Forgiving and Wounding: A Theological Exploration on Forgiveness and Sexual Violence

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Abstract

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Susanne Smetana

The following thesis is an exploration on current literature on forgiveness that applies it to the context of sexual abuse. While there are many Biblical commands to forgive and to love thy neighbour, sexual violence continues to be an issue in most parts of the world. This thesis examines the Biblical applications of forgiveness, how certain applications of it have been harmful for Christian survivors, and considers whether it can be applied in a culturally sensitive and psychologically helpful manner. This thesis also examines the nature of trauma, both in the psychology community and in Biblical narratives such as the Book of Job and the Rape of Tamar in 2 Samuel.

The impacts of sexual abuse are numerous: the survivor is found with psychological impact (such as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder), potential physiological damage, and a breakdown of the self and relationships in community and faith. This thesis finds that the spiritual needs of survivors are unique because they run counter to Christian beliefs. While Christians are taught to see a loving, Father God, survivors may reflect their own trauma and instead, see an all-powerful dominating God. While calls to forgive abusers can be callous in some scenarios, the application of forgiveness of the self can be helpful in forging a restorative relationship with God.

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Dedication

To my late mother, Jolanta Smetana,
who fought tooth and nail for every person she ever met,
and taught me that your value is in how you fight for others.

And

To every survivor,
who has survived and is surviving.

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Introduction

> To be Christian means to forgive the inexcusable, because God has forgiven the inexcusable in you. This is hard…how can we do it? Only, I think, by remembering where we stand, by meaning our words when we say in our prayers each night "forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those that trespass against us." We are offered forgiveness on no other terms. To refuse it is to refuse God's mercy for ourselves. There is no hint of exceptions and God means what He says.[1]

An American study in 2010 showed that nearly 1 in 10 women has been raped by an intimate partner in her lifetime.[2] That is about approximately 11.1 million women in America alone. I have often wondered how many of these women were Christians, who leaned on their community for help and heard something similar to the above quote. I wonder how many women were told to let go of their anger towards, maybe their hatred of, the one who sexually assaulted them. I wonder how many were told that if they were Christian, they would forgive just as God has forgiven them, because they were sinners too.

The Bible, the foundational text of Christianity and divine revelation, is full of wisdom regarding forgiveness. For example, Colossians 3:13 reads, "Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive."[3] The context of the command is clear for anyone with knowledge of the basic tenets of Christianity. Jesus Christ died to forgive your sins, to redeem you. In the case of Colossians 3:13, you honor the way the Lord has forgiven you by forgiving your neighbor. That neighbor has also been redeemed and forgiven by God. Who are you to hold a grudge, when even the Most High does not? Who are we, as a society, to hold others to a standard that not even God holds them to? The Bible, being an ancient document, does not consider the impact of traumatic events on the very psyche of a person – at least, not in contemporary terms. How could it, when it was not until the 1941 publication of *The Traumatic Neuroses of War* by Abram Kardiner, that experiences would even be labeled as "traumatic"?[4] Before, "trauma" had only been used to describe physical injures.

Before the term "Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder", or PTSD, was even coined, the symptoms were present in women suffering from sexual violence. However, it was not until the "consciousness-raising" efforts of 1970s American feminists that rape, or what at the time, women considered the "problem without a name," that conversations about sexual violence

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[1] C. S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996), 135.

[2] Black et al., The National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (NISVS): 2010 Summary Report (Atlanta, GA: National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention), 42.

[3] This thesis relies on the NRSV translation, unless otherwise stated.

[4] Judith Lewis Herman, *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence, from Domestic Abuse to Political Terror* (New York: Basic Books, 1992), 23-24.

would enter the public sphere.[5] In 1972, when Ann Burgess and Lynda Holmstrom began studying the psychological effects of rape, the term "rape trauma syndrome" was coined.[6] The first rape crisis center opened in 1971, and within a decade, hundreds of these were operating across the United States.[7]

Today, "rape trauma syndrome" is an obsolete term. Rape, and other forms of sexual violence, fall under the umbrella of "traumatic events" and subsequently, those who experience it are at risk for PTSD, a mental disorder that seriously impacts quality of life for the sufferer. If the Christian response is to forgive, but the psychological narrative says that survivors of sexual abuse can carry lifelong emotional scars, can these two responses coexist? The answer is a simple yes, and no. This thesis will examine the biblical and cultural implications of Christianity and the concept of forgiveness, as well as the psychological narrative of trauma, PTSD, and life in the aftermath. Forgiveness can indeed be a healing strategy for the traumatized, but it must be cultivated and this takes time. If the survivor of sexual violence feels like forgiveness is mandatory, whether this is by being shamed or feeling guilty by not meeting a cultural standard, it can have adverse psychological effects. Forgiveness can be used to further wound someone or it can be used to heal someone.

This thesis will first clarify the terms being used throughout the paper, as well as give a more in-depth explanation of what sexual violence is. It is also important to state that, while this is an academic work, I cannot deny that much of the findings are a result of a personal praxis; this praxis is informed by my own experiences as a woman reading the Bible, both as a Christian and as an academic. The first chapter, entitled "Sexual Violence as Wounding," focuses on the PTSD and its risk factors, and the various ways in which sexual violence causes harm: through social and cultural stigma, psychological and physical trauma, loss of safety, traumatic memories, and the impact on spirituality. This chapter heavily relies on the work of Dr. Judith Lewis Herman, a world-renowned expert on trauma and a professor at Harvard Medical School, and her book, *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence, from Domestic Abuse to Political Terror*. To give a modern day context to discussion of sexual violence, that chapter will also include a brief discussion of the #MeToo Movement and a prominent victim's advocate, Andrea Constand, as well as some discussion on the work of Susan J. Brison, a philosopher who has written extensively about the impact of rape after her personal experience with it. The second chapter, entitled "Biblical Narratives," looks at examples of sexual violence in the Bible, and how modern experiences can be reflected in it. It looks at the Book of Job as a trauma narrative, the Rape of Tamar (2 Samuel 13:1-22) as an account of incest, and smaller narratives of sexual violence like Genesis 19:33, a sexual encounter between Lot and his daughters and the rape of Dinah (Genesis 34).

The second half of this thesis explores the notion of forgiveness. The third chapter, "Forgiveness as Wounding," looks at the ways forgiveness is encouraged in Christian contexts, but can actually be more harmful than positive. First there is a discussion of the biblical background, such as the origin of sin, and where forgiveness is mentioned, as well as the context of it. Then there is a breakdown of what it means to forgive, and the various ways forgiveness manifests itself: psychological, relational and judicial. Finally, there is a discussion on the role of patriarchy in sexual violence, and how forgiveness can become "cheap grace," a term coined by

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[5] Ibid, 28-29.
[6] Ibid, 31.
[7] Ibid.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer. It also looks at the ways in which the crucifixion is a reflection of forgiveness and how that impacts survivors of sexual violence. This chapter relies heavily on liberation and feminist theology, and includes the work of Jürgen Moltmann, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Gerald Peterson, Andrew Schmutzer, Marie Marshall Fortune, and Aruna Gnanadason. Finally, it looks extensively at the work of Miroslav Volf and his book, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation*, including critiques of his work by Sunder John Boopalan. The thesis concludes in the final chapter with a positive discussion of forgiveness, as part of the healing process for survivors of sexual violence. Using the work of Herman again, I will propose looking at forgiveness as a process, alongside the healing process, and a variety of stages in which it should be implemented. The point is that after a traumatic experience, one will gradually heal in a transformative process and forgiveness, or some aspects of forgiveness, can be used in that transformation. First, one goes through the experience of remembrance and truth-telling, and mourning. Then, we look at connection and community building through empowerment, healing of the self, and reestablishing safety. Finally, spirituality is the last component in a look at divine solidarity, loosely inspired by the work of Rev. Marie M. Fortune and Moltmann.

Defining Sexual Violence & Sexual Assault

Sexual violence is a broad term regarding any violence, physical or psychological, that has a sexual nature or means. It is whenever someone forces, manipulates, or coerces someone into unwanted sexual activity. In many cases the victim did not, or cannot, consent[8] to sexual activity. The forms of sexual violence are numerous: rape, rape or incest involving children, intimate partner sexual assault, unwanted sexual contact and/or touching (molestation), sexual exploitation (sex trafficking, sexual slavery), exposing genitals without consent (exhibitionism), lewd sexual acts in public (such as masturbation), and watching someone without their knowledge or permission (voyeurism).[9] People who are under the influence of drugs or alcohol, whether taken by choice or not, are unable to give consent.[10] People can be forced into a sexual violence situation through verbal harassment or coercion, violence and the threat of further violence, and the use of force and/or weapons.[11]

Sexual violence is the sociological term referring to these kinds of encounters. Sexual assault falls under the umbrella of sexual violence. Often, it is considered a synonym for the word "rape." However, sexual assault is any unwanted sexual act or touching without consent. This means even molestation would fall under the category of "sexual assault." Sexual assault is used in a legal context and varies based on a country's legal system. In the United States, sexual assault is simply defined as "any non-consensual sexual act…including when the victim lacks

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[8] The opposite of unwanted sexual activity is consensual sexual activity. Consent refers to permitting or agreeing to a sexual encounter or act.

[9] Rachel Jewkes, Purna Sen, and Claudia Garcia-Moreno, "Sexual Violence," in *World Report on Violence and Health 2002*, ed. Etienne G. Krug et al. (Geneva: World Health Organization, 2002), 149-150.

[10] Ibid, 149.

[11] Ibid.

capacity to consent."[12] In Canada, the legal definition of sexual assault is an assault "which is committed in circumstances of a sexual nature such that the sexual integrity of the victim is violated."[13]

In many of the sources used for this paper, sexual violence and sexual assault are used interchangeably to refer to rape. Many sources do not define the terms, and so the reader is left to assume that rape is what they are referring to. In the case of this thesis, I will be using sexual violence and sexual assault interchangeably. To clarify, rape is any "unlawful sexual activity and usually sexual intercourse carried out forcibly or under threat of injury against a person's will" or with someone who is unable to consent for any reason, including mental illness, intoxication, or deception.[14] While the impacts of rape are significant, it cannot be ignored that other forms of sexual violence, like molestation, fall under the category of "traumatic" as well. Therefore, the use of "sexual assault" and "sexual violence" should be interpreted as "any assault of a sexual nature." I will specify if a distinction must be made over the kind of sexual violence experienced.

Another thing that must be mentioned is that sexual assault is not exclusively about sex. The act of rape is considered "pseudosexual," because the primary feelings are "hostility (anger) and control (power)."[15] The rapist is not attacking the victim out of sexual desire, but out of a need to control and dominate (a non-sexual need). It is also not considered a sexual act because the second person involved, or the victim, is not having a sexual experience but a violent one.[16] In interviews with rapists, a common theme is that the sexual satisfaction was lacking for them but the main source of pleasure came from the act of dominating, or feeling powerful/seeing someone overpowered by them.[17]

When someone inflicts sexual contact on another against their will, regardless of the circumstances, it is a violation of personhood. Keep this in mind throughout this thesis, as it is important to acknowledge that sexual assault, rape, molestation – these are all expressions of violence, and not necessarily sex, passion, or desire.

Victim or Survivor: Context

Up until this point, I have been using "survivor" and "victim" to denote someone who has experienced sexual violence. Technically speaking, they mean the same thing but the connotation is very different. There is a recent movement to step away from "victim" and, rather, use the term "survivor," although "victim" remains the technical term in the medical and legal field.

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[12] "Sexual Assault," The United States Department of Justice, May 16, 2019, https://www.justice.gov/ovw/sexual-assault.

[13] Department of Justice and Research and Statistics Division, "An Estimation of the Economic Impact of Violent Victimization in Canada, 2009," Sexual Assault and Other Sexual Offences, December 6, 2016, https://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/rp-pr/cj-jp/victim/rr14_01/p10.html.

[14] Merriam-Webster, *s.v.* "rape," https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/rape.

[15] Marie Marshall Fortune, *Sexual Violence the Unmentionable Sin* (New York: Pilgrim Press, 1988), 8.

[16] Ibid.

[17] Ibid.

From a legal standpoint, "victim" describes someone who has been subjected to a crime.[18] The term is used to illustrate that a crime was committed against that person, and it is also used to offer certain rights under the law. Researchers for the Australian Centre for the Study of Sexual Assault, Alexandra Neame and Melanie Heenan, have said, "the term 'victim' recognises the realities of sexual assault and implies a rejection of norms that have often positioned victims as deserving of, or complicit in, offences committed against them."[19] I would go on to say that "victim" is, in a sense, a passive term – it is about what was done to someone, not something they did.

Susan Brison, an American sociologist who has written about her experience of being raped and left for dead, writes that, "we are taught not to empathize with victims."[20] She says that we only join the victim in our nightmares; we have a fear of becoming that victim.[21] This is one of the reasons that people may not identify with the term victim. It has a certain negative connotation, and prompts reactions like, "that could never happen to me" rather than an empathic response.[22]

In contrast, "survivor" is active – it is about what one has done; one has survived a traumatic experience. A survivor of sexual abuse has overcome that abuse, and recognizes a potential for life beyond that abuse. Beth Crisp, an Australian social worker, writes that a survivor "more closely recognizes the potential for transformation and a future in which the experience of sexual assault is only one aspect of one's defining history."[23] Some would say that "survivor" denotes respect for the strength of those who have experienced sexual assault.[24]

Legal systems often continue to use "victim" and people who offer social and mental health services lean towards the use of "survivor."[25] There is no consensus on whether one is more appropriate than the other. In the end, it comes down to self-identification. Does the person who experienced the assault, identify with the term "victim" or "survivor"? In some cases, the answer is "neither." Since both terms are used in a variety of contexts, I will be using both interchangeably. I will be using a specific term if an author I am citing favors it, especially if that author is self-identifying as such. The choice of "victim" or "survivor" is not a judgment, so I wish to be respectful to the variety of ways in which these terms are evolving, and the discourse around that.

Finally, I would like to address the specifics of the "survivors" to which I refer. First of all, my research is focused on the experience of adult survivors of sexual abuse. While many

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[18] "Victim or Survivor: Terminology from Investigation Through Prosecution," Sexual Assault Kit Initiative (RTI International), https://sakitta.org/toolkit/docs/Victim-or-Survivor-Terminology-from-Investigation-Through-Prosecution.pdf.

[19] Alexandra Neame and Melanie Heenan, "What Lies Behind the Hidden Figure of Sexual Assault? Issue of Prevalence and Disclosure." (Australian Centre for the Study of Sexual Assault, 2003) 12.

[20] Susan T. Brison, "Surviving Sexual Violence: A Philosophical Perspective," *Journal of Social Philosophy* 24, no. 1 (1993): https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9833.1993.tb00493.x, 11.

[21] Ibid.

[22] Ibid, 12.

[23] Beth Crisp, "Beyond Crucifixion: Remaining Christian after Sexual Abuse," *Theology & Sexuality* 15, no. 1 (2009): https://doi.org/10.1558/tse.v15i1.65), 65.

[24] Neame and Heenan, "What Lies Behind the Hidden Figure of Sexual Assault?", 12.

[25] "Victim or Survivor," Sexual Assault Kit Initiative.

have been also assaulted as children, I am focusing on the experiences of adults. This is for simplicity's sake, as the varied developmental stages mean that age is a significant factor in post-traumatic growth. Secondly, throughout this thesis, I will be favoring "she/her" pronouns. This is not to say that men cannot be survivors of sexual violence, nor that these experiences, and the aftermath, are exclusive to women. However, women are statistically at a higher risk of being sexually assaulted. In the U.S., the estimation is that 1 in 5 women and 1 in 71 men have been raped in their lifetime.[26] That is almost 22 million women compared to almost 1.6 million men. It should be noted, however, that several statistical reports believe that sexual violence continues to be underreported and underestimated. There has also been very little attention and research focused on male victims of rape, until fairly recently.[27]

Part of the reason men underreport is due to social stigma. There is a feeling of a loss of "manliness."[28] Most survivors of rape feel shame and for men, this is also attached to the shame of feeling like they have been stripped of their masculinity. Men also struggle to disclose to other men, fearing a homophobic reaction if the perpetrator was also male, or negative counter-transference reactions.[29] Psychiatrists and psychologists often neglect to even ask male patients if they have a possible abuse history.[30] Men fear not being believed, which is shared amongst most survivors of rape. However, there is also a cultural precedence for it. For example, a common "joke" is that men get sexually assaulted in prison; "don't drop the soap," is a common reference to prison rape.[31] This is not a joke made about female inmates, possibly because the rape of women is taken more seriously. Regardless of the sex of the victim, it is simply not a laughing manner. However, it shows a casual, and homophobic, attitude towards men who are raped. Men are also expected to be sexual beings. There is shame in admitting a sexual encounter was unwanted. That shame is worsened if the male victim had an orgasm or experienced an erection; these are common physiological responses to fear, not necessarily a display of pleasure.[32] Suffice to say, men can be, and are, victims of sexual violence. I wish to acknowledge this here as my thesis will be focused on the experiences of female victims, unless otherwise stated.

Sexual violence remains a hotly debated topic, from countries trying to define it within legal parameters to survivors and victims wondering if their experiences qualify. Though some may feel that one experience is worse than the other, it is important not to compare and to address all forms of sexual violence in a similar manner. A one-off experience, a childhood experience, a traumatic product of war – all of these carry the same ramifications in terms of health and long-term impact. Furthermore, the very nature of sexual violence calls for much

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[26] Black et al., "The National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (NISVS): 2010 Summary Report," (Atlanta, National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2011) 18.
[27] Patrizia Riccardi, "Male Rape: The Silent Victim and the Gender of the Listener," *The Primary Care Companion to The Journal of Clinical Psychiatry* 12, no. 6 (2010), https://doi.org/10.4088/pcc.10l00993whi.
[28] Ibid.
[29] Ibid.
[30] Ibid.
[31] Sean Cahill, "From 'Don't Drop the Soap' to PREA Standards: Reducing Sexual Victimization of LGBT People in the Juvenile and Criminal Justice Systems," in *LGBTQ Politics: A Critical Reader*, ed. Marla Brettschneider (New York: NYU Press, 2017), 134
[32] Fortune, *Sexual Violence*, 8.

theological considerations in topics such as doctrinal teachings about sin and questions of theodicy. However, the orientation of this thesis is more pastoral, with an emphasis on forgiveness, spirituality, and the psychology of trauma. The following chapters reflect on biblical narratives for pastoral understanding of the human condition, and lean on psychology teachings to understand what role forgiveness plays in the traumatized psyche. This thesis ends with a proposed pastoral framework on dealing with the recovery and spirituality of sexually abused people.

Chapter One: Sexual Violence as Wounding

Many will think of rape as a violent encounter and picture a woman left bruised and bloodied. However, the impacts of sexual violence go much deeper than physical wounds, and can persist for even a lifetime. The following chapter is meant to introduce the concept of trauma, especially in the context of PTSD, and the ways in which sexual violence leaves long-lasting harm. Sexual violence impacts everything from your social status to your relationship with God, even if the experience is subconsciously buried and left unaddressed.

PTSD and Risk Factors

In the introduction, this thesis brought up that: 1) sexual violence is not necessarily about sex or passion, but about power and domination and 2) sexual violence is categorized as traumatic. It is important to look at the multitude of ways that sexual violence wounds a person. From a medical and psychological perspective, someone who has experienced sexual violence will have symptoms that are physical, behavioral, emotional, and cognitive. From a theological perspective, sexual violence can be seen as spiritually wounding.

When one thinks of physical symptoms, one probably thinks of bruises and scrapes that can occur during a violent experience. However, that is not the only physical symptom that survivors of sexual violence endure. The body physically responds to traumatic events as it would to any stressful encounter: faster heart rate, increased blood pressure, and accelerated breathing. Chronic stress can cause neurological changes and fatigue. One aspect of trauma is that the survivor will often relive the experience, and the associated neurological and physical symptoms, meaning that these physical symptoms of stress will continue to appear.

Trauma is labelled as such because it is an interaction with an extraordinary event – something that is out of the realm of "ordinary." The human body perceives threat and responds with an adrenaline rush, or the "fight, flight, or freeze" reaction.[33] The feeling of being threatened arouses the sympathetic nervous system, which, through the adrenaline rush, forces the body into a state of alertness.[34] This adrenaline, alertness, and fear connected to the perceived threat, work in tandem to change perceptions in the human body – things like fatigue or pain can be dismissed, in favor of the overwhelming feelings of fear and anger.[35]

The ways in which a survivor reacts to trauma, psychologically speaking, can be incredibly varied. Most commonly, a survivor will experience what the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM) calls "Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder," or "PTSD". As of 2020, the psychiatric community is using the 5th edition of the DSM (DSM-5. PTSD can be found in the chapter entitled, "Trauma- and Stressor-Related Disorders."

According to the DSM-5, there are a few risk factors to PTSD known as "pretraumatic factors." Prior mental disorders (panic or depressive disorder, for example) and childhood emotional problems (such as anxiety) by the age of 6, are risk factors for someone developing PTSD after a traumatic encounter. Environmental risk factors include lower socioeconomic status, lower education, exposure to prior trauma, childhood adversity (such as family dysfunction), cultural characteristics (self-blame coping strategies), lower intelligence, minority

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[33] Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 34.
[34] Ibid.
[35] Ibid.

racial/ethnic status, and a family with a history of psychiatric needs.[36] Other risk factors include being female and a child at the time of the event.[37]

Peritraumatic factors list only environmental risks: severity or dose of trauma ("the greater the magnitude of trauma," the greater the likelihood of PTSD), perceived life threat, personal injury, and interpersonal violence.[38] "Dissociation" is also listed as a risk factor. If dissociation has occurred during trauma and persists afterwards, it increases the likelihood of a PTSD diagnosis.

Dr. Judith Herman, a medical expert in the field of trauma, explains dissociation as the following. There are two coping mechanisms of trauma which create an uncomfortable dichotomy: the traumatic event is considered too harrowing to recount, and yet, the survivor is caught in a loop of constantly reliving it.[39] This is the psychological dialectic that exists in the face of psychological trauma: people who survive atrocities alternate between feeling numb and being emotionally consumed by it.[40] Furthermore, Herman notes that "traumatic reactions," such as dissociation, occur when the victim feels like action is pointless.[41] Escape is not possible and resistance is futile. The body does not rely on self-defence mechanisms, focusing instead on survival instinct. The brain refocuses: the point is no longer to escape or stop the event, now the victim only wants to make it to the end.

The posttraumatic factors are the ones most relevant to this thesis. First, there are "temperamental" factors: negative appraisals, inappropriate coping strategies, and development of acute stress disorder.[42] Environmental factors include repeated upsetting reminders, further adverse life events, and trauma-related losses (such as financial or social).[43] The DSM-5 notes that there are also "protective" factors, that can help discourage the development of PTSD. The most significant "protective factor," is one that many survivors will not have. It is positive social support, but because of the current societal attitudes towards sexual violence, survivors find themselves lacking that positive support.

Social Stigma

Herman addresses social support and stigma in *Trauma and Recovery*. Using the example of a woman raped by a man, she writes the following: "It is very tempting to take the side of the perpetrator. All the perpetrator asks is that the bystander do nothing. He appeals to the universal desire to see, hear, speak no evil. The victim, on the contrary, asks the bystander to share the burden of pain. The victim demands action, engagement, and remembering."[44] This, she believes, is one of the factors of why so many rape victims find themselves without positive

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[36] "Trauma- and Stressor-Related Disorders," in *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders: DSM-5*, 5th ed. (American Psychiatric Association, 2013), doi-org.db29.linccweb.org/10.1176/ appi.books.9780890425596.dsm02.
[37] Ibid.
[38] Ibid.
[39] Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 2.
[40] Ibid.
[41] Ibid, 34.
[42] "Trauma- and Stressor-Related Disorders" in *DSM-5*.
[43] Ibid.
[44] Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 7-8.

social relations. Rather than being accepted and embraced with empathy, she believes that rape victims are more likely to be doubted and ignored. To ignore their pain is easier than to share in it. Furthermore, it can often be difficult to share the pain in the first place. Women who speak out fear being ostracized, blamed and shamed.

Susan Brison, a philosopher and a survivor of rape, shared a similar perspective in her 1993 article, "Surviving Sexual Violence: A Philosophical Perspective." She was out one morning for a stroll, when a stranger grabbed her, violently raped her, and left her for dead in a ravine. She refers to herself as a victim of "attempted murder." When people asked why someone would want to murder her, her reply of "it started as a sexual assault" seemed to inquirers as a reasonable "explanation as to why some man wanted to murder me."[45] She continues, " I would have thought that a murder attempt plus a sexual assault would require more, not less, of an explanation than a murder attempt by itself."[46] Here, she points out a common dismissive attitude towards sexual violence. People do not wish to hear about the sexual assault, yet feel comfortable asking about an attempted murder.

Brison writes that, as a victim of rape, she was the best kind of victim to the police and to the legal system. It was morning, not evening, so no one could ask why she was out at that hour. She was not dressed seductively, but in baggy sweatpants and sneakers. The police officer taking her statement encouraged her to speak about her husband, because her assailant said she provoked the attack, but her deposition showed a care for a husband waiting patiently at home.[47] She was visibly injured, so there was no question about the violence. She was the perfect victim, because it was not easy to challenge her "story."

Brison shared another experience that happened 15 years prior. In 2014, she published an article in *Time* entitled, "Why I Spoke Out About One Rape but Stayed Silent About Another," where she detailed a rape that occurred at the age of 20, though she did not publicly call it rape until 2011. She was 20, asleep in her dorm room, when a man she knew knocked on her door. She let him in, and he raped her.[48]

The difference between these rapes is striking and shows why women like Brison would report one over the other. In the earlier rape, Brison is not the "perfect" victim. She knew the assailant and she let him in; one can almost imagine how a police deposition would go. Why did she let him in? Why didn't she say no? Why didn't she stop him? Brison was also significantly younger, and an unwed student. What resources did she have then, compared to 15 years later – married and established in her career?

Brison alludes to this in her *Time* article. Published in 2014, the article initially talks about her rapes alongside the recent allegations that were coming out against Bill Cosby, an American comedian and actor. This article would be one of many that lead to the re-igniting of a movement known as the #MeToo movement.

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[45] Brison, "Surviving Sexual Violence", 6.
[46] Ibid.
[47] Ibid, 9.
[48] Susan J. Brison, "Why I Spoke Out About One Rape but Stayed Silent About Another," *Time* (TIME USA, LLC, December 1, 2014), https://time.com/3612283/why-i-spoke-out-about-one-rape-but-stayed-silent-about-another/

That movement started all the way back in 1997. That year, Tarana Burke met a 13-year old girl who disclosed that she was being sexually abused by her mother's boyfriend.[49] She was moved by that encounter, and saddened that she could not bring herself to respond with the words, "me too."[50] Ten years later, she would found Just Be Inc., a non-profit organization that offers resources to sexual assault victims; this would also be the start of the "Me Too" movement.

In 2017, an actress named Alyssa Milano would reignite interest in "Me Too," as well as spread it internationally, with a simple tweet that read, "If you've been sexually harassed or assaulted write 'me too' as a reply to this tweet."[51] The response was overwhelming and #metoo became a popular hashtag[52] on a variety of social media networks, such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Snapchat. In the first 24 hours, there were more than 12 million responses.[53] Many of these responses were people sharing their "me too" stories, publicly sharing their stories of sexual abuse.

The #metoo movement was significant in calling out high powered male abusers, such as Jeffrey Epstein and Harvey Weinstein. However, before their actions were called into the spotlight, Cosby was being publicly acknowledged as a perpetrator of sexual violence. In fact, he was under investigation as early as 2005. In Brison's 2014 article, she is directly responding to a slew of women coming forward from November to December 2014.

There was much public outcry over these assault accusations, some going back as far as the 60s. Brison posits that much of the outrage, and lack of positive social support, is because empathizing with a victim means acknowledging that you live in a world where such things are commonplace.[54] Rape isn't a rare occurrence and you cannot predict what will lead to it: you can be assaulted even if you are a well-educated lawyer who never leaves the house after 8 PM, doesn't date, drink or do drugs, and exclusively wears unflattering and baggy clothing. Brison's story is like many others. She blamed herself, after hearing and witnessing the cultural phenomenon of blaming women for being raped. This is a shared phenomenon amongst rape survivors. Perhaps they shouldn't have been alone with him, or perhaps they shouldn't have accepted a drink which ultimately ended up being drugged.

These women coming forward were asked questions like, "why did you stay silent so long," or "why didn't you go to the police?"[55] Brison points out that many of these women did come forward but were dismissed because of a lack of physical evidence, or they wanted to come forward but were told that no one would believe.[56] In many instances, you had a young teenager who had just been assaulted by one of the most famous men in America. Who would believe her? What power did she hold, over a wealthy man?

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[49] Sandra E. Garcia, "The Woman Who Created #MeToo Long Before Hashtags," *The New York Times* (The New York Times, October 20, 2017), https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/20/us/me-too-movement-tarana-burke.html

[50] Ibid.

[51] Ibid.

[52] A hashtag, or the octothorpe symbol (#), is a metadata tag on social media that allows users to follow a conversation or concept. #metoo is a searchable tag on a variety of social networks.

[53] Garcia, "The Woman Who Created #MeToo."

[54] Brison, "Surviving Sexual Violence", 11.

[55] Brison, "Why I Spoke Out."

[56] Ibid.

Many of the responses to a rape disclosure hover around the curiosity of "why didn't you fight back?" These responses are especially common in cases where coercion occurred, and not blatant physical force. For example, one of Cosby's victims was asked by Don Lemon, a CNN host, why she didn't use her teeth, if she really didn't want to be orally raped? [57] That same woman said she didn't come forward because, who would believe her? [58]

A victim of sexual violence will usually blame herself first. So, the logic follows that if she discloses, others will also blame her.[59] It is an extreme reaction to the way you are treated. In sexual violence, the victim is dominated and forced to submit. She is treated as less than, as an "it" and not a person. Blaming yourself for your own objectification and mistreatment, is one way of coping with the reality that you didn't deserve this and couldn't avoid it. Even more frightening, acknowledging that you weren't to blame means acknowledging that it could happen again and you can't prevent it.[60]Herman aptly puts it:

> In order to escape accountability for his crimes, the perpetrator does everything in his power to promote forgetting. Secrecy and silence are the perpetrator's first line of defense. If secrecy fails, the perpetrator attacks the credibility of his victim. If he cannot silence her absolutely, he tries to make sure that no one listens… it never happened; the victim lies; the victim exaggerates; the victim brought it upon herself; and in any case it is time to forget the past and move on.[61]

In turn, society adapts these reasons as well; the victim is a liar or she deserved it, or she survived, so why not just move on? Alternatively, sexual violence is treated as a taboo subject, one too vulgar to discuss with others. Part of this is the misconception mentioned earlier, that rape is incorrectly interpreted as a sexual act, and though society is moving towards more liberal conversations, talking about sex publicly is still not accepted as normal. Treating it as taboo makes it harder for survivors to come forward. After all, they are raised in the same culture as those they disclose to. If a mother finds rape too vulgar to discuss, why should she react differently if it happened to her own daughter?

As a challenge to this culture of secrecy, shame, and forgetting, I present a list of all the women who accused Bill Cosby of some form of sexual violence. As previously mentioned, Cosby is an American entertainer whose career spanned from 1961 to 2018. He won the hearts of television viewers as Cliff Huxtable, a doctor and father of five, and continued to rise in prominence through his stand-up comedy, his original character "Fat Albert," and various film and television appearances.

The earliest assault claim against Cosby is Kristina Ruehli, in December 1965. He was also accused of assaulting the following women: Sunni Welles (mid-1960s), Carla Ferrigno (1967), Cindra Ladd (1969), Joan Tarshis (1969), Linda Brown (1969), Tamara Green (1969 or 1970), Victoria Valentino (1970), Autumn Burns (1970), Linda Traitz (1970), Linda Ridgeway Whitedeer (1971), Louisa Moritz (1971), Donna Motsinger (1972), Helen Hayes (1973), Margie Shapiro (1975), Marcella Tate (1975), Colleen Hughes (early 1970s), "Elizabeth"[62] (1976),

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[57] Ibid.
[58] Ibid.
[59] Ibid.
[60] Ibid.
[61] Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 8.
[62] Some of these women requested to go by pseudonyms to protect their privacy.

Sharon Van Ert (1976), Therese Serignese (1976), Judy Huth (mid-1970s), Shawn Upshaw Brown (mid-1970s), Katherine McKee (mid-1970s), Charlotte Fox (1970s), Sarita Butterfield (1977), Patricia Leary Steuer (1978 and 1980), P. J. Masten (1979), Pamela Abeyta (1979), Jewel Allison, Joyce Emmons (1980), Rebecca Lynn Neal (early 1980s), Linda Kirkpatrick (1981), Janice Baker-Kinney (1982), Janice Dickinson (1982), Beth Ferrier (1980s), Lisa Jones (1980s), "Dottye" (1984), Beverly Johnson (mid-1980s), Barbara Bowman (multiple times from 1985 to 1987), Heidi Thomas (1984), Chelan Lasha (1986), Helen Gumpel (1987), Sammie Mays (1987), Renita Chaney Hill (started at the age of 15, repeatedly throughout the mid-1980s), "Lisa" (1988), Lise-Lotte Lublin (1989), Lisa Christie (1989), Jennifer Thompson (1989), Eden Tirl (1989), Lili Bernard (1992), Angela Leslie (1992), Michelle Hurd (1995), Kelly Johnson (1996), Lachele Covington (2000), Donna Barrett (2004), Andrea Constand (2004), Chloe Goins (2008), and three "Jane Does" (1958-60).[63]

It may seem excessive to list each of these women by name. But doing so is necessary to communicate the atrocities one man committed against 60 women (and perhaps more) over a span that exceeds four decades. These accusations range from women being drugged and raped, to groping, to years of manipulation and threats of Cosby ruining their lives and careers unless they perform sexual favors. These women were victims of Cosby, and victims of a cultural standard that encouraged their silence and his rise to prominence. When people look back at the wake of trauma that Cosby left behind, not all 60 women will receive recognition and justice. In fact, only Constand successfully sued and won against Cosby. Her case led to him being sentenced to three to ten years in prison.[64] During the trial, only five of Cosby's other victims were permitted to speak.[65] There are several cases against Cosby currently ongoing, though many of these assaults will not be tried as such due to a statue of limitations in the United States. Instead, many women are pursuing justice via defamation suits.[66]

Constand's victim impact statement paints an apt picture of life after assault. She writes, "After the assault…the pain spoke volumes. The shame was overwhelming. Self-doubt and confusion kept me from turning to my family or friends as I normally did. I felt completely alone, unable to trust anyone, including myself."[67] The litany of names demonstrates how one man used the culture around him to continuously assault woman. This man was protected by his cultural status, and protected by the women's fears of speaking out. Whether they were blaming themselves, or feared social outrage and blame for the greater community, these women went without justice for years.

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[63] Carly Mallenbaum, Patrick Ryan, and Maria Puente, "A Complete List of the 60 Bill Cosby Accusers and Their Reactions to His Prison Sentence," *USA Today* (Gannett Satellite Information Network, September 26, 2018), https://www.usatoday.com/story/life/people/2018/04/27/bill-cosby-full-list-accusers/555144002/)

[64] Ibid.

[65] Ibid.

[66] Ibid.

[67] Andrea Constand, "Andrea Constand's Victim Impact Statement," *The New York Times* (The New York Times, September 25, 2018), https://www.nytimes.com/2018/09/25/arts/andrea-constand-statement-cosby.html)

Terror and the Self

Constand eloquently shows the common experience of the survivor. After hearing negative responses from the people around her, the survivor will interpret her assault as a shameful experience, one too horrific, or even embarrassing, to recount to others. While the social impact of conversations about sexual abuse is changing, leading to more empowering discussions, there is still a history of shaming victims and approaching many cases with disbelief. While the jailing of one famous abuser is a positive step forward in the relationship between the justice system and survivors, it cannot undo generations of portraying survivors as the ones who ought to be ashamed. It is not just the act of sexual violence that impacts the victim on an emotional level, it is also the social impact. Sexual abuse has serious ramifications for the victim's relationship to the self, because the relationships the victim previously had with their family, friends, and community are also damaged. The destabilizing of relationships leads to a destabilizing of the very self.

In the aftermath of sexual abuse, the self experiences a destabilizing fragmentation. This comes from the interaction with terror that they experience during the assault, and potentially afterwards. For an event to be traumatic, it must threaten the self in some way. A person comes face to face with terror and helplessness, and reacts accordingly.[68] Psychological trauma is marked by an intense fear, helplessness and "threat of annihilation."[69] As previously mentioned, the brain refocuses from "get out of here" to "let's just survive this," and so the focus on survival means enduring till the very end of the assault. This sort of helplessness can be horrifying to reflect on, as many victims are asked things like "why didn't you fight back?" The reality is that our innate self-defence system can be overwhelmed and disorganized in the face of true terror, an extreme fear that feels insurmountable.[70]

In the face of this terror and disorganization, the survivor may find that normally integrated functions, appropriate reactions to events, are severed from each other.[71] What this means is that the traumatized person may experience intense emotional experiences, without any knowledge of what the trigger is.[72] For example, many people with PTSD live in a constant state of hyper-vigilance. This constant arousal can be reflected in a person being irritable for seemingly no reason. The reality is that the body is working hard, but many logical connections have been broken due to the terror reaction. Herman writes that, "traumatic symptoms have a tendency to become disconnected from their source and to take on a life of their own."[73]

For a survivor of sexual violence, the very experience of abuse was incomprehensible. Now they are at the mercy of seemingly illogical behaviors. Trauma has torn apart whatever protective systems the body had in place, leaving the survivor feeling vulnerable, confused, and exposed.[74] The self-preservation, the integrated survival instincts, have become fragmented and disconnected. This fragmentation is reflected beyond psychological responses. It can be seen in the victim's perception of the self, which has become fragmented as well.

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[68] Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 33.
[69] Ibid.
[70] Ibid, 34.
[71] Ibid.
[72] Ibid.
[73] Ibid.
[74] Ibid.

First, there is the issue of hyperarousal, which is similar to hyper-vigilance. The survivor experiences a persistent fear, and expectation, of danger. Their perceptions are inaccurate, in most cases, and things like judgment and discrimination fail them.[75] This physiological phenomenon, where sense organs and the nervous system are over or under reacting, will persist if untreated, and negatively impacts quality of life. Secondly, another issue of the self is that it is destabilized by flashbacks, or "intrusions." In the case of intrusions, resuming a normal life is impossible. Trauma is constantly interrupting their daily lives. "It is as if time stops at the moment of trauma."[76] It becomes permanently encoded as an abnormal form of memory, which spontaneously interjects into consciousness while the survivor is awake and/or asleep.[77] Even if they are safe in their own home, an intrusion can suddenly turn this environment into an unsafe place. While sleeping, intrusions occur as nightmares and negatively impact the quality of sleep, which over time leads to a state of exhaustion. It is an involuntary fixation on trauma. It can also interrupt and stall the course of normal development, especially in psychosocial contexts.[78]

One issue in discussions of trauma outside of psychological conversations, is that many will treat traumatic memories in the same vein as regular memories. However, a memory of a positive childhood activity is not encoded in the same way that a traumatic and intrusive memory is. Pierre Janet, considered one of the founding fathers of psychology, makes the distinction in volume one of *Psychological Healing* by saying that process of encoding a "normal" memory is an action.[79] He likens it to the process of telling a story: the situation is processed by the outward reaction (the world around us) and the inward reaction (how we tell the story to ourselves, which words we use, and how we perceive ourselves in this story) until this "recital" becomes a part of our personal history.[80]

In contrast, a traumatic memory does not have the same structure. Where a normal, "neurotypical," memory has a linear structure and verbal narrative, a traumatic memory is encoded in the form of imagery. In this context, "images are mental contents that possess sensory qualities…distinguished from mental activity that is purely verbal or abstract."[81] Elizabeth A. Brett, a practicing psychologist, and Robert Ostroff, a psychiatrist at the Yale School of Medicine, working with theories originally posited by Sigmund Freud, believe that when a person's adaptive capabilities are disrupted, one form of coping is by reverting to a childhood compulsion, which is repetition.[82] The survivor will go over the disturbing incident, again and again, in the subconscious hope of "conquering" that experience. However, this falls apart when this is done as an act of "intrusion" and is not necessarily an active reconstructing of the event. In this sense, the survivor is still a passive victim unable to control the narrative or outcome. Memories are things we wish to hold onto; they are repeated in the hopes of coming up again in

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[75] Ibid, 35.
[76] Ibid, 37.
[77] Ibid.
[78] Ibid.
[79] Pierre Janet, *Psychological Healing*, trans. Eden Paul and Cedar Paul, vol. 1 (New York: MacMillan, 1925) 661.
[80] Ibid, 662.
[81] Elizabeth A. Brett and Robert Ostroff, "Imagery and Posttraumatic Stress Disorder: An Overview," *American Journal of Psychiatry* 142, no. 4 (April 1985) https://doi.org/10.1176/ajp.142.4.417, 417.
[82] Ibid, 418.

the near-future as they are a part of one's personal history. Traumatic memories are invasive, sensory experiences that trigger the initial sense of helplessness, passivity, and terror.

Freud noted regression in his patients who were likely suffering from trauma. As Herman notes, traumatic memories appear to be encoded in the same way as the memories of young children.[83] Instead of a verbal narrative, the memory is encoded as a predominantly visual-sensory experience. She uses the example of a child molested by a babysitter at the age of 2. When he was 5, he could not recall a memory of being abused but his play was a re-enactment of a pornographic film his babysitter had made..[84] Since it happened at such a young age, he didn't have the language for it but it was encoded in his memory and presented itself on an occasion that involved enacting something highly visual.

Roger K. Pitman posited that the encoding of memories is an evolutionary trait, where the importance of an experience is reflected in it's hormonal consequences.[85] The stronger the hormonal response, the more important the experience and this is reflected in the strength of the memory. Animal research has shown that certain hormones, like epinephrine and norepinephrine, help condition a response that is highly resistant to extinction.[86] So, there is hypothesis which suggests that there is a means by which a traumatic event stimulates stress-responsive hormones, which leads to a deeply engraved traumatic memory that "subsequently manifests itself in intrusive recollections and conditioned emotional response of PTSD."[87]

Trauma manifests itself in day-to-day experiences, through invasive memories or involuntary reactions. Trauma manifests itself in actions, like repetitive play of children or an uncontrollable physiological response. And finally, trauma also presents itself in the form of nightmares. These nightmares share much of the same features as waking intrusions: repetition, bold and vivid imagery, fragments of the event, no elaboration or imagination, and the interpreting of stimuli in the dream as dangerous.[88] These intrusions also manifest in behavior. Much like children using imaginative play to re-enact trauma, traumatized adults will relive trauma in a variety of ways. Some may feel compelled to re-create the experience, hoping to change the outcome at the end.[89] This, however, often means that the survivor is putting themselves in harm's way. Sometimes, these re-enactments occur as disguised reactions like unnecessary road rage or unhealthy relationships.[90] Ultimately, these re-enactments, even if consciously chosen, "have a feeling of involuntariness."[91]

Beth R. Crisp, a professor of Social Work at Deakin University, describes sexual abuse as life-changing. She writes that, sexual abuse so profoundly affects the survivors that they cannot maintain their previous ways of being.[92] As previously mentioned, sometimes one will relate to

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[83] Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 38.
[84] Ibid.
[85] Roger K. Pitman, "Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, Hormones, and Memory," *Biological Psychiatry* 26, no. 3 (July 1989) https://doi.org/10.1016/0006-3223(89)90033-4, 221.
[86] Ibid, 222.
[87] Ibid.
[88] Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 39.
[89] Ibid.
[90] Ibid, 40.
[91] Ibid.
[92] Beth Crisp, "Spirituality and Sexual Abuse: Issues and Dilemmas for Survivors," *Theology & Sexuality* 13, no. 3 (2007) https://doi.org/10.1177/1355835807078263, 301.

the trauma in a physical way. Crisp notes that this often occurs as an outward transformation – an extreme hair cut or drastic style change are one way that survivors communicate their traumatic transformation non-verbally.[93]

The point of showing all this psychological data in regard to intrusive thoughts and behaviors, is to demonstrate that there is strong biological response to trauma that is outside the conscious control of the survivor. First, to have been at the mercy of another, is traumatic in itself. Second, the survivor is at the mercy of their subconscious, reflected in dreams and unexpected or unexplained emotions. This is a twofold violation of the self; after losing control in a violent encounter, the survivor has now lost control of their day-to-day experience. This is one of the ways the self is fragmented – the survivor feels like they are at the mercy of these intrusions, which appear to be coming from themselves. They have been, in a sense, betrayed by their own body and mind.

The survivor is caught in a "dialectic of trauma," a dance between extreme states of numbness and volatile emotion.[94] This instability exacerbates feelings of vulnerability and helplessness. Once again, the survivor lacks control over their day to day narrative. There is no choice in how they feel that day. This further fragments the self, or as Brison puts it, "the disintegration of the self."[95] Part of the damage comes from relationships that are damaged. A survivor experienced a destruction in the relationship to the self, the people in their lives, and their own spirituality. The self is formed and sustained "in relation to others."[96] A violation of the self challenges a survivor's notions of those around them, including friends, family, and a higher power. It can even push the survivor into an existential crisis.[97]

"Traumatic events destroy the victim's fundamental assumptions about the safety of the world, the positive value of the self, and the meaningful order of creation."[98] In a healthy childhood, the child's first interaction and understanding of "safety" comes from the caretaker – a successful relationship with the caretaker, where the child's needs are met, is the basis for all future relationships[99] and even faith.[100] This early exposure to a world where they are loved and cared for, sets the tone that the world is also a hospitable place. Herman, working from Erik Erikson's theory of personality, writes that this relationship informs the child of "the continuity of life, the order of nature, and the transcendent order of the divine."[101] When this trust is challenged, one will seek the comfort of the one who offered it first. Herman uses the examples of soldiers at war, who cry out for their mother or for God in periods of extreme conflict.[102] When this call is not answered, the perception of basic trust is forever changed. A symptom of trauma is the feeling of being abandoned, alone, and unimportant in the grand scheme of

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[93] Ibid, 302.
[94] Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 47.
[95] Brison, 7.
[96] Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 51
[97] Ibid.
[98] Ibid.
[99] Robert Winston and Rebecca Chicot, "The Importance of Early Bonding on the Long-Term Mental Health and Resilience of Children," *London Journal of Primary Care* 8, no. 1 (2016) https://doi.org/10.1080/17571472.2015.1133012, 13.
[100] Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 51.
[101] Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 52.
[102] Ibid.

things.[103] An extreme outcome of this is where the traumatized "feel that they belong more to the dead than to the living."[104]

A foundational idea in personality psychology is that this trust is the foundation of personality development. Without it, without a connection to people who care or feel caring, then the sense of self can be shattered.[105] Traumatic encounters bring up experiences that enhance feelings of alienation and isolation, struggles over identity, intimacy, and autonomy. As mentioned earlier, sexual assault is about the perpetrator exuding power over the victim. In children, the relationship between the caregiver is also a relationship of power – but this power is, hopefully, used for positive enforcement. When a caregiver, or the one with power, respects the child, the child develops a positive sense of self (self-esteem).[106] In particular, it reinforces the child's autonomy – control over her body and bodily functions, and development of her own points of view.[107]

Neurologically speaking, a baby's earliest experiences are responsible for wiring and encoding millions of new connections in the brain.[108] The repeated behaviors of love and attention lead to pathways being built that help with relationship and memory development; this impacts everything from logic to empathy.[109] It also means that the brain is extra vulnerable; this is another way in which the caregiver has significant power over a child. It is very much a case of "use it or lose it" – if the positive experiences are not there, the pathways cannot be built or reinforced, leading to severe developmental issues and delays.[110] Furthermore, insecure attachment to a primary giver is a precursor to issues in relationship development down the line.[111]

This means that childhood can, in part, predict our behavior as adults. However, when "normal" is disrupted – what happens then? It challenges everything, even if the neurological pathways have been reinforced for 18 years. Traumatic events violate the autonomy of a person – including the basic bodily integrity that one would develop after a positive childhood.[112] The loss of control is often considered one of the most humiliating aspects of rape. For most of their life, the survivor has had anatomical control over their own body. Since rape is an act of violence, an act of having power over another body, the perpetrator demonstrates "contempt for the victim's autonomy and dignity"[113] The victim is left feeling like their voice means nothing, and the belief that "one can be oneself in relation to others" is ultimately destroyed.[114] Trauma attacks even foundational beliefs.

The feeling of helplessness at the hands of another leaves one prone to feelings of shame and doubt. When trust is broken, survivors are left doubting relationships and even themselves.

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[103] Ibid.
[104] Ibid.
[105] Ibid.
[106] Ibid.
[107] Ibid.
[108] Winston and Chicot, "The Importance of Early Bonding," 12.
[109] Ibid.
[110] Ibid, 13.
[111] Ibid.
[112] Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 52-3.
[113] Ibid, 53.
[114] Ibid.

No matter if she overcame or not, the survivor still feels guilt and inferiority because she didn't do enough to save herself in the moment.[115] She judges her behavior and choices, and uses guilt to make sense of the situation. It is easier, safer, to feel guilty for not trying harder than it is to accept the reality of utter helplessness.[116] All of this leaves the self in a state of fragmentation – shame, doubt, fear, alienation, loneliness, and guilt degrade her self-esteem.

And while the survivor is having an internal conflict about whether she can trust herself or be safe by herself, she also faces the reality that her relationship and connection to her community is shattered. This is especially true in the case of faith – for how can she feel safe in her faith, when in a moment of utter helplessness, she perceives that her faith did nothing for her?

Trauma's Impact on Spirituality

Difficult scenarios often bring up common questions about God, especially in Judeo-Christian communities. Why is there evil in the world? Why did God let something bad happen to someone so good? Where was God in this act of violence? What can God actually do, since He didn't even try to stop this atrocity? And ultimately, what is the point of God? This eventually becomes, what is the point of me interacting with God? What is the point of being involved in anything that supports God?

Traumatic experiences have serious implications on the spiritual health and formation of survivors. These are the questions that come up, alongside things like "why me?" For a person of faith, it is even more staggering. For they have followed all the God-given rules, lived in a righteous community, and yet, they have faced a traumatic experience that has destroyed their sense of self and their very nature of being. If they cannot trust themselves, or their family or community, why should the survivor trust God?[117]

The impact on spirituality varies based on age. For example, a child will be challenged if they pray for God's intervention in a case of long-term abuse and does not receive it. They will perceive themselves as "bad" and deserving of such abuse, as God clearly did not intervene.[118] For adults, a traumatic experience is a challenge to their core beliefs and assumptions. For many people who identify as religious, their spiritual and religious believes contribute to their understanding of a "global meaning system" which is how they navigate, understand, and cope with suffering.[119] In many cases, survivors of sexual violence leave their faith because they are unable to navigate their traumatic experience through that lens.[120]

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[115] Ibid.
[116] Ibid, 54.
[117] There are larger theological anthropological issues here that are worth noting but cannot be addressed in this thesis.
[118] Barbara R. Mclaughlin, "Devastated Spirituality: The Impact of Clergy Sexual Abuse on the Survivors Relationship with God and the Church," *Sexual Addiction & Compulsivity* 1, no. 2 (1994) https://doi.org/10.1080/10720169408400039, 148.
[119] Glòria Durà-Vilà, Roland Littlewood, and Gerard Leavey, "Integration of Sexual Trauma in a Religious Narrative: Transformation, Resolution and Growth among Contemplative Nuns," *Transcultural Psychiatry* 50, no. 1 (2013) https://doi.org/10.1177/1363461512467769, 22.
[120] Crisp, "Spirituality and Sexual Abuse," 302.

However, the biggest roadblock to a healthy spirituality, in Christianity, is the image of God. First, there is the issue of *imago dei* – the teaching that human beings are made in the image of God. In Genesis 1:27, it reads "God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them." In the previous line, Genesis 1:26, it reads "Then God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness…" This presents two problems to the survivor. The first is that humans are a reflection of God. The second is that, though it initially states "in our image" and "male and female," Genesis also reads "He made them." This reinforces the idea of God as a masculine force. To female victims who were assaulted by males, the imagery of a male God can be unsympathetic to their trauma. Rather, they can perceive God as having a hand in trauma, alongside their male abuser. They feel othered – "she" was not made in "his" image, but "he" was. Secondly, male imagery of God is reinforced in many Christian communities – God is the Father, and in many cases His priests are "father" as well.[121]

There is a lot of literature on the issue of "God the Father" (as opposed to "God the Mother") and how masculine interpretations of God can harm women written by many feminist scholars such as Phyllis Trible and Rosemary Radford Ruether. It extends a bit beyond the scope of this paper, but a brief summary is this: for women who were harmed by men, a male God reinforces feelings of subordination, feeling "othered," and feeling less valuable than men. This is reinforced in Christian communities where women cannot preach or hold leadership positions, a reality that Mary Daly and Radford Ruether would often use as a critique of the Catholic Church. This issue of a male God is important to mention as it is a common feminist critique in discussions of rape.[122]

In the case of *imago dei*, the affect can be positive or negative. The positive will be explored further in chapter 3. Briefly, though, the idea is that a survivor of abuse can see their traumatic experience as in line with the suffering Christ (crucifixion). Crisp writes that, "a deep violation of personhood can result in sexual abuse being experienced as a form of crucifixion"[123] which highlights the connection between a crucified Christ[124] and a violated survivor. When Christ dies on the cross, he is not dying for his own sins. Rather, Christ is dying for the sins of humanity, and at the same time, is identifying with the human. The significance lies there – while humans were made in God's *image*, Jesus is giving a clarity to the idea that God *identifies* with the human. Of course, God expresses emotion towards the human. God laments,[125] God gets angry,[126] and God rejoices.[127] But in Christ's crucifixion, He identifies with the sinner, going as far as to say "My God, why hast thou forsaken me?"[128] This is the image that the survivor can

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[121] McLaughlin, "Devastated Spirituality," 146-147.
[122] For more on this discussion, see Radford Ruether's *Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology* and Daly's *The Church and the Second Sex*. The conversation has advanced significantly since these publications, but their critiques are still valid.
[123] Beth Crisp, "Beyond Crucifixion: Remaining Christian after Sexual Abuse," *Theology & Sexuality* 15, no. 1 (2009) https://doi.org/10.1558/tse.v15i1.65, 66.
[124] The focus on a "crucified Christ" is reminiscent of Martin Luther's *theologia crucis* and expanded upon by Jürgen Moltmann in *The Crucified Christ*.
[125] See Isa. 1:2-9.
[126] See 2 Sam. 24:1.
[127] See Zeph. 3:17.
[128] Matt. 27:46; Mark 15:34.

relate to. A suffering Christ is a reflection of their own suffering. He bears the full weight of humanity – he runs the gamut of injustice, abuse, and humiliation.[129]

The negative affect of *imago dei* is that to a survivor, potentially suffering from low self-esteem, it simply doesn't make sense. It is an illogical and impossible connection to make. There is an inability to grasp their value to others, including a higher power, and in a Christian context, an inability to accept the concept of grace.[130] For many involved in an organized Christian practice, such as a particular church or denomination, God is associated with imagery of love and trust. Many denominations portray the relationship between God and His people as intimate and loving. In the Epistle to the Ephesians, it reads "For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life."[131] There is a lot of reinforcement that we are made in God's image, this image is a good image, and life is a gift.

However, that breach of trust, committed by another of God's creatures, impacts the very relationship between God and the survivor. In a variety of research, there are examples of women unable to see a loving God because God "the father" is too similar to their own "father," who sexually abused them.[132] For others, the language of Christianity can encourage "selfless subservience and obedience," which touches too closely on the traumatic experience of being helpless in an act of sexual violence.[133] Crisp notes that even the nature of the formation of a relationship with God can be problematic. In some cases, people are encouraged to come to Christ through their relationships and community. For example, in a Catholic church, the entire experience of forgiveness must be mediated by a priest. For a survivor, where trust and vulnerability are already hard to come by, they will instead choose to opt out of this experience. In other cases, a relationship with God is fostered through prayerful silence.[134] While few people can say they easily fall into silence without distractions, the experience can be distressing for survivors who are suffering from intrusions, like flashbacks or emotional distress.[135] How then, do they connect to God? Crisp notes that many people feel in control when they have access to speech, so periods of silence contribute to feelings of loss of control.[136]

The entire idea of a relationship with God is counterintuitive to the body's response to trauma. It calls for a trust in something you cannot see, when you would like to see. It calls for periods of openness and vulnerability without a guarantee of the outcome. Crisp notes that many survivors need explicit forms of affirmation, shown in words and actions, which cannot always be directly traced to God.[137] Furthermore, the relationship with God is also supposed to be reflected in the community – the Bible often speaks of fellowship[138] and refers to Christians as

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[129] Mark S. M. Scott, "Cruciform Theodicy: Divine Solidarity through the Cross," in *Pathways in Theodicy: An Introduction to the Problem of Evil, (*Minneapolis: Fortress Publishers, 2015*),* 147.
[130] Crisp, "Spirituality and Sexual Abuse," 303.
[131] Eph. 2:10.
[132] Crisp, "Spirituality and Sexual Abuse," 304.
[133] Ibid, 305.
[134] Ibid, 306.
[135] Ibid.
[136] Ibid.
[137] Ibid.
[138] For example, 1 John 1:7.

"brothers and sisters."[139] Colossians 3:13 reads, "bear with each other and forgive one another…" Galatians 6:2 asks us to "carry each other's burdens…" In many ways, the Bible encourages a relationship with Christ in the context of the Body of Christ. How does a survivor make peace with this, if an abuser lives among them? How does this ultimately reflect a loving God?

Crisp writes that "in addition to having deal with the abuse itself, survivors may feel guilty that their response is not consistent with what they have interpreted Christian teaching to be."[140] Anger, a normal response to injustice and trauma, may feel sinful to the survivor.[141] To be angry with God, for "allowing" this trauma to occur, ultimately feels "sinful." Yet, the survivor does have very real feelings to work through – sadness, loss and abandonment by God – and when they are unable to work through this, it will affect their lives and faith in subconscious ways, and hinder healing.[142]

Christ also suffered – should the survivor not share in Christ's suffering as well?[143] This too is a popular response to Christian survivors of abuse, as well as affirmations that everything has a purpose and so, perhaps God gave you this traumatic encounter for a reason.[144] Notions like these can incorrectly appear to absolve the perpetrator of responsibility, where they do not need to take responsibility or even express remorse.[145] The burden of acceptance and moving forward is on the survivor, who is being pushed in that direction by their community. Crisp refers to cases like this as "yet another form of abuse, sanctioned by religious authorities."[146] As the survivor struggles with feelings of safety and security, with feeling protected by people around them, with a fragmented self and low self-esteem, this too, is reflected in their faith, spiritual practice, and religious affiliation. The fragmented self ultimately has a fragmented relationship with God. For Christians, this is a troublesome situation that ought to be remedied. Luckily, for many Christians, the answer is biblical.

This chapter has demonstrated that the experience of sexual violence, or trauma in general, has a profound impact on the life of the survivor. Traumatic events cause neurological changes, like fatigue from constant adrenaline surges in the sympathetic nervous system. Traumatic experiences are encoded as traumatic memories, which can leave a survivor recalling a repetitive memory without a verbal narrative or linear structure. Survivors experience damage to the self through a dialectic of trauma and feeling a loss of control over their own lives and bodies. Relationships outside of the self are left damaged as trust is broken and challenged. Finally, there is the spiritual conflict of *imago dei*, how to trust God in the aftermath of trauma, and moving forward as a Christian in light of these experiences.

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[139] For example, 1 Cor. 1:10
[140] Crisp, "Spirituality and Sexual Abuse," 307.
[141] Ibid.
[142] Ibid, 307-8.
[143] Ibid, 308.
[144] Ibid.
[145] Ibid.
[146] Ibid.

Chapter Two: Biblical Narratives

For Christians, the Bible serves as a source of inspiration, direction, and motivation. It is more than just a book – it represents an entire culture, history, faith, and even a roadmap to the future. Even more so, it is divine revelation from God himself. It has guidelines on what it means to be "good" and how live a "good life." It also questions the very meaning of the word "good" and the human capacity for it. Through the use of parables and narratives, Christians find advice and answers to their questions, and even inspiration in times of trouble. Most of all, it focuses on the glory of God. God is omnipotent and omniscient. He is perfect and good, and He has created all things. This is a simple fact for Christians, and yet, the story of God is not simple – a Father, a Son, and Holy Spirit, present and not present on Earth, responsible, and not, for troubled times and good times. This book has inspired famous artwork, like Michelangelo's *The Creation of Adam*, has been used to challenge unethical behavior, and is significant to at least two billion people alive today.

The Bible is also the story of God's people. In the Old Testament, we see the story of the Israelites and the birth of a nation. In the New Testament, foundational to Christianity, we see the story of the Messiah finally coming. In part, the Bible weaves an intricate story about the emotions and possibilities of humanity. There is evil and there is good; there is ignorance and there is wisdom. It is a record of how things can go horribly wrong and how things can go surprisingly well, and how in all things, God remains present and active.

A Christian survivor will find stories she can relate to. The Bible does not use the word "trauma," but few stories paint such an apt portrayal as the Book of Job. So much so, that many psychologists have approached the text from that perspective. A Christian survivor will also read narratives about sexual violence, though it is often light on details or lacking a satisfying ending (from the perspective of the survivor). This chapter serves to give some insight into biblical narratives of trauma and rape, to give some background on what Christian communities have to work with.

The Trauma of Job

The Book of Job comes from the *Tanakh*, or Hebrew Bible, in the *Ketuvim*[147] ("Writings") section, and has also been categorized as part of the "Poetical Books" alongside Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Solomon.[148] Considered a piece of wisdom literature written by an anonymous author, this poetic book questions how "just" God really is.[149] Wisdom literature is intended to be a reflection on "universal human concerns," like the understanding of human experiences and the relationships that lead to human success and divine approval.[150] The book is estimated to have been written between the seventh and fourth centuries, compiled in the second century alongside the other poetical writings, and potentially

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[147] Also written "*Ketubim*."
[148] Michael David Coogan et al., *The New Oxford Annotated Bible: New Revised Standard Version with the Apocrypha,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010) 721.
[149] Ibid, 726.
[150] Ibid, 721.

takes place in much older times.[151] This is partially because Job is not a new character in the *Tanakh*; Job is mentioned in the sixth century BCE writings of Ezekiel, who mentions him alongside Noah, the hero of Genesis 6-9.[152]

The Book of Job is unique in that it proposes a variety of theological questions, looking at the problem of suffering, or more specifically, the injustice of undeserved suffering.[153] To the survivor of trauma, Job's wails of "why me?" can be quite relatable. His suffering, unimaginable to many of us, illustrates the depths of despair that humans can feel. Briefly put, Job is a wealthy man with a large family who loses everything, and then is blessed at the end of his suffering. Job is "blameless and upright."[154] He is happily married, has ten children, many servants, and thousands of various animals.[155] Job loved his family so much that he would burn offerings to God to cleanse his children of their sins, which involved feasting and partying at each others houses.[156] Yet, when he loses everything, he calls out to God and asks, essentially, why matters of justice are not God's primary concern. Job argues that the lack of justice for God's upstanding citizens, and the prosperity of the wicked, are evidence of "God's neglect of justice."[157] When God responds, He does not directly address the issue of justice, focusing instead on God's design and creation; this showcases that perhaps justice is not a heavenly concern.[158]

In the story, God and Satan have a conversation about Job, and Satan challenges his character – for of course, Job is only a loyal servant of the Lord because he has everything he could ever want or need.[159] Satan, actually labeled "the Accuser,"[160] claims Job will curse God if he loses everything; God essentially allows him to test that theory.[161] Satan's concern is that Job's righteousness is purely for the sake of reward and not for it's own sake.[162] In what appears to be a short amount of time, the following occurs: Job's children die, his animals are killed or stolen, and his servants are murdered.[163] Job weeps but does not forsake God, so then he gets covered in boils,[164] discouraged by his wife,[165] and rebuked by his friends.[166] What proceeds is a back and forth debate with Job and his friends; they insist he must be guilty to suffer so and he maintains his innocence. Eventually the Lord speaks in Job 38 and humbles Job in a, supposedly,

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[151] Ibid, 726.
[152] Ibid, Ezek 14:14.
[153] Coogan et al., *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, 726.
[154] Job 1:1.
[155] Job 1:2-3.
[156] Job 1:4-5.
[157] Coogan et al., *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, 726.
[158] Ibid.
[159] Job 1:6-7.
[160] Coogan et al., *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, 727; From the Hebrew "sâtan" or שָׂטָן; in Job, the word is used with a definite article (*ha-satan*) which refers specifically to the "heavenly accuser" or "the satan." This is the title of a function, which is a seat on the heavenly council.
[161] Job 1:11-12.
[162] Coogan et al., *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, 727.
[163] Job 1:13-19.
[164] Job 2:7.
[165] In Job 2:9, his wife implores him to "curse God and die."
[166] The following rebukes from his friends are found throughout Job: Eliphaz (Job 4, 15, 22), Bildad (Job 8, 18, 25), Zophar (Job 11, 20), and Elihu (Job 33-5).

satisfying dialogue.[167] His three friends, Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar, are rebuked by the Lord,[168] and Job gets twice as much as before – ten children, money and jewelry from all his friends, and lives another 140 years, enough to see four generations of his family.[169]

The Book of Job is an interesting narrative because it doesn't answer all the questions it poses. Rather, it reaffirms God's position as all-knowing and all-powerful. It does not answer Job has suffered, but Job is humbled as his life is put into perspective of the greater world. God affirms His position as the Almighty; He asserts how much is on His plate – mountain goats and deer,[170] the sea and the clouds,[171] and lightness and darkness.[172] In Job 38:2, God says, "Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge?" God is establishing Job's place in the world against his own; Job knows nothing of the divine world or the divine plan. His questions come from ignorance of all that God set in motion, yet God has heard the challenge in his cries. Job is not asking for personal vindication, rather he has begun to question the very order of things and is demanding an alternative.[173] In a sense, Job has done the unthinkable and told God to change things. God's response is ironic: in Job 40:12, He says to "tread down the wicked where they stand," or take matters into your own hands, and perhaps then Job will have nothing to complain about.[174]

In the grand scheme of things, Job's problems are just a few out of many. However, the story of Job is an honest account of what a person in pain will do. In 2009, Clifford Haughn and John C. Gonsiorek analyzed Job from the perspective of the DSM-4's diagnostic criteria for PTSD in their article entitled "The *Book of Job*: Implications for construct validity of posttraumatic stress disorder diagnostic criteria."[175] The DSM has been updated since, but their paper still contributes greatly to perceiving Job as a trauma-narrative. I consulted this study to develop a reinterpretation of their results in light of the DSM-5. Looking at the diagnostic criteria, does Job experience PTSD?

(1) The sudden death of his children would fall under Criterion A (3): Learning that the traumatic event(s) occurred to a close family member or close friend.[176]

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[167] Job 42:1-6.
[168] Job 42:7-9.
[169] Job 42:10-17.
[170] Job 29:1.
[171] Job 38: 8-11.
[172] Job 38:19.
[173] Coogan et al., *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, 768; Kenneth Ngwa, "Did Job Suffer for Nothing? The Ethics of Piety, Presumption and the Reception of Disaster in the Prologue of Job," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 33, no. 3 (2009) https://doi.org/10.1177/0309089209102502, 380.
[174] Coogan et al., *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, 768.
[175] Clifford Haughn and John C. Gonsiorek, "The Book of Job: Implications for Construct Validity of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder Diagnostic Criteria," *Mental Health, Religion & Culture* 12, no. 8 (2009) https://doi.org/10.1080/13674670903101218.
[176] "Trauma- and Stressor-Related Disorders" in *DSM-5*.

(2) His incapacitating skin disease[177] could fall under the category of "serious injury." Criterion A reads "exposure to actual or threatened death, serious injury, or sexual violence…"[178]

Therefore, the character of Job did experience trauma, according to the DSM-5. This is relevant to establish that while PTSD and "trauma" are more modern concepts, these experiences and the harm they cause psychologically and physiologically are not new. Job also suffered great economic hardship due to the loss of his animals and servants, and while this is a severe experience, it does not qualify as traumatic under the DSM-5 or DSM-4.[179] While Job is not a narrative of sexual violence, the laments of Job read very much like the pain of a traumatized person. For example, "my inward parts are in turmoil, and are never still; days of affliction come to meet me."[180] In comparison, here is a survivor of the Nazi extermination camps sharing a similar narrative:

> I knew that I was growing weaker…I was so tired, so tired; all I wanted to do was sleep. And I knew that was dangerous, fatal, like the man lost in Arctic snow who, having laid his head down for that delicious nap, never woke again. My mind, suddenly, was alive and alert to all this. I could see what was happening to me, as if I were outside myself.[181]

Criterion B (2) reads: "Recurrent distressing dreams in which the content and/or affect of the dream are related to the traumatic event(s)."[182] As previously mentioned, survivors of trauma often relive their trauma through nightmares that disturb their sleep cycle. "When I say, 'My bed will comfort me, my couch will ease my complaint,' then you scare me with dreams and terrify me with visions…"[183] Moreover, "…nights of misery are apportioned to me. When I lie down I say, 'When shall I rise?' But the night is long, and I am full of tossing until dawn."[184] This fulfills Criterion B (4), "intense or prolonged psychological distress at exposure to internal or external cues that symbolize or resemble an aspect of the traumatic event(s)."[185] Haughn and Gonsiorek also find this in Job 10:15: "…I cannot lift up my head, for I am filled with disgrace…"[186]

Criterion B (5) is also met by Job; "marked physiological reactions to internal or external cues that symbolize or resemble an aspect of the traumatic event(s)."[187] Haughn and Gonsiorek note one particular occasion, Job 21:6,[188] which reads, "when I think of it I am dismayed, and shuddering seizes my flesh."

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[177] In Job 3:7, Job is covered in "loathsome sores…from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head."
[178] "Trauma- and Stressor-Related Disorders" in *DSM-5*.
[179] Haughn and Gonsiorek, 836.
[180] Job 30:27.
[181] Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 85-86.
[182] "Trauma- and Stressor-Related Disorders" in *DSM-5*.
[183] Job 7:13-14 .
[184] Job 7:3-4.
[185] Haughn and Gonsiorek, 837; "Trauma- and Stressor-Related Disorders" in *DSM-5*.
[186] Haughn and Gonsiorek, 837.
[187] Ibid, 837; "Trauma- and Stressor-Related Disorders" in *DSM-5*.
[188] Haughn and Gonsiorek, 837.

Job, like many survivors of trauma, has "persistent and exaggerated negative beliefs or expectations about oneself, others, or the world," a "persistent negative emotional state" and "feelings of detachment or estrangement from others."[189] Haughn and Gonsiorek also identify the following from Criterion E in Job: irritable behavior and angry outburst (1), self-destructive behavior (2), hypervigilance (3), sleep disturbance (6).[190]

Did Job have PTSD? We cannot say for sure, particularly because he is a fictional character. But the implications are that Job's behavior is consistent of someone with PTSD.[191] This is significant, as the study of trauma in the Bible is necessary when approaching survivors of sexual abuse. However, there are also real cases of sexual violence displayed in the Bible.

The Rape of Tamar[192]

The story of Tamar, presented in 2 Samuel 13:1-22, is not an incomprehensible narrative for the modern reader. The story of rape, and the subsequent lack of action on the victim's behalf, is a tragically familiar narrative heard too often throughout the world. The story of Tamar's rape unfolds in a violent but bloodless narrative. The language of 2 Samuel 13:1-22 subtly portrays a vicious act and betrayal, creating a narrative that accentuates a violence the modern reader has probably already encountered, either directly or indirectly.[193]

Briefly, the plot goes as follows: Tamar is the daughter of King David and the sister of Amnon and Absalom. Amnon lusts after his sister, "Amnon was so tormented that he made himself ill because of his sister Tamar, for she was a virgin and it seemed impossible to Amnon to do anything to her."[194] His friend schemes with him on how to fulfill this lust. He fakes illness and Tamar goes to his aid. After the servants are sent away and he has Tamar alone, Amnon rapes her.

The rape of Tamar is addressed in three parts: before, during, and after the rape.[195] In the first segment, before the rape, the reader is not introduced to Tamar. Instead, a host of characters in Tamar's life are introduced and the reader is made witness to the plotting of her rape. She is not a "real" character yet. During the rape, the reader finally sees Tamar becoming a realized character, with a speaking part and accompanying behavior. After the rape, the reader witnesses the demolition of Tamar's character and her interactions with all the previously mentioned characters, with the rape as context.[196] The reader is witnessing a carefully executed violent act, with a host of characters playing roles like the aggressor, the victim, the co-conspirator, and the bystander. The defilement of Tamar, and her very identity, is artfully choreographed. The

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[189] "Trauma- and Stressor-Related Disorders" in *DSM-5*.
[190] Haughn and Gonsiorek, 837-839; "Trauma- and Stressor-Related Disorders" in *DSM-5*.
[191] Haughn and Gonsiorek, 840.
[192] The following discussion of the Rape of Tamar partially comes from a graduate paper I wrote in 2018, entitled, "2 Samuel 13:1-22: Violence, Subtle and Not."
[193] Susanne Smetana, "2 Samuel 13:1-22: Violence, Subtle and Not," Essay, Concordia University, 2018, 3.
[194] 2 Sam. 13:2.
[195] Phyllis Trible, *Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 37.
[196] Smetana, "2 Samuel 13:1-22," 3.

violence is emphasized without reference to a hand being raised, for the narrator knows what the reader knows: a crime has been committed.[197]

Before diving into the text, it is important to understand some context – this text is not about Tamar. It is not even about her rapist. It is a narrative about her father, King David. The assault of Tamar is a result of David's actions and a prophecy about his family.[198] In this context, which is a bit dehumanizing, Tamar's rape is a "plot device" and not central to the story at large, the Book of Samuel. In a larger context, the rape of Tamar is not a standalone narrative, though it can be read as one. According to some researchers, 1 and 2 Samuel, and 1 and 2 Kings were all one volume meant to be read together.[199] King David becomes the main focus in 1 Samuel 16, where he rises in prominence. David excels in his rise to power and becomes King of Israel, which is chronicled in 2 Samuel. However, he begins to falter and commits certain wrongs, like adultery and murder.[200] He is confronted by a prophet, Nathan, who tells him that "the sword shall never depart from your house."[201] This prophecy marks the downfall of the house of David, which begins with the death of his first child with Bathsheba, [202] followed by the rape of his daughter, Tamar, and the subsequent murder of his firstborn, Amnon.[203] The rape of Tamar can be interpreted as a parallel narrative to David pursuing Bathsheba.[204] As David kills Uriah, the husband of his future wife Bathsheba,[205] Amnon is killed by Absalom.[206]

Phyllis Trible, an Old Testament Scholar known for her feminist critiques of the Bible, describes the rape of Tamar as "the royal rape of wisdom."[207] Tamar is presented as a princess, representing "wisdom, courage, and unrelieved suffering."[208] Her brother, and her rapist, is a prince representing "power, prestige, and unrestrained lust."[209] As a modern reader, we may perceive this as stereotypical – the rapist is presented as powerful and unable to control himself. It falls on the fallacy that rape is about strong, unfulfilled urges. Tamar is reduced to an object of lust.[210]

Tamar's status is shown to be lesser in the language used throughout the text.[211] Tamar is never directly connected to David, though she is his daughter and a princess of that kingdom; this is partially due to the ring composition of the text overall.[212] In contrast, the male friend

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[197] Ibid, 4.
[198] Alberto J. Soggin, *Introduction to the Old Testament: From its Original to the Closing of the Alexandrian Canon*, (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1989), 217; 2 Sam 12:10.
[199] Soggin, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, 209.
[200] 2 Sam 11.
[201] 2 Sam 12:11.
[202] 2 Sam 12:19.
[203] Smetana, "2 Samuel 13:1-22," 10-11.
[204] William H. Propp, "Kinship in 2 Samuel 13," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 55, no. 1 (1993) 43.
[205] 2 Sam 11:15.
[206] 2 Samuel 13:28.
[207] Trible, *Texts of Terror*, 37.
[208] Ibid.
[209] Ibid.
[210] Ibid, 39.
[211] Smetana, "2 Samuel 13:1-22," 15.
[212] Trible, *Texts of Terror*, 39.

Jonadab, introduced to help plan her rape, is introduced as a relation to David: the son of David's brother, Shimeah.[213] In verse 2, Tamar is called Amnon's sister but later, in conversation with Jonadab, Amnon says "I love Tamar, my brother Absalom's sister."[214] She becomes "removed" from Amnon – not HIS sister, but someone else's. It also shows that Amnon, perhaps like many perpetrators of sexual violence, knows his fantasy is wrong - however, it probably has more to do with the fact that she is his sister.[215]

It is important to see how Tamar is treated, or at least spoken about, prior to the rape. It highlights the power dynamics that allowed for this to happen. Tamar did not go visit her brother and get raped. Tamar was manipulated by Jonadab and her brother to be alone with a dangerous, lustful man who would take advantage of her. Tamar was a victim even before Amnon touched her, because she had no way out. Worried about her ill brother, she prepares food for him and then delivers it, just as he requested.[216] Once they are alone, the following ensues: "..he took hold of her, and said to her, "Come, lie with me, my sister." She answered him, "No, my brother, do not force me; for such a thing is not done in Israel; do not do anything so vile… But he would not listen to her; and being stronger than she, he forced her and lay with her."[217]

There is no arguing with the language here – "he forced her." She said, "do not force me." With her objections falling on deaf ears, reality sets in. Tamar's will is ignored; she lacks any power in this situation. When Amnon rapes her, he shows that it was not "love" or care he had for his sister. When Amnon "lays" with her, the verb *škb* is used without a preposition. To stress the brutality of the situation, it really reads "he laid her."[218]

Afterwards, Tamar is demeaned and dehumanised when he only speaks to her using two imperatives: get up and go.[219] *Hlk* is used to tell her to "go", but it is a command – the same command given by David when she was ordered to see Amnon in his illness.[220] When Tamar speaks again, she does not call him brother, as she did before. Her voice is forceful, and she resists Amnon's intention to commit another evil (sending her away after the rape.) However, he, again, uses his power to command a servant to help send her out. Trible writes that Tamar's behavior afterword is significant in portraying a "destroyed woman."[221] This highlights the wrongdoing that is done and that it is more than just rape – Tamar is afflicted for life.

How does Tamar respond? "…Tamar put ashes on her head, and tore the long robe that she was wearing; she put her hand on her head, and went away, crying aloud as she went."[222] Trible describes Tamar's behavioral shift as a "living death,"[223] eerily similar to Herman's own

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[213] 2 Sam 13:3.
[214] 2 Sam 13:4.
[215] Propp, "Kinship in 2 Samuel 13," 43-44.
[216] "So Amnon lay down, and pretended to be ill; and when the king came to see him, Amnon said to the king, "Please let my sister Tamar come and make a couple of cakes in my sight, so that I may eat from her hand." (2 Samuel 13:6)
[217] 2 Sam 13:11-14.
[218] Trible, *Texts of Terror*, 46.
[219] Ibid.
[220] Ibid.
[221] Ibid, 49.
[222] 2 Sam 13:19.
[223] Trible, *Texts of Terror*, 50.

description of traumatized people believing "they belong more to the dead than the living."[224] Ashes are a common biblical reference to grief.[225] In this case, Tamar is grieving the life she has lost. She moved from the royal house of David, a virgin princess with prospects of marriage, into the house of her brother, Absalom, no longer a candidate for marriage, and presumably with no other options.[226] This narrative emphasizes the vulnerability of women at this time, as well as the abuses of power that occur against them; a woman was supposed to go from the house of her father to the house of her husband[227] and her virginity was tied to her marriage prospects.[228] Furthermore, one can argue that Tamar's behavior, that of a grieving woman, is an accurate portrayal of a victim coping with sexual violence. She mourns the woman she was before, and now moves through life carrying that shame and burden. The story of Tamar is a powerful testament to the abuse of power; the reader is left to reflect on Tamar, weeping in Absalom's home with her torn robe, covered in ashes. Unlike Job, we have no triumphant imagery to reflect on; Tamar is no longer relevant to the story and so, we will not hear from her again.

(More) Sexual Violence in the Bible

When it comes to the discussion of rape in the Bible, Tamar's story is significant because of the language used and level of detail evident in it. It is an unflinching narrative about rape, and it is also part of a larger context. For a survivor of sexual abuse, these narratives hold a significant weight as they see themselves reflected in this violence. The Bible also references other instances of sexual violence.

Genesis 19:33 features the daughters of Lot getting him drunk, then raping him. This is presented as the only way the daughters could continue their family line – by being impregnated by their father. However, before that, he offers up his daughters to an angry mob, where they would presumably be raped. In Genesis 19:8, Lot says to the crowd, "Look, I have two daughters who have not known a man; let me bring them out to you, and do to them as you please…"

Similarly, the book of Judges recounts the story of an unnamed concubine who is gang-raped by an angry mob in Gibeah.[229] This particular story is quite gruesome. Much like Lot, the master of the house offers up his virgin daughter and an unnamed concubine to the angry mob. "Here are my virgin daughter and his concubine; let me bring them out now. Ravish them and do whatever you want to them…"[230] In the end, the concubine is thrown out into the crowd, to be raped and abused all throughout the night. She dies from that abuse, and in the morning, her master dismembers her into 12 pieces and sends the pieces all around Israel.[231] This is a call to arms, for the Israelites retaliate by almost wiping out the entire tribe of Benjamin.

Another well-known narrative is the rape of Dinah in Genesis 34. It simply reads, "When Shechem son of Hamor the Hivite, prince of the region, saw her, he seized her and lay with her

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[224] Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 52.
[225] See: Job 30:19, Ps. 102:9, and Dan. 9:3.
[226] Coogan et al., *New Oxford Annotated Bible*, 463.
[227] See Num. 30 for an example.
[228] See Deut. 22:13-21.
[229] Judg. 19:25.
[230] Judg. 19:24.
[231] Judg. 19:27-30.

by force."[232] Shechem, Hamor, and all the males in their city are killed.[233] Like Tamar, her brothers avenge her rape and she is heard from no more. As modern readers with the tendency to use a personal praxis, feminist scholarship is often employed when analysing these texts. Therefore, it is traditionally assumed in feminist scholarship that the Bible is androcentric literature of a patriarchal origin and should be approached with a hermeneutic of suspicion, and so the text is approached with that challenge.[234] Through this hermeneutic, one could argue that the Bible demonstrates justice for victims of sexual violence. Amnon rapes Tamar and is killed. The concubine is raped and the mob, belonging to the Benjaminites, is responsible for a battle that almost kills their entire tribe. Dinah is raped, and the man responsible, and his kin, are killed. In their eyes, this violation is avenged. However, vengeance is not enough. We see that Tamar is destroyed by what happens to her, and it is implied that she lives the rest of her life out in shame. So, she was avenged but what now? The rape of Dinah leads to a civil war. While Dinah's brothers are angry at this violation, they do not hesitate to perpetuate more violence in the form of raping women as spoils of war.[235] In the end, this vengeance is not about the women. The aftermath is not about the victims.

One could even argue that some parts of the Bible had previously encouraged sexual violence. Historically, sexual violence has also been a weapon of war, and this is even a problem today. [236] Wartime sexual violence occurs when "sex" and women are treated as "spoils of war," as a campaign of ethnic cleansing, institutionalized sexual slavery, and/or as a form of psychological warfare. In the Bible we see this in Deuteronomy 20:14, Moses encourages soldiers to take women as spoils of war. We also see it in Numbers 31:17-18, when he encourages men to save the virgins for themselves.

The Bible does not explicitly say "go out and rape," nor does it say "kill as a cure for rape." It was written in a very specific context. The Old Testament, in particular, is about God's chosen people struggling to keep their heads above water, following their covenant responsibilities, and failing. Yet, when we turn to the Bible for solace in these situations, it can be hard to see what positives it can offer. It offers proof that the suffering is real and acknowledged by God. It offers a chance at feeling less lonely for survivors of sexual violence. It is testament to the grief that humans can experience. Yet, I would fault these examples because they don't suggest a way to heal. From the perspective of literature, these rapes are plot devices. Once the plot gets moving, how does that impact the reader who is a survivor?

To conclude, this chapter has served to offer a brief overview of sexual violence in the Bible, and to show that what we today call trauma, is also manifested in various parts of the Bible. The following chapter will look at this concept of "forgiveness," and why it has been applied pastorally to victims of sexual violence.

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[232] Gen. 34:2.
[233] Gen. 34:25-26.
[234] Robin Parry, "Feminist Hermeneutics and Evangelical Concerns: The Rape of Dinah as a Case Stuy," *Tyndale Bulletin* 53, no. 1 (2002): 1.
[235] Susanne Scholz, *Rape Plots: A Feminist Cultural Study of Genesis 34* (New York: Peter Lang, 2002), 168-169.
[236] To situate this in a modern context, sexual violence is high in active warzones. So much so, that in 2008, the U.N. declared sexual violence a war crime, or a targeted tactic of genocide. See United Nations Security Council, "Resolution 1820," (June 19, 2008).

Chapter Three: Forgiveness as Wounding

Sexual violence leaves the survivor with a lifelong impact. Between lifestyle changes and physical alterations, there is also an emotional turmoil that impacts almost every aspect of life. For many, it brings up questions of theodicy and even the very nature of God. Someone who identifies as Christian, or seeks to become Christian, will seek spiritual solace within that community. Whether they receive counsel from a pastor or a Christian friend, the answer to dealing with the emotional fall out of sexual violence is not easily found in scripture, and churches often prioritize dealing with safety and punishment over the psychological wellbeing of the survivor.

For example, the Anglican Communion relies on a document called "Safe Church," which outlines a policy for removing sexual offenders from the church but not much about the psychological aftermath.[237] Canadian Mennonites have a published guide, *Understanding Sexual Abuse by a Church Leader or Caregiver*, which only concludes with information for the abused and not instructions for clergy moving forward.[238] In contrast, denominations like the Catholic Church[239] and the Southern Baptist Church[240] have been regularly criticized for not addressing sexual violence at all. While mainly pastors, ministers, and priests offer counsel, it is not mandatory for them to have a psychological background. In a pastoral context, one tool offered to survivors is biblical words of wisdom. The Bible, while a vital resource for Christians, does not offer a specific method for healing in cases of sexual abuse. However, what it does offer is the suggestion of forgiveness – it encourages the wronged to forgive the perpetrator. For Christians, this is a teaching of Jesus Christ, who died for all sins. He died to save all, and this includes even those who have wronged you; in other words, Christ is the Redeemer for all sinners.. The following chapter will explain the Biblical background for forgiveness, as well as why a push for forgiveness can ultimately harm survivors of sexual abuse.

Biblical Background

Mentions of forgiveness in the Hebrew Bible often come in the form of others seeking God's forgiveness. In contrast, the New Testament is both the story of Jesus Christ and a guide for an emerging Christian community, on how to behave amongst each other and amongst non-believers. For some background context, we see that in the Hebrew scriptures, forgiveness is

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[237] The Anglican Communion Safe Church Commission, "Report of the Anglican Communion Safe Church Commission to the meeting of the Anglican Consultative Council (ACC-17) at Hong Kong from 28 April to 5 May 2019," (2019), https://www.anglicancommunion.org/community/commissions/the-anglican-communion-safe-church-commission.aspx.

[238] Heather Block, *Understanding Sexual Abuse by a Church Leader or Caregiver*, (2003) https://mcc.org/media/resources/1136.

[239] See The New York Times online section, entitled "Roman Catholic Church Sex Abuse Cases."

[240] Nicole Ault, "The SBC Has a Sex-Abuse Problem," The Wall Street Journal (Dow Jones & Company, December 26, 2019), https://www.wsj.com/articles/the-sbc-has-a-sex-abuse-problem-11577400072.

rarely handed out without hard work. This is presented in the form of animal sacrifices, cleansing rituals, and intervention from temple priests. In Job 1:5, we see Job burning offerings for his children to receive pardon from the Lord. The Book of Leviticus is a significant book of law for the Israelites, telling them how to conduct themselves and how to make offerings in the Tabernacle. It emphasises the ritual, legal, and moral practises for that community, under the reign of Moses. One example in particular, shows the importance of seeking the Lord's forgiveness; in Leviticus 4:31 the reader learns how a priest prepares an animal sacrifice, and then it is burned on the altar "for a pleasing odor to the Lord," and this is how the priest "shall make atonement on your behalf, and you shall be forgiven."

Jesus was raised in a Jewish home and lived as an adult man bound to the Jewish laws found in Deuteronomy and Leviticus.[241] For example, in Luke 2:22-24, we see the family of the infant Jesus, present him in the temple along with a sacrifice, in accordance with the law in Exodus 13:2. The birth, death, and resurrection of Jesus ushered in a new era for those who believed the Messiah arrived. It was a fundamental shift in the daily lives of all believers. For one, Jesus ended the practise of animal sacrifice.[242] According to Paul in 1 Corinthians, Jesus was the final sacrifice and atonement for humanity – in 1 Corinthians 5:7, he confirms that Jesus was our "Passover lamb." A main facet of Christianity is that Jesus' crucifixion is the ultimate sacrifice, and through it, all of our sins are forgiven; cosmic redemption is found in that ultimate sacrifice. This is the main source for the modern conceptualization and relationship to forgiveness in Christian communities, arrives from.

The following examples come from the understanding that Christ shed his blood for the forgiveness of all of humankind. Sins are not automatically forgiven – they must be confessed and acknowledged first. A simple example is 1 John 1:9 which reads, "If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness." The following line reads that if we claim to have not sinned, then we have made a liar of God and "his word is not in us."[243] In order to have union with God, we must acknowledge sin and seek forgiveness. It can be quite daunting to think that all humans are sinners and leave people with questions like, does God hate your envious behavior as much as He hates murder? It can even be disheartening for survivors of crime to think this way – that perhaps they fit into the same category as the perpetrator of a crime. This goes further – if God forgives all sinners, and all believers who have His forgiveness will enter his Kingdom, or heaven, then does that mean we share heaven with people who have harmed us? The following anecdote, shared by Miroslav Volf in an article entitled "Love Your Heavenly Enemy" articulates a perhaps unwelcome answer:

> When my Yale colleague Professor Carlos Eire visits his elderly mother, he often ends up as a resident theologian for a small Cuban-immigrant community of her friends. "Is it possible," one woman asked him, "for Castro to convert on his deathbed and end up in heaven?" "It is possible," Professor Eire assured her. "This is what Christian faith is all about. Nobody is beyond the pale of redemption." "Well, if that were to happen," said the woman, "then I would not want to be in heaven." Karl Barth was once asked the

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[241] However, in the New Testament Jesus is seen violating these laws as interpreted by leaders of his day. For example, he violated the Sabbath law (see Jesus Heals on the Sabbath in John 5).
[242] After the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 A.D., the practice was also discontinued in Jewish communities. This is because sacrifices could only be made in the temple.
[243] 1 John 1:10.

> antithesis of that Cuban expatriate's question: "Is it true that one day in heaven we will see again our loved ones?" Barth responded with a chuckle, "Not only the loved ones!"[244]

Statements like these express a typical Christian conviction: we accept Jesus' sacrifice as a sacrifice for our sins, and we accept Jesus' sacrifice as a sacrifice for the sin of others. This is also what leads some believers to question where God stands on severity of sin and whether one sin as bad as another.

These questions can be reflected on, in what scholars Gerald W. Peterman and Andrew J. Schmutzer, call "the relational ecosystem of sin and suffering."[245] That is to say, to understand where God stands on which sin and what sinner, we must first understand how sin reflects on the sinner, and God.

Schmutzer likens God's design of the world, to a symphony – sin disrupts the beauty of that symphony, and it ripples out into all the created order.[246] From the very beginning, God is a relational God. Genesis 1:26, God says, "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness." Out of love, God has created humankind, to have someone "other" to commune with them, and to enjoy fellowship with.[247] The very nature of humanity is relational, to exist in a communal setting with the Lord and each other. We must also reflect on the intent put into the creation of humankind; God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good.[248] Therefore, acts of sin disrupt this good creation because it is not what God intended.[249] In creating humankind, God also gave a vocation and "bound" them in service to the Earth. This is the theology of *creatio continua*, or "continuous creation." God put man in the garden of Eden to "till it and keep it,"[250] not for indulgence. The act of creating human kind is both God creating someone to commune with, and God creating someone to serve Him/the created world; in Genesis 2 we see the implication that humankind are servants to God and their service begins in the garden.[251] We can further make the assumption that the earth needs work, so the mandatory stewardship given to humankind also emphasises solidarity with earthly domain.[252] Further emphasis on humans as relational beings is present in other dynamics introduced by God: in marriage (partnership),[253] as stewards of the Earth,[254] and as rulers of animals.[255]

Schmutzer notes parallels in the writing of Genesis that shows humankind as "co-creators" with God. In Genesis 2:19-20, Adam, the first created man, is responsible for the naming of every creature. In Genesis 5:3, Adam becomes a "father of a son in his own likeness,

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[244] Miroslav Volf, "Love Your Heavenly Enemy" (Christianity Today, October 23, 2000), https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2000/october23/7.94.html.
[245] Gerald W. Peterman and Andrew J. Schmutzer, *Between Pain & Grace: A Biblical Theology of Suffering* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2016) 37.
[246] Ibid.
[247] Anthony C. Thiselton, *Systematic Theology*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015) 102.
[248] Gen 1:31.
[249] Peterman and Schmutzer, *Between Pain & Grace,* 39.; Ps. 104:5.
[250] Gen 2:15.
[251] Peterman and Schmutzer, *Between Pain & Grace,* 42.
[252] Ibid, 42-43.
[253] Gen 2:24.
[254] Gen 2:15.
[255] Gen 2:19-20.

according to his image," which is almost identical to how the creation of Adam is described. Yet, as co-creators,[256] humankind is not powerful on it's own; "theirs is not a dominion of power, but power for dominion."[257] Humankind is a portrayal of holistic personhood, because we do not have God's image but are God's image.[258] When humans mistreat each other, they are mistreating emblems of God, and polluting the relational ecosystem.[259] All this to say, that any amount of sin matters to God as it impacts His created world. Furthermore, God works within the relational ecosystem by settling natural laws however, God does not, and has not, restricted humankind in their moral choices just like He did not stop Adam from making certain choices.[260]

Adam and Eve make a choice to disobey God by eating fruit from the tree in the middle of the garden, or the "forbidden" tree,[261] which begins the breaking up of God's relational ecosystem.[262] However, this is not yet "sin," or at least not in name. Schmutzer notes that human rebellion breaks the "bindings" of the sanctuary humans were given; humans were put in the garden to give them purpose, and what they have done instead is broken God's trust and brought His judgement onto their relationships.[263] Humans are exiled from the garden and things take a turn for the worst for the kin of Adam. Eve gives birth to Cain, a "tiller of the ground", and then Abel, a "keeper of sheep".[264] Cain kills his brother Abel,[265] due to God finding favour in Abel's sacrificial offering over Cain's,[266] and God responds by cursing the ground that Cain works, so that it will no longer yield a harvest.[267] Genesis 4:7 is when the first mention of the word "sin" appears. It is used as a warning to Cain, who is stewing in his anger; God says, "if you do not do well, sin is lurking at the door; its desire is for you, but you must master it."[268] Sin is a disruption of harmony in the relational ecosystem, and a breach of God's trust. Sin is also part of a cycle: sin (act) → corruption (evil) → pollution (spoiling).[269] Even if a sin occurs in a private home with no witness, there is no such thing as a private sin and it spills out into the world as pollution.[270] For example, the aftermath of a rape in the form of PTSD would be that pollution. Schmutzer notes that sin has a ripple effect, so it is not private and "there is no contained sin."[271]

Sin also "matures."[272] The theme of sin and suffering maturing is present in Genesis 1-11:

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[256] Co-creation is a much larger theological notion that deserves to be recognized but can not be explored in full due to the parameters of this thesis.
[257] Peterman and Schmutzer, *Between Pain & Grace,* 44.
[258] Ibid, 45.
[259] Ibid.
[260] Ibid, 43.; Gen 3:6.
[261] Gen 3:6.
[262] Peterman and Schmutzer, *Between Pain & Grace,* 49.
[263] Ibid, 49-50.
[264] Gen 4:1-2.
[265] Gen 4:8.
[266] Gen 4:3-5.
[267] Gen 4:12.
[268] Gen 4:7.
[269] Peterman and Schmutzer, *Between Pain & Grace,* 51.
[270] Ibid.
[271] Ibid.
[272] Ibid, 52.

(1) children impacted by a parent's sin,
(2) creating conditions that negatively affect the children's options, and thus
(3) predispose the children toward certain choices
(4) which contribute destructively to their personal lives.[273]

Simply put, God is eager to forgive but He does not erase the consequences of our actions.[274] Adam's descendent Noah, is seen drunk and "uncovered in his tent," which leads to his son, Ham, sharing the sight with his brothers.[275] His brothers cover up his father,[276] but Noah is angered by Ham and curses his grandson, Canaan.[277] The descendants of Canaan become the Canaanites,[278] who later are driven out by the Israelites, the descendants of Abraham.[279] This is just one example of the polluting effect of sin, as it appears in Biblical narratives. "Sin twists reality and passes on a contorted environment to those who come after. This, in turn, limits their freedom to choose rightly."[280]

God is witness to all humankind, and often expresses pain at their misbehaviour and sin. In Genesis 6:6, we see that the Lord "grieves" that he made humans capable of wickedness on Earth, ultimately leading to the Great Flood.[281] He floods the earth,[282] sparing no one but Noah and his sons and their families.[283] Later, when God smells the sweet odor of a satisfactory sacrifice from Noah,[284] God promises to limit his divine options for addressing sin and violence;[285] in other words, "I will never again curse the ground because of humankind, for the inclination of the human heart is evil from youth; nor will I ever again destroy every living creature as I have done."[286] While God does make this promise, He does also give humans laws and consequences of various degrees, especially in many Old Testament teachings. In Numbers 35:16, murderers are put to death and yet, in Numbers 35:22-28, if the murder is accidental, the murderer is only exiled until the high priest dies. This shows that God does approach some sins differently.

In the New Testament, we see some differences such as James 2:10 which reads, "For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it," and Romans 3:23 which reads, "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." While we look at the impact of sin through a relational ecosystem, we can see that some sins have a greater impact than others. For example, murder has more consequences in the impact of the lives of all marginally involved while a lie about being late to work might not extend beyond that moment in

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[273] Ibid.
[274] Ibid, 53.
[275] Gen 9:22.
[276] Gen 9:23.
[277] Gen 9:25.
[278] Gen 10:15-29.
[279] Gen 15:18-21; Num. 33:53.
[280] Peterman and Schmutzer, *Between Pain & Grace,* 53.
[281] Gen 6:11-13.
[282] Gen 6:17.
[283] Gen 6:18.
[284] Gen 8:21.
[285] Peterman and Schmutzer, *Between Pain & Grace,* 54. See Gen 8:21.
[286] Gen 8:21.

the workplace. However, the point stands that sin, no matter how big or small, is sin and in these cases, breaks the relational trust between God and humankind. When we see scriptural references like the one from James and Romans, we can understand that the Christian perception of sin is that it must be remedied and it is inevitable. This emphasis on sin being forgiven or remedied, comes from Jesus, the Redeemer, and will be examined further in this chapter.

In 1 Timothy, a letter from Paul to the young disciple it is named after, the apostle eloquently communicates that no one is beyond forgiveness. He calls himself a former blasphemer and a man of violence, and yet, he receives mercy and grace in abundance from Christ.[287] He showcases that clear attitude to his young (in faith) follower – if even he, the former persecutor of Christians, can be forgiven by God, then so can anyone who has faith. The forgiveness of Christ is abundant. Paul expands on this in his letter to the Ephesians, where he writes, "forgive one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you."[288] Again, Paul reflects this in Colossians 3:13: "Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you must also forgive."

The problem with these scriptural references, is that they discuss a relationship between a believer and God, or a believer and another believer. In our ever expanding and globalised world, it is not always the case that Christians are exclusively wronged by Christians, though that is not unheard of. Yet, pastoral guidance usually involves citing forgiveness. The context of many of these passages, many of them letters from Paul to communities in turmoil, is about the very "body" of Christ, or the church (*ecclesia*). While there is something to be said about the relief of forgiving someone who has wronged you, when it is offered as biblical advice, one cannot ignore that the context was within a relatively limited community or church. However, it offers an easy guideline in tumultuous relationships and has slowly become the Christian response to turmoil, and even a part of the very culture of Christianity.

The idea of forgiving all, with no exceptions, is also present in some New Testament teachings. A significant one is The Lord's Prayer: Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.[289] In Matthew 6:9-13, it reads "forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors." This appears several times throughout the New Testament, such as in Matthew 18:27-34 or Luke 7:41-42, where humans become a debtor to God when they do not give Him the obedience He deserves.[290] The Lord's Prayer is an intercessory prayer, where God's name is invoked for assistance in living a life that honors Him; it highlights human suffering and encourages a hope for the future.[291] Peterman notes that this is a challenging request on the basis alone – we ask forgiveness because we have forgiven others.[292] To ask for forgiveness without offering forgiveness to others is akin to suggesting that others need forgiveness more than you or that others are more wrong than you.[293] This reality sequence is "an expression of honest faith."[294] We cannot seek God without honestly seeking out His wounded, our neighbours. "The

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[287] 1 Tim. 1:13-14 .
[288] Eph. 4:31-32.
[289] The original is found partially in Luke 11 and fully in Matt. 6:9-13. However, there are many variations used throughout different Christian faith communities and denominations.
[290] Peterman and Schmutzer, *Between Pain & Grace,* 158.
[291] Ibid*,* 148.
[292] Ibid*,* 159.
[293] Ibid.
[294] Frederick Dale Bruner, *The Christbook: Matthew 1-12* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004) 310.

conscience that is able to ask for forgiveness without giving it is not a conscience living in faith."[295] This prayer reminds us that we fall short in our obedience to God, and so we seek forgiveness to thrive spirituality, and then, we acknowledge that we might again fail the will of God and will need even daily forgiveness.[296] This is portrayed in the Parable of the Unforgiving Servant, in Matthew 18:21-35. When Peter asks Jesus how often should he forgive someone, Jesus launches into the following parable. A servant owed his master money but was unable to pay and begged for mercy. Moved by his plea, the master released him from the debt. However, that servant was also owed 100 denarii by another servant and went out to seek it; his fellow servant could not pay and so he was shown no mercy and was thrown into prison until he could. The master, angered that his servant could not extend the same compassion, rebuked him and then sent him away to be tortured until he could pay off his own debt. The conclusion Jesus leaves Peter with is that God shall do the same to the ones who cannot offer forgiveness to their fellow human.

Asking survivors to forgive their abusers is not wrong, and it is an important gospel teaching. It must also be noted that forgiveness and reconciliation are not the same. Forgiveness can be one-sided, while reconciliation demands repentance.[297] Another misconception about forgiveness is that it also includes forgetting how you were wronged.[298] The Greek word for "forgive" in the New Testament is *αφιημι* (afiimi) which conveys the concept of "letting go."[299] Many Christian leaders take a eductionist approach of defining forgiveness as simply letting go, and ignore the various nuances in asking anyone to let go of something as large as sexual abuse.[300] For example, many definitions of forgiveness involve a total elimination of negative feelings, such as distrust. Some survivors are even told that if they do not forgive, God will not forgive them and in that case, if they cannot let go of their distrust, they certainly cannot forgive and receive God's forgiveness.[301] Even a trusted resource like the *Anchor Bible Dictionary* defines forgiveness as completely eliminating the wrong from memory, and with that, forgiveness must be offered with no conditions between the offender and the wounded party; it goes further to say "harmony is restored between the two."[302] Furthermore, the misconception that forgive and forget are mutually inclusive is based on the incorrect assumption that God also forgives and forgets. For example, in Jeremiah 31:34, it reads "for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more." However, if God forgot, then God would cease to be all-knowing.[303] This is a "figure of speech" in regards to God ceasing punishment, not completely eradicating wrongs from his memory.[304]

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[295] Ibid.
[296] Peterman and Schmutzer, *Between Pain & Grace,* 158.
[297] Ibid*,* 159.
[298] Ibid*.* Steven Tracy, "Sexual Abuse and Forgiveness," *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 27, no. 3 (1999) https://doi.org/10.1177/009164719902700302, 219.
[299] Tracy, "Sexual Abuse and Forgiveness," 219.
[300] Ibid.
[301] Ibid, 220.
[302] Herion Gray, "Forgiveness," in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman, vol. 2 (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 831.
[303] Peterman and Schmutzer, *Between Pain & Grace,* 160.
[304] Ibid*,* 159-160.

The truth is that *αφιημ* means a variety of things throughout the Bible, and there are actually types of forgiveness. To paint biblical forgiveness with a broad stroke is, ultimately, quite unfair. According to Steven Tracy, *αφιημ* was originally used to mean "release" and that meaning was carried over into the New Testament, where it appears over 125 times.[305] However, each meaning is nuanced and based on context. In Matthew 13:36, we see "send away" or "to let go." In Matthew 18:27, we see "to cancel" or "remit." John 10:12 uses it to mean "to leave" and in Romans 1:27, it is "to give up" or "abandon." In Acts 5:38, it means "to tolerate." The Bible also has conflicting information about forgiveness. In Mark 11:25, it reads to forgive anything so that God can forgive you, but Luke 17:3 demands repentance first. Later, in the Lord's Prayer, we see the urge to forgive all but before that, in Matthew 18:15-20, Jesus says to reprove those who sin and if they do not listen, "let such a one be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector." In Luke, we even see judgement in two different perspectives: "do not judge and you will not be judged,"[306] and later, "judge for yourselves what is right."[307] The prevalence of seeming contradictions and various criterion, shows that forgiveness in the Bible is not black and white. Tracy proposes distinguishing all of these discussions of forgiveness into three categories: judicial, relational and psychological forgiveness.

Judicial forgiveness is often what is conflated in Christian communities, as the exclusive and mandatory form of forgiveness. This involves pardoning of sins, a complete removal of guilt, and is available to any and all sinners.[308] This is what we are referring to when discussing the forgiveness offered to humanity through Jesus' sacrifice. It is the heart of the salvation experience: God desires to freely forgive and heal even the most hopeless of sinners.[309] This is often used against survivors to express the idea that God especially reaches out to those who seem unredeemable, and the message of Jesus is that God's mercy and justice and forgiveness can redeem anyone.[310] However, this type of forgiveness is contingent on confession, acknowledgement, and repentance as seen in 1 John 1:9 and Acts 2:38, for example. Judicial forgiveness can only be granted by God, as it is an all-encompassing spiritual pardon that even church discipline cannot offer. As Tracy writes, it is "absurd" to pressure abuse victims into forgiving their abusers so that the abusers may go to heaven, when this ought to be left to God.[311] We also do a disservice to these kinds of sinners when we do not push them to be accountable and honest about what they have done. To not encourage confession, to allow abuse to go unnamed, is to downplay the significance of judicial forgiveness. Often, the pressure to "let go" of what an abuser has done or to push for "premature reconciliation," can actually validate the offender's denial of wrongdoing.[312] Furthermore, it is insensitive and destructive to victims, can hinder their healing, and strengthen their "unforgiveness."[313] It can also contribute to additional sexual abuse in Christian communities when forgetting and minimization is promoted.[314] It

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[305] Tracy, "Sexual Abuse and Forgiveness," 220.
[306] Lk 6:36.
[307] Lk 12:57.
[308] Tracy, "Sexual Abuse and Forgiveness," 221.
[309] Ibid.
[310] Ibid.
[311] Ibid.
[312] Ibid, 222.
[313] Ibid, 225.
[314] Ibid.

falsely makes "being nice" a virtue, as opposed to being honest. Instead, pain is driven inside, and responsibility is given a low threshold. Tracy warns that it can even be an invitation to continue the perpetuation of violence.[315]

Psychological forgiveness is where there must be an acknowledgement of trauma. It is an inner, personal category of forgiveness that can be categorized as negative (letting go of ill feelings) and positive (extending grace). While Jesus bared no ill will towards his executioners, even asking God to forgive them, the average human will experience negative emotions like rage, and even feelings of vengeance. Revenge fantasies are actually quite normal experiences after experiencing a trauma. Herman writes that, one form of resistance to working through pain, comes in the form of revenge fantasies: the fantasy is often a mirror image of the traumatic memory, where the roles are reversed and the victim can have a sense of power.[316] It is cathartic and does not mean the survivor will go out and cause harm, but rather, the survivor is processing and re-experiencing her feeling of helplessness. For many survivors, it is a desperate attempt to get the perpetrator to understand her pain.[317]

While we can say this is normal, it is not healthy – these revenge fantasies play out like traumatic memories, highlighting the experience of helplessness and fear, exacerbating negative aspects of the self, and leaving the survivor feeling degraded.[318] Anger is also a normal experience for any human. Christ himself expressed anger, as in Matthew 21 when he cleanses the temple of money changers and merchants. For Tracy, addressing negative psychological forgiveness is exactly what many communities encourage, where the abused is asked to let go of resentment, and to commit the abuser to God.[319] What he means is, sometimes rage[320] and revenge fantasies can turn into sinful resentment,[321] and letting go means letting go of the right to exact revenge.[322] However, this can be conflated with justice. The survivor is not asked to let go of justice, but to let go of personal retribution and instead, commit to an intensified desire for justice. When she lets go, she is "relinquishing the roles of judge, jury, and executioner over to God."[323] On an emotional level, she is expressing a hope and desire that the perpetrator will actually go to God, and will repent and experience judicial forgiveness.

Former American gymnast Rachael Denhollander gave a victim impact statement, about the abuse she received at the hands of her doctor, Larry Nassar, sharing a similar sentiment:

> You spoke of praying for forgiveness. But Larry, if you have read the Bible you carry, you know forgiveness does not come from doing good things, as if good deeds can erase what you have done. It comes from repentance which requires facing and acknowledging the truth about what you have done in all of its utter depravity and horror without

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[315] Ibid.
[316] Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 189.
[317] Ibid.
[318] Ibid.
[319] Tracy, "Sexual Abuse and Forgiveness," 222.
[320] For a discussion on whether or not "rage" itself qualifies as a sin, see *The Angry Christian: A Theology for Care and Counseling* by Andrew D. Lester. The answer is yes, if we indulged in it, and no, as the Bible has evidence of "righteous anger" and Jesus himself expressing anger at the behaviour of others.
[321] See Ephesians 4:26.
[322] Tracy, "Sexual Abuse and Forgiveness," 222.
[323] Ibid.

> mitigation, without excuse…Should you ever reach the point of truly facing what you have done, the guilt will be crushing. And that is what makes the gospel of Christ so sweet. Because it extends grace and hope and mercy where none should be found. And it will be there for you. I pray you experience the soul crushing weight of guilt so you may someday experience true repentance and true forgiveness from God, which you need far more than forgiveness from me -- though I extend that to you as well.[324]

This is not an easy task, because it means having a confidence in God and arguably, a confidence that the perpetrator will seek genuine repentance. Forgiveness becomes an act of faith and trust, and the hope is that God will offer the abused some justice. In this, there is positive psychological forgiveness if the abused feels an inner desire for the perpetrator's healing as an extension of giving them grace.[325] This is based on God's own mercy, and again, is putting faith in God that the forgiven will truly seek repentance. In the next and final chapter, we will discuss the benefits of extending grace but only "appropriate" grace.

Relational forgiveness is reconciliation, or the restoration of a relationship. However, this is often blindly thrust upon survivors: forgive, forget, and live in harmony with your abuser. In Mallory Wyckoff's doctoral research on the impact of sexual trauma on survivors', she cited the example of a woman disclosing that her husband was abusive, and being dismissed by a church elder, and told that she "has to make it work."[326] The survival of her marriage was a priority to the man she disclosed to, and not whether she was in harm's way. The culture of her church encouraged her to prioritize loving her abusive husband, as a means of moving forward.[327] In these circumstances, we look to scripture such as Luke 17:3 (rebuke the sinner and forgive, if he repents) and in particular 2 Corinthians 2:5-11, where Paul commands the Corinthians to forgive an excommunicated man. In this case, the excommunication was the catalyst for true repentance – the isolation, shame and guilt play a factor.

There is a proper definition of repentance in the New Testament that stresses the avoidance of performative or superficial repentance, particularly in the Gospel of Luke. In Luke 17:3, the word for "repents" is *μετανοέω* which comes from the Greek words "change" and "mind."[328] Another word seen in the Bible, as well as in both psychology and theology, is *μετάνοια* or "metanoia." The Greek means "changing one's mind," and in psychology it has been in use since the late 19th century to refer to a fundamental change in an individual's life.[329] Carl Gustav Jung, the founder of analytical psychology, used the term to describe an existential crisis, or an attempt of the psyche to heal itself from a conflict by making a dramatic change.[330] In the Bible, "repentance" is a change of the mind, a spiritual transformation moving towards a new life (generally, a new life in Christ). In psychology, metanoia is a process the mind undergoes to

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[324] Rachael Denhollander, "Rachael Denhollander's Full Victim Impact Statement about Larry Nassar," CNN (Cable News Network, January 30, 2018), https://www.cnn.com/2018/01/24/us/rachael-denhollander-full-statement/index.html.
[325] Tracy, "Sexual Abuse and Forgiveness," 222.
[326] Mallory Wyckoff, "The Impact of Sexual Trauma on Survivors' Theological Perception and Spiritual Formation," (PhD Project, Hazelip School of Theology, 2016) 34.
[327] Ibid.
[328] Tracy, "Sexual Abuse and Forgiveness," 224.
[329] Petruska Clarkson, *On Psychotherapy* (Chichester: John Wiley and Sons Ltd.., 1993) 57.
[330] Ibid, 56.

repair itself, to shift the balance to a newer and truer experience of the self. Relational forgiveness then, is not about encouraging the abused and abuser to create a relationship. Rather, it is about encouraging reconciliation between the self, and the self and God, for both parties.

The Crucifixion, Patriarchy, and Cheap Grace

The previous examples, such as the petition to forgive and be forgiven in the Lord's prayer, ask for an extraordinary gift. They ask that you gift someone your forgiveness. All of this is grounded in the core of Christian theology – your sins are forgiven, and so are your neighbours, all because of Jesus' experience on the cross. Jürgen Moltmann, author of *The Crucified God*, opens up his seminal work with the following: "The cross is not and cannot be loved."[331] How can this be, when Christians have written and sung songs that proclaim, "I love that old cross… I'll cherish the old rugged cross…Oh, that old rugged cross, so despised by the world, has a wondrous attraction for me"?[332] The cross, a paradoxical symbol of Christianity, represents the ugliness and desperation of humanity, and the perfect love of Christ, is a central symbol of salvation. It is both a triumphant monument[333] and the very place that Jesus cried, "my God, why have you forsaken me?"[334] The premise, while extreme, is quite simple: Jesus was put to death so that humanity may live eternally in God's Kingdom. On the cross, Jesus makes seven statements,[335] two stand out: one echoes the theme of forgiveness while another solidifies Jesus' achievement. The first statement is important to acknowledge as it is a theme of the ministry of Jesus and the impact he had on his followers. In Luke 23:34, he simply says, of the men executing him, "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing."

The second statement of importance comes from John 19:30: "When Jesus had received the wine, he said, "It is finished."[336] Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit." In an 1861 sermon, Charles Haddon Spurgeon tries to illustrate the significance of these words; it is the final act of wisdom from Jesus himself. He lived a virtuous life, was despised and rejected by many, knew grief and sorrow well, and died at the hands of those who hated him.[337] He is forsaken by both God[338] and man.[339]

For many survivors of trauma, this rings eerily familiar - that feeling of loneliness and abandonment, and receiving an unjust punishment for being innocent. Yet, when he proclaims *tetelestai,* it is an act of victory. For his death on the cross means Scripture has been fulfilled; all the promises and prophecies that came before Jesus were completed by him.[340] He has abolished

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[331] Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015) xix.
[332] George Bennard, *The Old Rugged Cross*, 1912.
[333] Col. 2:15.
[334] Matt. 27:46 and Mark 15:34; This is also a quote from Ps. 22:2.
[335] Luke 23:34, Luke 23:43, John 19:26-27, Matt. 27:46/Mark 15:34, John 19:28, John 19:30, and Luke 23:46.
[336] τετέλεσται or "*tetelestai.*"
[337] Charles Haddon Spurgeon, "It Is Finished!," The Spurgeon Center, December 1, 1861, https://www.spurgeon.org/resource-library/sermons/it-is-finished#flipbook/.
[338] Matt. 27:46 and Mark 15:34; it is also seen in Ps. 22.
[339] Mark 14:50 and Matt. 26:56.
[340] Spurgeon, "It Is Finished!"

the need for sacrifices in Jewish law, through his "perfect obedience."[341] His work on earth is finished. Spurgeon goes on to say, "But Christ the Creator, who finished creation, has perfected redemption. God can ask no more."[342] It is clear: through Him, we are redeemed. Our forgiveness is a given, if we are honest about our sins. In that, as Christians, we must rejoice. This is salvation!

However, Moltmann is correct in his statement that the cross cannot be loved. It is a symbol of life and death, victory and great loss, sorrow and joy. One can also compare that to the spirituality of a Christian – it is a dance between gratitude and humility. Moltmann deeply relates to the pain of Jesus on the cross – as a prisoner of war during World War II (WWII), he interacted with Jesus' final statements and felt understood for he saw his own pain reflected in the pain of Jesus.[343] From this bitter fruit, comes such a sweet reward for Christians.

As survivors of sexual violence read that passage, they reflect similarly. Here is the visceral pain of Christ, suffering at the hands of another. There may be a disconnect in the choice – Christ chose this path and victims do not, but the raw emotion in that encounter between Jesus and his cross is reflective of the trauma survivor's own pain.

The crucifixion of Jesus informs the Christian relationship with God, and in turn, informs the survivor's, or really any person's, relationship to Him. God is known through the world; the world is known as God's world, as revealed in scripture, and so, the visible body of God is His creation.[344] God's power, wisdom, and righteousness are reflected into the created world.[345] God's crucifixion is part of His desire to reveal Himself; God is revealed "in the contradiction and protest of Christ's passion to be against all that is exalted."[346] Moltmann goes on to say, "To know God means to endure God."[347] What he means by "endure God," is that we experience the same sorrow and pain and knowledge that Christ did on the cross. For a survivor, this is deeply reflected by their own experience. The experience of sexual violence is earth-shattering and it is something to "endure," and when it is over, it comes with a knowledge. It comes with the knowledge that not everything is good and the world is flawed. Yet, in life after trauma, there is often an impasse. While Christ will come back in glory and with encouragement, the survivor is at a stalemate. For now they have the knowledge that the world, for them, is no longer safe and yet, their world must go on. Yet, Moltmann argues that to know the God on the cross is a crucifying knowledge, that sets you free.[348] However, for the survivor, there is no freedom in pain but there is very much an identification with God's suffering.

There is something to be said about "enduring God," as a way of finding oneself within the Christian tradition. We see the sacraments as one way to get closer to God: baptism is a symbol of death and resurrection, while reconciliation is about coming closer to God by admitting fault and seeking forgiveness. "Enduring God" is not just about enduring the pain, but the hope, the resurrection, as well. As mentioned previously, the experience of abuse is often described as lonely or used as a catalyst for self-isolation. Identifying with Jesus is one way to

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[341] Ibid.
[342] Ibid.
[343] Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, ix.
[344] Ibid, 304.
[345] Ibid,
[346] Ibid, 306.
[347] Ibid.
[348] Ibid.

understand the pain one is going through. Crisp writes that identifying with Jesus in that moment, means to come face to face with his wounds, which put an end to his human flourishing.[349] The crucifixion ends, and the next chapter is the resurrection – a symbol of God's raising the Self, the experience of the Self being restored. If Jesus, wounded and bloodied, can rise again and embrace others, can the survivor not also?

When Moltmann writes of the crucifixion, he too is pointing out that the cross is the foundation of hope.[350] For after we have endured God, we end up in Communion with God. First, God takes you as you are – there is no hiding from Him. Jesus was the human experience of God and therefore, he has human fellowship with humankind. In Christ, you can become what you truly are.[351] Furthermore, there is no loneliness in God; the forsakenness that he experienced on the cross encompasses all the moments in which humans feel alone or forgotten.[352] Moltmann believes we must know ourselves in the context of the crucified God to understand what we truly are, for there is no hiding from God.[353]

Previously, it was mentioned that survivors struggle with trust and vulnerability after their traumatic experience. Yet, there is no vulnerability that they have not seen in Christ. What is more vulnerable than to be rejected, forsaken, weakened, and to die publicly? There is an understanding in that experience, that as open and wounded as Christ was, literally and figuratively, that is reflected in our own wounding. The powerful thing about the cross is that it represents the paradox of life and death; in that very moment, Christ accepted the wholeness and reality of life and the wholeness and reality of death.[354] We are taken up into the death and resurrection of God, the life and suffering of God, and in faith, participate corporeally in the fullness of God – "the grief of the Father, the love of the Son and the drive of the Spirit."[355] There is nothing that the survivor can do to be excluded from that situation, when faith is present. Yet, the problem lies in the tension between our personal pain and the sin of the other. So, there is a healing in witnessing and embracing God's suffering and resurrection, but the very human reality is that when we look outside ourselves, there is more to work through. Namely, the work in the relationship within the self, and the one with perpetrator, or perception of the perpetrator.

Volf, a student of Moltmann's, briefly discusses the theology of the cross in his book, *Exclusion and Embrace.* He describes the tension as being pulled in different directions by the blood of God shed for the guilty, and the blood of the innocent shed while crying out to God.[356] Forgiveness is a gift, but how can we extend that gift for all when we are also loyal to the idea of justice for the oppressed?[357] Furthermore, faith is almost at odds with itself – for God is the one who abandoned the crucified but also the one who delivered.[358] Yet, the Trinitarian doctrine

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[349] Crisp, "Beyond Crucifixion," 69.
[350] This is more intensely explored in Moltmann's *Theology of Hope.*
[351] Moltmann, *The Crucified God,* 414.
[352] Ibid.
[353] Ibid, 414-415.
[354] Ibid, 415.
[355] Ibid.
[356] Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1996) 9.
[357] Ibid.
[358] Ibid.

(Israel's one God understood in Christianity to be revealed as three distinct persons –Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) is a representation of all of this. It is how God extends His divine grace and mercy, and how we understand and participate in that communion. It is an act of "divine solidarity." God has suffered alongside victims, protected them, and even restored their stolen rights –should we not do the same?[359] Volf reframes this when looking at the perpetrator: God does not abandon those who sin willfully; instead he gives himself to them so that they may receive that communion, through atonement.[360]

To Volf and Moltmann, the cross is a representation of God as a co-sufferer. This idea of the cross representing the oppressed is strongly rooted in liberation theology. Martin Luther, though not a liberation theologian himself, coined the term *theologia crucis*[361] and advocated for a liberated humanity: "A Christian man is the most free lord of all, and subject to none."[362] *Theologia crucis* was further developed by Moltmann, who said a theology of the cross understands God as a suffering God, whose being "is in suffering, the suffering is in God's being itself, because God is love."[363] From this idea, comes the political theology marked by solidarity with the oppressed, based on a shared faith in a God who participates in all the suffering of His creatures.[364]

Yet, it is important to acknowledge that Christianity, like most of the world, is not immune to the influence of patriarchal oppression. In fact, this patriarchal oppression is part of the reason that "forgiveness" has become a response to sexual abuse. Mary Hunt, an American feminist theologian, encourages a deep "suspicion" of theology. She maintains that mainstream theology is often presented as one, male truth and the ethics of it encourage oppressed people to turn the other cheek and turn their struggle into a theological project.[365] This is part of the reason liberation theology came to be; it came to challenge the idea of theology as theory and to put it into practise, and a practise that is informed by a thorough analysis of both the origins and modernity of theology.[366] A truth that comes out of feminist and liberation theology is the following: theology is *kyriarchal*,[367] and religious components themselves are shaped by power dynamics informed by this.[368] In other words, for the majority of the history of Christianity, men have had the biggest say in the structure of the church and interpretation of scripture. This is not to downplay the role of women in ancient times, but to acknowledge that the church standing

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[359] Ibid, 23
[360] Ibid.
[361] Literally "cross theology," or "theology of the cross."
[362] Martin Luther, "On the Freedom of a Christian," (Internet Modern History Sourcebook: Fordham University, https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/mod/luther-freedomchristian.asp).
[363] Moltmann, *The Crucified God,* 227.
[364] Harold Wells, "Theology of the Cross: Luther and Liberationists," *Touchstone* 35, no. 2 (2017): http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=rfh&AN=ATLAiC9Y170613002958&site=eds-live, 52-53.
[365] Mary E. Hunt, "Feminist Theo-Politics: Religions and Power," *Feminist Theology* 9, no. 25 (September 25, 2000) https://doi.org/10.1177/096673500000002502, 11.
[366] Wells, "Theology of the Cross," 47.
[367] This term was coined by Elisabeth Schüsler-Fiorenza, a radical feminist theologian, in her 1992 book, *But She Said: Feminist Practices of Biblical Interpretation*. It comes from the Greek *kyrios* (lord, master) and *archō* (to rule).
[368] Hunt, "Feminist Theo-Politics," 12.

today favours the contributions and words of men. A significant example would be found in church leadership; a major denomination such as Roman Catholicism has never had a female pope, or even a female priest,[369] and the Church of England has never had a female Bishop of Canterbury. This means that it is very easy for a church to participate in structural injustice, which we often will see in the treatment of female survivors of sexual violence. Aruna Gnanadason writes that the Bible, in its special place of privilege in the church, has often been used to legitimize violence against women and even teach women submission and resignation.[370] This reduces what help is available to women, especially those dealing with sexual violence.

It is also important to assert why sexual violence is a sin, especially in the context of feminist critiques of patriarchy in Christianity. Fortune writes that sexual violence is the physical, psychological, and spiritual violation of a person by another.[371] This violation, she believes, "shatters any possibility of a right relationship between the victim and abuser."[372] It is not natural, not part of the created order, and "not ordained by God as inevitable."[373] Ruether approaches it from the perspective of alienation as the starting point of sin. According to her, there are three dimensions. First, there is an interpersonal dimension, which is the distortion of relationships via domination as a violent act.[374] Secondly, there is a social-historical dimension, which acknowledges that some people are given more power in situations which they can use to dominate and violate the other – specifically, we are talking about men and women in Western countries.[375] Thirdly, we have the ideological-cultural dimension which is how the church, educational systems, and media help maintain the status quo by protecting those power and silencing the oppressed.[376] In the context of Christianity, sin can be anything that alienates you from God. For Fortune and Ruether, this is done when the "body of Christ," or the "church" participates in an act of violence or propagates certain forms of violence. Ruether argues that alienation as a sin does not begin with alienation from God, but rather, alienation from each other.[377]

However, I would use the perspective that because humanity is considered the body of Christ, alienation from one another is equivalent to alienation from God. 1 John 4:20 states it: "Those who say, "I love God," and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars; for those who do not

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[369] It should be noted that there are unofficial offshoots of Roman Catholicism that do ordain women. For example, there is the "Roman Catholic Womenpriests" which ordains female priests. However, the Vatican automatically excommunicates a woman that seeks a sacred order and anyone who confers that sacred order.

[370] Aruna Gnanadason, "'We Have Spoken So Long O God: When Will We Be Heard?' Theological Reflections on Overcoming Violence against Women," *Theology & Sexuality* 13, no. 1 (2006) https://doi.org/10.1177/1355835806069782, 10.

[371] Marie Marshall Fortune, "Violence, Sexual," in *Dictionary of Feminist Theologies*, ed. Letty M. Russell and Jeanette Shannon Clarkson (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996) 310.

[372] Ibid.

[373] Ibid, 311.

[374] Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Introducing Redemption in Christian Feminism* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press Ltd., 1998) 70.

[375] Ibid, 73-74.

[376] Ibid, 74.

[377] Ibid, 70.

love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen."[378] This makes the patriarchal influence over the treatment of women particularly concerning. It even influences how the cross is viewed; to some women, it is representative of sacrifice and suffering – the very sacrifice and suffering that the church invites them to.[379] While men are encouraged to be Christ-like by being the "head" of their households and their religious communities, women are called to be Christ-like by sacrificing as Christ did, and to emulate His submission.[380] This is not to say that men are never called to submit, as they are in fact called to submit to the Lord,[381] but that there is an emphasis on female submission. In many ways, this manifests in women silently standing on the sidelines, being marginalized or even excluded. When women become victims of violence, they hear variations of "Christ suffered for you, can you not suffer for Him?"[382] In fact, this is presented in Luke 6:35-36: "But love your enemies…Your reward will be great…Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful." Unfortunately, this can be interpreted as an institution that glorifies unmerited suffering as redemptive. It takes reframing: Jesus did not just die for humankind, Jesus also lived for humankind.

Discussions of forgiving your abuser also bring up the controversial Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and his idea of "cheap grace." The truth is that many instances of "forgiving" are asking survivors to practise cheap grace, or to give mercy. If the perpetrator is a Christian having conversations with another Christian, there is sure to be talk of repentance and seeking absolution in the hope of receiving grace. Even seeking out help in sorting the manner is an act of seeking repentance. Yet, when a survivor is left to deal with her pain alone, she is asked to practise a radical forgiveness with or without an apology or atonement. In this case, it is cheap grace because it does not ask the perpetrator to put in the hard work of being a Christ-follower; it is asking the survivor to do the work on her own. Simply put, cheap grace is preaching forgiveness without mandating repentance.[383]

Grace is a gift from God, emphasized through remembering the crucifixion; it is God's sanctuary, and the living Word of God.[384] It is the very incarnation of God and His mercy, and Christians are called to extend grace towards others, in the same manner God extended it towards them. We see grace in action in the sacrament of reconciliation, the idea being that sin separates humans from God and "reconciliation" is asking for grace to experience communion with the Lord again.[385] When we cheapen grace, it is because we hand it out without consideration of the cost. The cost is acknowledgment of Jesus' sacrifice, repentance, and baptism. The idea of cheap grace is that it is pre-paid, paid in advance by the blood of Jesus, and so everything can be had.[386] A church that, according to Bonhoeffer, has the "correct" approach to grace, is a church that

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[378] Full context can be found in 1 John 4:7-21.
[379] Gnanadason, "'We Have Spoken So Long O God," 14.
[380] Ibid.
[381] James 4:7.
[382] Gnanadason, "'We Have Spoken So Long O God," 14.
[383] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (London: SCM Press, 2015) 3.
[384] Ibid, 5.
[385] Catholic Church. "The Sacrament of Forgiveness" in the Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2nd ed. (*Vatican*: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2012).
[386] Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, 3.

plays a part in that grace.[387] To forgive someone who has not shown repentance, or tried to make reparations, is costly to them as well. It allows them to continue living in denial of God; it means their true self is not in communion with God. Cheap grace is "justification of sin without the justification of the sinner," and is expected to work on its own.[388] It contributes to an argument that many have with Christianity – can I do anything I want, and be forgiven for it? In a world of cheap grace, yes you can almost do it all. In a world of costly grace, you must face your sin and be yourself in the face of God. If someone forgives cheaply, the forgiven can be comforted in that grace, enjoy all the benefits of that grace, without paying the cost for God's grace.[389]

This is not to say that human forgiveness is the equivalent of God's grace, but that as a community of Christ-believers, as the very body of Christ, we must hold each other accountable and not encourage or participate in cheap grace.[390] Cheap grace is grace without the cross. God was an active participant in the cross and the toll paid by Jesus was more than costly. To understand that cost, is to have experienced God's grace but to truly know God, you must be in communion with God. To be in communion with God, is to come face to face with the truth that God knows you inside out, and so, you are called to be His body and represent Him rightly. Costly grace is, perhaps, best explained in the words of Bonhoeffer:

> Costly grace is the treasure hidden in the field; for the sake of it a man will gladly go and sell all that he has…Such grace is costly because it calls us to follow, and it is grace because it calls us to follow Jesus Christ. It is costly because it costs a man his life, and it is grace because it gives a man the only true life. It is costly because it condemns sin, and grace because it justifies the sinner.[391]

A survivor-led organization, called Into Account, released a statement aimed at Christian communities and asked for their feedback, and stirred up an unsettling discussion about autonomy and costly grace. The opening statement was, "We believe that no institution, family, or community is more important than our right to autonomy over our own bodies."[392] This was met with responses asserting that there were many more important things, such as God. Furthermore, as we are called to be Christ-like,[393] is not the most Christ-like thing submission, since Jesus himself did not exercise autonomy over his own body?[394] The responses were staking a claim of costly grace: to be Christian is to give up something like bodily autonomy if it is the will of God. In many instances, the sacrifice of Christ is considered an ethical model for Christians to follow. To emulate Christ is to practice *agape*,[395] a type of love that is charitable

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[387] Ibid.
[388] Ibid.
[389] Ibid, 4.
[390] Luke 17:3.
[391] Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, 4-5.
[392] Hilary Jerome Scarsella and Stephanie Krehbiel, "Sexual Violence: Christian Theological Legacies and Responsibilities," *Religion Compass* 13, no. 9 (2019), https://doi.org/10.1111/rec3.12337, 1.
[393] For example, 1 John 2:6.
[394] Scarsella and Krehbiel, "Sexual Violence," 1.; Evidenced in Mark 14:36 and Luke 22:42; "…not my will but yours be done."
[395] From the Greek "ἀγάπη."

and self-giving. *Agape*, is a 'love of the other,' a giving type of love that cannot be returned by the other and further, a type of love that demands sacrifice.[396]

However, the notion of a sacrificial love can trigger feelings reminiscent of the trauma of sexual violence. It can be costly to have faith in Christ, but is bodily autonomy really an aspect of costly grace that makes one a better Christian? Matthew 16:24 and Mark 8:34 has Jesus telling his disciples explicitly to deny themselves if they wish to follow him. In discussions about the relationship between sexual violence and Christian theology, the suggestion that bodily autonomy is unnecessary is uncomfortable at best. It also makes the concept of grace seem more alienating than it ought to be, because for a survivor, the loss of bodily autonomy cuts deeper than for someone who has not lost their autonomy at the hands of another.

A disturbing trend noted by twentieth and twenty-first century feminists, is that women who experience forms of violence and seek help in their communities of faith, are regularly counselled to consider "their bodily and psychic injury a holy sacrifice in service of the abuser's eventual conversion, repentance, and salvation."[397] Since Christ died for that exact reason, it ought to be an honor to suffer in a similar circumstance. To cut ties or try to hold someone accountable can leave Christian women ostracized from the community and portrayed as unwilling to uphold Christian values, like reconciliation and forgiveness.[398] Jennifer Beste maintains that there are those who assume that God's grace is handed out unilaterally, and so with that grace, anyone can overcome difficulties on their own, evidenced in phrases like "God never gives you more than you can handle."[399] Statements like these, emphasizing sacrifice and handling things on your own, only minimize the trauma survivors have experienced and can erode a person's sense of self.[400] These beliefs also contribute to blaming victims for their reactions, or for their failure to move forward with their lives – it assumes that there is a level of control in the aftermath of trauma, which is not necessarily the truth for deep psychological wounds. Beste, a professor of theology at Saint John's University, describes these beliefs as ones that "anaesthetise Christians from confronting how vulnerable we are to interpersonal harm" and ultimately dismiss the importance of dependence on one another.[401]

Ultimately, it boils down to a stand off: there is an essential facet of Christianity (emulating Jesus' sacrifice) and there is what survivors have deemed essential for survival (bodily autonomy). Furthermore, emulating Jesus' sacrifice also means taking on other Christ-like behaviours, like forgiving others and being forgiven. How should one resolve the apparent tension?

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[396] J. Matthew Bonzo, *Indwelling the Forsaken Other: The Trinitarian Ethics of Jürgen Moltmann* (Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2009) 75-76. Again, this is another larger theological concept that deserves more space than this thesis can offer.
[397] Bonzo, *Indwelling the Forsaken Other*, 2.
[398] Ibid.
[399] Jennifer Beste, "Recovery from Sexual Violence and Socially Mediated Dimensions of God's Grace: Implications for Christian Communities," *Studies in Christian Ethics* 18, no. 2 (2005) https://doi.org/10.1177/0953946805054806, 95.
[400] Ibid.
[401] Ibid.

Miroslav Volf

When discussing issues of forgiveness, Volf is an important figure because of his ground-breaking publications.[402] Volf is a Croatian Protestant theologian, currently employed by Yale University as a professor and director of the Yale Center for Faith and Culture. He was a student of Moltmann, and even wrote a foreword to the 40th anniversary edition of *The Crucified God*. He experienced religious discrimination as the son of a Pentecostal minister in the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, was interrogated by members of the Yugoslavian Army while doing his compulsory military service,[403] and witnessed ethnic cleansing, among other forms of violence such as the burning down of church buildings, during the Yugoslav wars.[404] All of these experiences cumulated in the book that would establish Volf as a significant theological voice: *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation*.

The basis *for Exclusion and Embrace* comes from an encounter with Moltmann himself. Volf is asked if he could embrace a četnik. *Četnik* in this context refers to Serbian nationalists who were committing acts of violence in modern-day Croatia. In a seminar led by Moltmann, Volf argues that Christ embraces humankind despite their sin, and that humans must work to be Christ-like. Moltmann countered by asking if Volf himself could be Christ-like and embrace someone sowing seeds of violence?[405] This book would go on to win the prestigious Grawemeyer Award in 2002, and be named one of the 100 most influential religious books of the twentieth century by *Christianity Today.*

The book is an attempt to demystify the relationship between God forgiving sinners and people forgiving each other; Volf presents a theological framework of "embracing" one another while treating "exclusion" as a sin. Much of the book discusses the politics of difference. However, for the purposes of this thesis, Volf's work is being used in a general sense. His framework is being applied to the specific situation of the relationship between the victim (the self) and the rapist. Much like Moltmann, Volf advocates for putting the cross at the center of all human relationships. He writes, "Just as the oppressed must be liberated from the suffering caused by oppression, so the oppressors must be liberated from the injustice committed through oppression."[406] In terms of the cross, he is speaking of how God came to live as human, suffer as a human, and die as a human in the person of Jesus Christ. This is, again, that divine solidarity that Moltmann originally wrote of – God suffers with victims, protects them, and offers them reconciliation in His kingdom, where they are free from earthly oppression.[407] However, God is also divinely self-giving – God does not abandon those classed as evil, but offers himself up for them to seek atonement and be received into divine communion.[408] Volf states what many

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[402] Most notable are *The End of Memory* and *Exclusion and Embrace.*
[403] Miroslav Volf, *The End of Memory: Remembering Rightly in a Violent World* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2006) 3-4.
[404] Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace,* 9.
[405] Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace,* 9.
[406] Ibid, 23.
[407] Ibid.
[408] Ibid.

survivors of sexual abuse have heard before: if God can forgive, then so should we.[409] For God "died for the ungodly," and the overwhelming theme of the cross is self-giving love.[410]

Volf uses Moltmann's theology of the cross to further his theology of embrace. The introductory chapter of *Exclusion and Embrace* is aptly titled "The Cross, The Self, and The Other." Volf's inherently liberationist framework is exhibited as such – liberation from oppression is the goal, yet Christianity partakes in the act of "othering" non-Christians, which causes various forms of violence.[411] This can be shown in Volf's discussion of the *četnik* in Yugoslavia. He shares the example of seeing a *četnik* operating a tank and crossing himself simultaneously.[412] The act of crossing himself is a sign of faith, but also superiority – for the Protestants, which includes Volf and his family, do not cross themselves and Catholics distinguish themselves by crossing themselves in a different matter. The context was significant – it was an act of faith, during an act of violence. It is an act of othering, in something that ought to be communal (faith and religion). Both Protestants and Catholics feel "othered" and in Yugoslavia, both Serbians and Croatians felt that otherness in their identities. What Volf sees is that a standard liberationist framework, the idea that the oppressed must be liberated, cannot work in a system where everyone feels like a victim.[413]

Volf's book is filled with his theological reflections on identity, forgiveness, and the cross. Ultimately, what Volf is saying is that to exclude someone for their sin is not Christ-like, and we must instead embrace them so that they can know Christ like others do. When we approach the situation as "us vs. them," or label others as "evil" and unworthy of our attention, we are practicing exclusion.[414] Volf writes that we must move from exclusion to embrace, as God receives hostile humanity into divine communion, so should we seek communion amongst ourselves.[415] Embracing is meant to be a dimension of divine justice wherein grace is extended towards the sinner.[416] Volf calls grace a type of profound "injustice" about God – God has a higher understanding of justice, and our relationship with Him cannot be defined through the abstract principles of justice, and so the concept of justice must be rethought.[417] For people, Volf warns that wanting nothing but justice, which we calculate through our own lens of pain, will eventually lead to us finding injustice; if we want justice without injustice, then we want love.[418] Therefore, we embrace as God has embraced us. One example is the Eucharist. In the Eucharist, all are held in that embrace, and all are forgiven in that embrace and become "brother" and "sister."[419] Even Paul, the former Saul who persecuted Christians, is embraced as a Christian and

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[409] Ibid.
[410] Ibid, 24.
[411] Miroslav Volf and Thomas R. Yoder Neufeld, "Conversations with Miroslav Volf on His Book Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation (1996) Part 1." (*The Conrad Grebel Review* 18, no. 3, Fall 2000), 71-2.
[412] Krista Tippet. Interview with Miroslav Volf. *On Being with Krista Tippet*, On Being Studios, August 4, 2005.
[413] Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 18.
[414] Ibid, 100.
[415] Ibid.
[416] Ibid, 220.
[417] Ibid, 221.
[418] Ibid, 223.
[419] Ibid, 130.

not a persecutor. Paul is the ultimate "brother" in Christ, steeped in God's forgiveness, benefitting for Christ's sacrifice, and embracing those who carried out the crucifixion.

On forgiveness, Volf writes of the emotional turmoil it causes in people, such as feelings of anger and revenge. The sense of justice, born of these emotions, twists the message: the perpetrator deserves unforgiveness, and to forgive would be unjust![420] This is especially true in the face of an unrepentant perpetrator. The victim and the perpetrator end up stuck in a cycle of "mutual exclusion" where they are unable to forgive or repent and unite in "a perverse communion of mutual hate."[421] However, Volf proposes the opposite of wanting to forgive, as wanting to get revenge.[422] As previously noted, in cases of sexual violence, a thirst for revenge is a common experience. Yet, it is not about causing harm to the other – it is about re-establishing a sense of power in oneself, or to even get the perpetrator to understand the pain and turmoil they caused.[423]

Volf is attempting to use a broad stroke with his theory, but it is very difficult to apply in the case of the relationship between a rapist and his victim. There is a very real psychological aspect to the pain of a traumatic experience, which must be given space to offer real healing. To shut down and ignore emotional turmoil is to allow it to fester and grow, eventually spilling into all aspects of life.[424] Furthermore, victims rarely do get revenge – and the ones that do, regret it.[425] In these cases, Volf is saying that what one perceives as justice, another will perceive as revenge – this can be especially true in cases of disclosing for victims.[426] To be named a rapist can be viewed as an act of revenge, but to the victim it is the truth and it would feel just for others to know this truth.

Forgiveness is not a substitute for justice; rather, the two are complimentary efforts. Volf cites the Lord's prayer as an example of this, noting that when we say "forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors," we imply that we owe God something and other people owe us.[427] Therefore, what we owe and are owed can be established only through the concept of justice, meaning without justice there cannot be forgiveness and vice versa.[428] This is partially because nothing can be undone; restorative justice cannot be fully realized because the original offense will remain.[429] The pursuit of strict restorative justice only serves to deepen conflict and lead one astray, or as Volf says, "reinstate the compulsion to evil deeds."[430] When forgiveness is offered, there is opportunity for both parties. Every act of forgiveness is an act of justice, because it offers to forgo it's claims and offer a framework to properly pursue, and understand, justice.[431] Finally, when forgiveness does take place, it is "but an echo of the forgiveness granted by the

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[420] Ibid, 120.
[421] Ibid.
[422] Ibid.
[423] Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 189.
[424] Ibid, 34.
[425] Ibid, 189.
[426] Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace,* 121.
[427] Ibid, 122.
[428] Ibid.
[429] Ibid.
[430] Ibid.
[431] Ibid, 123.

just and loving God" and ultimately, that is the only forgiveness that matters because God is the only one who can really forgive or retain sins.[432]

Drawing on the work of Moltmann, Volf writes, "Just as the oppressed must be liberated from the suffering caused by oppression, so the oppressors must be liberated from the injustice committed through oppression."[433] Here, he is speaking of the cross and Christ's identity. Like Moltmann, he notes that God experienced the life of a human, and humanity feels God identifies with the human condition. The act of violence committed against Christ, crucifixion, means that God is identified with victims of violence and in turn, victims identify with God and believe they receive the rights they had been deprived of.[434] Identification with Christ's suffering is one thing, but we must also identify with Christ's forgiveness. For if Christ suffered alongside us, he suffered alongside all of us. If he forgave one sinner, he forgave all sinners, or at least the sinners that asked for forgiveness. We forgive because he forgave, so that we may be redeemed. However, humanity is imperfect and so even if we forgive, we can hold on to the memory. That memory shapes us and our identity.

First, Volf says there is no forgiveness without repentance.[435] Then, the forgiveness is given in the context of the cross. Jesus died for your sins, even if they happened thousands of years later, and this sin, this evil, is no exception.[436] The understanding of the cross and God's grace must be two-fold; the victim and the perpetrator must know it and embrace it. Then, both are embraced in Christ through an active faith life, such as participating in the Eucharist.[437] The final step of Volf's theology of embrace is the "non-theoretical act of non-remembering."[438] Now, does God forget? Paul writes, "…the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us."[439] Yet , as mentioned earlier, God does not forget because it would nullify the core belief that God is all-knowing.[440] However, for humans, if it is not worth remembering, we will not remember it – especially when the alternative to remembering, is God's grace. The glory of God's grace and reconciliation should triumph the pain and suffering in your earthly existence. It is where we stress the importance – our tragic past versus our non-tragic future, the paradise that awaits.

What is non-remembrance? It is the eschatological notion that we will be so rapt with God, who is nothing but Goodness and love, that we will not be able to remember sin.[441] Non-remembrance is a gift offered by God, to all. It is also a gift that we will share with others.[442] Volf notes four features of non-remembering: wrongdoers do not deserve it (instead of punishment), we do not give the gift of non-remembering because we must (we do it to imitate God and God's love), it presupposes that the suffering has forgiven and the wrongdoer has repented, and it can only be given irrevocably in God's kingdom (here and now, it is tentative at

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[432] Ibid, 125; Mark 2:7.
[433] Ibid., 23.
[434] Ibid.
[435] Volf*, Exclusion and Embrace*, 119.
[436] Ibid, 125.
[437] Ibid, 130-1.
[438] Ibid, 135.
[439] Rom. 8:18.
[440] Peterman and Schmutzer, *Between Pain & Grace,* 160.; Jeremiah 31:34.
[441] Volf, *The End of Memory*, 141.
[442] Ibid, 142.

best).[443] Memory is also a beautiful human function: it gives us a sense of identity[444] and grounds us into the world we actively participate in. To discuss "non-remembering" can be terrifying because memory is a component of identity; the reality of our identities not coming with us to God's kingdom is a consequence of God's gift that can be difficult to rationalize and accept. It is a consequence of God's gift of allowing us to transform in His kingdom and enjoy "reconciled relationships in a redeemed world."[445]

Volf writes: "Enveloped in God's glory we will redeem ourselves and our enemies by one final act…the grace of non-remembering."[446] It is not that we have forgotten. It is that we have made peace with our tragedy, and thus with our abusers, to enter paradise redeemed. We shed our burdens at the gate, so that they may not follow us and turn paradise into a hell. However, if we are living, if the Messiah hasn't come yet, we remember the suffering of others. Volf says that we must share that vision of non-remembering, we must wait for the day where it will not be important to remember suffering because there will be no fear that another Holocaust will occur.[447] We remember now so that we may later forget.

Boopalan and Volf: A Critique

Though Volf's work has merited much praise, theologian Sunder John Boopalan believes that Volf does not give enough attention to structural wrongs in society. That is, society has many ingrained prejudices built into every day activities and these "wrongs" in the form of racism, discrimination and prejudice are not past-tense.[448] Therefore, while Volf discusses embracing, Boopalan believes this cannot function when looking at institutional reinforcement of said wrongs. He believes Volf's "exclusion" cannot be moved past as long as the current structural and institutional conflicts remain. As previously established, issues of sexual violence often stem from institutional reinforcement of patriarchal ideology, kyriarchy, aspects of identity like gender, race and class, and community reactions like shame. In *Exclusion and Embrace*, Volf does try to acknowledge these issues. But is his effort adequate, or does his work not translate completely in the case of kyriarchy?

Boopalan writes from the perspective of someone with a background in American culture and Indian culture, therefore, he focuses on caste and race in his analogies. However, these can also be applied to gender in Western cultures as well. He writes that the structural wrongs which injure someone cannot be left in the past because they are not past tense; these structural wrongs occur every day in various forms, in "rituals of humiliation."[449]

To apply this idea of "rituals of humiliation" to sexual violence, an example would be the entire process occurring in a court room. While the ideal is "innocent until proven guilty," an unfortunate by-product of that is the public discussion of a survivor's traumatic encounter. The survivor may also face their abuser in court, with his own defense team, and be subjected to re-

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[443] Ibid, 142-143.
[444] Ibid, 147.
[445] Ibid.
[446] Volf*, Exclusion and Embrace*, 138.
[447] Ibid, 139.
[448] Sunder John Boopalan, *Memory, Grief, and Agency: A Political Theological Account of Wrongs and Rites* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), DOI 10.1007/978-3-319-58958-9, 114.
[449] Ibid.

traumatising encounters like aggressive questioning or even humiliation by someone defending the perpetrator. In ordinary encounters, responses that place blame on the victim or excuse the perpetrator are also rituals of humiliation that serve to make the victim feel small, unimportant, and mostly, ashamed. These structural wrongs that are active and daily are enacted in "ordinary" ways.[450] The double-edged sword of human agency is at play. First, there is freedom in our rhetoric and second, in this rhetoric, we find an enduring presence of oppression.[451] According to Boopalan, theological rhetoric speaks of justice, love, hope and betterment of society and yet, when it comes to addressing wrongs, he believes the rhetoric is "found wanting."[452] What Boopalan claims is simply stated: human agency is complicit in the recognition and continuation of wrongs, and one way to address this is through memory and grief; the grieving of remembered wrongs contributes to the development of positive agency.[453]

A theologian like Volf exhibits an uneasiness with the memory of wrongs. In his theology of embrace, Volf believes that by embracing the others, we must also let go of the memory of the wrongs of the other. Otherwise, "we are bound together in a relationship of non-reconciliation"[454] which is not the kingdom that God promises us.[455] This is exhibited in his eschatology – if we are all forgiven by God, then we will all end up in God's kingdom, and we cannot bring the memories of the wrongs with us to the kingdom or we will not be able to enjoy it.[456] Even more so, what is waiting for us will surely be better than anything we have experienced before: "I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us."[457] Volf is essentially saying that our "enemies" cannot remain our enemies in God's kingdom and the only way to do that, is to forget why they were labelled such in the first place. In fact, he presents it as two alternatives: either you enjoy heaven or you are stuck in the memory of horror.[458] Volf's eschatology means that the latter is not really an option: remembrance of violence and horror is not possible in the face of God's glory. As it says in Revelation, "mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away."[459] God's glory is so great that even in our stubbornness, we cannot take our pain with us.

One can see how this sounds troubling to survivors of sexual violence who are Christian. There is the painful, difficult, and perhaps impossible task of "forgetting" your traumatic experience or live with that traumatic memory forever. Even though the "forgetting" occurs in God's kingdom, it may feel impossible to imagine. For survivors dealing with something like PTSD, which is a mental illness that demands daily attention, a life suddenly without their symptoms or their memories, is difficult to imagine. Volf does not say you must forget in this life, but he does say that the core of the Christian faith is loving others – even when they are

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[450] Ibid.
[451] Ibid.
[452] Ibid.
[453] Ibid, 115.
[454] Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 133.
[455] Col. 1:19-20.
[456] Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 135.
[457] Rom 8:18.
[458] Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 135.
[459] Rev. 21:4; Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 136.

perceived as wrongdoers.[460] He writes, that in our journey towards Christ we must also make room for the journey of the other, and while he does not say to "forget" wrongs, he encourages the coming together of the wrongdoer and the wronged, in pursuit of the grand vision God has promised.[461]

Boopalan argues that the remembrance of wrongs is crucial. As previously discussed, much of Volf's theology is based around the fear that the oppressed can become the oppressors through feelings of vengeance and anger. However, as noted earlier, Herman has shown these are healthy and normal human expressions of vulnerability, and the oppressed does not always become the oppressor. Boopalan also believes this, especially in the context of social status factors like gender and race.[462]

Volf believes that the opposition to non-remembrance of wrongs stems from two factors: 1) "the blood from the perpetrator's hands" is washed away; and, 2) "if memories of wrongs are erased, future perpetrators are offered immunity."[463] The first issue Boopalan takes with Volf, is that Volf writes of structural wrongs as if they were past tense; Volf says "justice is impotent in the face of past injustice."[464] Yet Boopalan is clear in asserting that past injustice is an oxymoron when it relates to structural violence or rituals of humiliation.[465] An example in regards to sexual violence would be the overwhelming number of women who are assaulted on more than one occasion. There is evidence to suggest that sexual abuse in childhood or adolescence is linked to patterns of victimizations during adulthood. One study found that women raped before the age of 18 were twice as likely to be raped as adults.[466] There are other risk factors for women that increase the likelihood of being raped such as being young and/or living in poverty.[467] The World Health Organization cites the most common form of sexual violence, and the biggest risk factor, is cohabitating with a partner or being married; this risk increases with education and economic empowerment.[468]

One can argue that while these patterns continue to exist, the injustice of sexual violence is not a thing of the past. Furthermore, looking at it individually, the risk factors also show that sexual violence is an active fear in the lives of many women. Using Boopalan's logic, women caught in a cycle of domestic violence and poverty, for example, are still facing an injustice even if they are not actively experiencing sexual violence – the likelihood that they will is a fear they have to live with. For victims of sexual violence, Volf's logic is flawed because of the prevalent sexual violence in the world around them. One can also link this to trauma triggers and traumatic memories – how can one forget this wrong, when it is so present in society?

Boopalan also argues that, even if these "structural wrongs"[469] are no longer present, Volf's theory does not factor in the effects of discriminatory logic such as the creation of violent identities, how discriminatory logics inform frame of mind and habits, and the very manner in

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[460] Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 85.
[461] Ibid, 231.
[462] Boopalan, *Memory, Grief, and Agency*, 114.
[463] Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 234; Boopalan, *Memory, Grief, and Agency*, 124.
[464] Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 224.
[465] Boopalan, *Memory, Grief, and Agency*, 124.
[466] Jewkes, Sen, and Garcia-Moreno, "Sexual Violence," 158.
[467] Ibid, 157.
[468] Ibid, 157-158.
[469] Boopalan is specifically discussing issues of racism in Western culture.

which these "structural wrongs hide behind seemingly ordinary actions and dispositions."[470] To acknowledge this would show that structural wrongs endure, despite efforts of reconciliation and forgiveness; it underestimates the extent of the damage that these injustices have on the human spirit and imagination in both overt and covert ways.[471] If we follow Volf's suggestion, which is that alongside the creation of "all things new,"[472] we pursue a theology of embracing via non-remembering, Boopalan predicts the following: wrongs are understood but continue to be enacted because they are "socially conditioned corporeal habits." Perpetrators remain stuck in a cycle of violence and inherit/pass on violent identities, victims do not feel safe from structural wrongs, and wounds grow and form.[473] To conclude, Volf's theory holds much merit but the reality is that as long as structural injustices persist, living side by side, moving towards non-remembering in our lifetime, is a difficulty that unfairly rests on the shoulders of the oppressed.

Two things are clear: healing from trauma is far from easy, and the same can be said about forgiving perpetrators of sexual violence. Despite that, there is a wealth of resources that can be found in the imperfect forms of forgiveness suggested above. There is a value in the Christian concept of forgiveness. Scholars like Moltmann, Volf, and Boopalan have dedicated their lives to unravelling the mystery of a Christian life after tragedy, and though these suggestions are imperfect, these resources offer us a generous starting point for answering the question, can forgiveness truly heal survivors of sexual assault? This chapter has served to show the multitude of ways forgiveness is mentioned and enacted through the Bible and in Christian communities. Furthermore, this forgiveness can be distinguished into three categories, judicial, psychological, and relational, which deeply influence the relationship a survivor has with themselves, with God, and their own community. Through a discussion of Volf, Moltmann, and Boopalan, this chapter also highlighted the role of the cross in issues of relational interpretations, and the role of grace in the Christian faith. Forgiveness is a vital component of healing. The following chapter is a proposal for approaching forgiveness in a manner that is fulfilling, healing and pastoral, built off the imperfect suggestions throughout this chapter.

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[470] Boopalan, *Memory, Grief, and Agency*, 124-125.
[471] Ibid, 125.
[472] Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 131.
[473] Boopalan, *Memory, Grief, and Agency*, 126.

Chapter Four: Forgiveness as Healing

When we frame forgiveness as the mandatory direction to move past pain and the only way into Heaven, we ignore the nuances of being human. Forgiveness, when forced, is not forgiveness. It is not from the heart, and it is not what is being asked. If we examine the Christian command to forgive, it is an act of grace. It is a reflection of the resurrection; it is about a new life and a new relationship. In the context of sexual violence survivors, if forgiveness is given freely as an act of grace and a genuine move of the heart, it breaths new life in the relationship with the self. It is restorative and resurrecting. It is transformative. Often, forgiveness is seen as a way out for the perpetrator and this narrative harms those on the fence about forgiving. We can frame it as offering them a new life through atonement, or we can frame it as a new life within the self, and a new, resurrected relationship with Jesus. It can give hope to a repentant perpetrator, but it ought to give hope to the survivor. In conversations about forgiveness, we can approach it in a more sensitive manner when dealing with survivors.

The following chapter looks at the role of forgiveness in healing, and propositions for applying it through a harm-reduction lens. Harm reduction is a public health approach, designed to minimize negative consequences of behavior if they cannot be eliminated straight away.[474] This approach was originally used with drug users: an example would be a needle exchange program where used needles would be exchanged for clean needles by people suffering from substance issues with drugs like heroin. The idea is that, if you cannot make someone stop using, you can minimize other risks like the spread of HIV and Hepatitis C which occur through syringe sharing.[475] A less severe example would be using a nicotine patch to quite smoking, as opposed to quitting "cold turkey" or abruptly.

How can we apply this to sexual abuse recovery? The idea is that we cannot use a "cold turkey" method to force forgiveness from Christian sexual violence survivors, instead we ought to encourage a series of slow-growing modules of positive post-traumatic growth that promote, but do not force, a type of forgiveness in the context of a Christian faith. It is important to concern ourselves with the spirituality of the survivor, when discussing moving forward. The Christian survivor can work through a gradual module of forgiveness that also encourages a restorative and healing relationship with the self and God. The end goal is not necessarily forgiveness of the perpetrator, but forgiveness and understanding with the self, and a more nuanced approach towards the perpetrator.

The majority of resources for people with PTSD will state that healing occurs in stages. For example, Herman proposes five stages: a healing relationship (whether with a therapist or trusted friend), re-establishing safety, remembrance and mourning, reconnection, and commonality (the restoration of social bonds).[476] Another proposal is the four stage healing plan of Claire Burke Draucker et al., for childhood sexual abuse, which also includes "five domains of function and six enabling factors that facilitate movement from one stage to the next."[477]

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[474] "What Is Harm Reduction?," Harm Reduction International, https://www.hri.global/what-is-harm-reduction.
[475] Ibid.
[476] Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, vii-viii.
[477] Claire Burke Draucker, Donna S. Martsolf, Cynthia Roller, Gregory Knapik, Ratchneewan Ross, and Andrea Warner Stidham, "Healing from Childhood Sexual Abuse: A Theoretical

These are: grappling with the meaning of childhood sexual abuse (CSA),[478] figuring out the meaning of CSA,[479] tackling the effects of CSA,[480] and laying claim to one's life.[481] Joan M. Schultz, psychologist and author of *Surviving Sexual Assault*, uses a common three-stage approach in her practise: reaction, recoil, and reorganization.[482]

In this thesis, the suggestion for the theoretical approach is on healing through the context of relationships: with the self, the community at large, and with God.[483] The self experiences a slow recovery in empowerment, safety, remembrance, truth-telling and mourning. These experiences, like truth-telling, bleed into the relationships with others and lead to additional positive post-traumatic growth like new relationships. Finally, the relationship to God is strengthened by a stronger appreciation of the self and the community, but ultimately is restored in the concept of divine solidarity, or the idea that God suffered alongside you. All of this serves to reframe the experience. While a traumatic experience feels all-encompassing and isolating, the reality is that, barring certain circumstances (such as ongoing abuse), this event ought to be the isolated one. Forgiveness has a role to play in all of this, as it is a cornerstone of strengthening relationships and re-establishing safety. The very nature of forgiveness is pivotal to recovery, but it is not always just forgiveness of the perpetrator. Forgiveness has the power to transform the three relationships most significant to us: the one with the self, the community, and God. Throughout this chapter, the emphasis is on transformation in our relationships, through forgiveness.

Metanoia: Truth and Remembrance

La Calunni, or *The Calumny of Appeles,* by Sandro Botticelli depicts two figures of interest: Truth and Repentance, or what we earlier noted as *Metanoia*.[484] Truth stands naked and unashamed, boldly pointing towards Heaven with his golden locks floating gracefully behind him. Repentance is hunched over, glancing at Truth, and shrouded in black like a woman in mourning. Truth and Repentance often keep company. We see *Metanoia* again, this time in the 1541 painting *Opportunity and Remorse* by Girolamo da Carpi.[485] Remorse is personified similarly, her head covered and turned towards *Kairos*, or Opportunity, while her body points away, and her eyes downcast. To her right, Opportunity gracefully balances on a gold ball, with the same flowing locks as Truth. What we see is that for centuries, *Metanoia* is personified as a

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Model, " *Journal of Child Sexual Abuse* 20, no. 4 (2011, doi:10.1080/10538712.2011.588188) 435.

[478] Ibid, 449.

[479] Ibid, 450.

[480] Ibid, 453.

[481] Ibid, 456.

[482] Joan M. Schultz, "Recovery and Healing After a Sexual Assault," Rape Victims Support Network, January 26, 2019, https://assaultcare.ca/healing.

[483] The following work also draws on my personal experiences of training as a counsellor, studying psychology in my undergraduate degree, and other sources, like my volunteer work at Concordia's Sexual Assault Resource Centre.

[484] Sandro Botticelli, *La Calunnia*, 1494-95, tempera on wood, 24 x 36 in. Uffizi, Florence.

[485] Girolamo da Carpi, *Opportunity and Remorse*, 1541, oil on canvas, Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister, Dresden.

veiled woman mourning, or a woman in shame, and she often accompanies Truth, or is found in moments of hesitation when Opportunity is around.[486] When we lean on the biblical understanding of *metanoia*, we see this reflected: in remorse, or repentance, we have opportunities for reflection, revelation, and growth.[487] In times of great psychological distress, we can find truth-telling as a form of reflection and revelation that ultimately leads to a great transformation. In the traumatized, owning your story is an act of empowerment and empowerment transforms your relationship with the self. Similarly, this is wished on sinners and perpetrators of crime, that they repent, understand, and transform. The dance between truth and transformation is centuries old, and is not just for the wounded.

In her theological reflection on violence against women, Gnanadason speaks of women becoming survivors, and not victims, and that silence is no longer their default reaction to violence.[488] Rather than struggling to live through a cycle of violence, feeling hopeless, women instead find resistance to violence and death in viewing Jesus Christ as a liberator: "Christ is working through, for and with women."[489] Gnanadason believes that for any healing or transformation can occur, remembering and truth-telling must be prioritized. This is particularly important in a culture that encourages an attitude of "forgive and forget." Women are told to move past painful experiences, to forget them and to forget the violence that women endure on the basis of their sex.[490] "The politics of forgetting" dominate the lives of women, which in turn denies them their dignity and the "right to a full and safe life."[491] Following Gnanadason's line of thinking, it can be a radical and courageous act to remember.

As Tinyiko Sam Maluleke, a South African theologian, puts it: "there *is* therapy in remembering and crying."[492] His paper, *Truth, National Unity and Reconciliation in South Africa*, is about the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) which was a court-like assembly focused on restorative justice after the end of apartheid. People who were considered victims of human rights violations, namely Black South Africans, were called to testify about their experiences and it brought up many questions about justice, forgiveness and reparations. Maluleke criticized the perspective that the TRC was just a forum for tears, that justice would not be served and the TRC would only serve to record stories.[493] Instead, he reframed the importance of sharing stories and remembering pain: to dismiss the importance of remembrance is to trivialize the issue at hand, when instead this remembrance can be used to inspire compassion and touch the conscience of the witnesses.[494] There is a wisdom to this: experiences are meant to be shared, even if they invoke pain in others. In fact, it is positive to share these

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[486] Kelly A. Myers, "Metanoia and the Transformation of Opportunity," *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 41, no. 1 (2011) https://doi.org/10.1080/02773945.2010.533146, 2.
[487] Ibid.
[488] Gnanadason, "'We Have Spoken So Long O God," 18.
[489] Ibid.
[490] Ibid.
[491] Ibid.
[492] Tinyiko Sam Maluleke, "Truth, National Unity and Reconciliation in South Africa: Aspects of the Emerging Agenda," *Missionalia* 25, no. 1 (1997) https://journals.co.za/content/mission/25/1/AJA02569507_864, 65.
[493] Ibid.
[494] Ibid, 64-65.

experiences if they are received because the gift of understanding can be restorative in many ways. So, we approach remembering, crying and grieving as acts of therapy.

Tracy also views forgiveness as a process, the first step being to clarify the offense (truth-telling) and the resultant negative emotions.[495] One cannot begin healing until they understand exactly what they need to heal from. One cannot forgive until they know exactly what they must forgive. For example, a victim of sexual abuse is not just needing to forgive for that abuse. They must also address the psychological harm they are experiencing, and extend forgiveness for that and other residual affects. This process is cognitive appraisal. It also helps one assess their own emotional needs from the overall experience of healing and forgiving. If the survivor does not address all that is weighing on them, they risk "trivial forgiveness," which can be unhealthy for the perpetrator and the survivor.[496] It is very easy for victims to downplay what happened to them, and often it is even encouraged. Tracy shared the story of a young woman who finally wrote a letter to her pastor, detailing the abuse she endured as a child. The pastor ripped the letter up in front of her, and told her she was guilty of the "sin" of unforgiveness; the young woman continued to be abused for several years after.[497] Survivors protect themselves from the severity of their trauma by behaviors like denial and dissociation.[498]

However, this can result in bitterness or buried trauma that comes back later in life. Clarifying the offensive and the aftermath are helpful for the survivor to "break the pattern of denial and misplaced blame."[499] Furthermore, if all is not addressed, we risk "excusing" the behavior rather than "forgiving" it.[500] Essentially, "forgiveness can only happen in the light of a careful moral judgment."[501]

> "Come now, let us argue it out,
> says the Lord:
> though your sins are like scarlet,
> they shall be like snow;
> though they are red like crimson,
> they shall become like wool."[502]

God is the model for this behavior of evaluating the sin and then forgiving it. Christians know God to be omnipresent, all-knowing, and infallible. God knows your sin before you do and God knows the aftermath. God's judicial forgiveness has a biblical basis: Psalm 32:1-5, Isaiah 1:18, Isaiah 40:27-28, Revelation 20:12.[503] These passages share the theme of God's all-encompassing judicial forgiveness – if you confess, He forgives.

Through telling our stories, truth becomes meaningful when told. Forgiveness is meaningful when truth is spoken. For Christians, it cannot be ignored that the church and community can absolutely serve as a barrier to truth-telling. Telling the truth can be seen as a

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[495] Tracy, "Sexual Abuse and Forgiveness," 225.
[496] Ibid.
[497] Ibid, 219.
[498] Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 34.
[499] Tracy, "Sexual Abuse and Forgiveness," 225.
[500] Ibid.
[501] Ibid.
[502] Isaiah 1:18.
[503] Tracy, "Sexual Abuse and Forgiveness," 225.

risk, especially when exposing something as deep and painful as sexual abuse. Survivors are all too aware that their truth may come with ramifications like judgment, shame, and perhaps worst of all, little or no requirements for perpetrators to be accountable.[504]

Though this thesis focuses on the individual process, it would be remiss not to note that churches can and should set a precedent on handling these situations. How pastoral leaders handle disclosures of sexual violence set the entire tone for how the community responds. If a leader forces reconciliation, they can alienate other survivors in the congregation. If a leader downplays the trauma, they do the same. This has to do with the trust that the survivor put in them, when disclosing – by disclosing their abuse, they identified the leader as a "safe" person and if the response is deemed unsupportive, it has negative consequences on trust in future relationships and future disclosures.[505] Alternatively, if they take a strong action like banning a perpetrator from church services, they can alienate other congregation members or be deemed "un-Christian" for an extreme response.

There is no doubt, however, that churches may feel stuck in these situations. On one hand, the survivor has a right to feel safe in her own church. On the other hand, even sexual predators are children of God who have a right to seek and participate in a spiritual community.[506] Women who are believed when they disclose a history of abuse, describe feeling peace and relief; being understood was a legitimizing experience.[507] This honesty is important as some women have reported feeling uneasy, like they are not being fully honest, by keeping these experiences secret.[508] There is a wealth of research and discussion on this topic, from organizations like the Church of England[509] to authors like Fr. Thomas Patrick Doyle[510] and Marie Marshall Fortune.

Truth is also important for the relationship one has with the self. To tell the truth about oneself is to address issues within the self. Trauma, for example, is recognized in truth-telling and can be addressed. It is a form of coming to terms with what happened for you, and can be used to tease out negative feelings like shame and guilt. To borrow a term from Rev. Dr. Kelly Brown Douglas, this can also be seen in "moral memory."[511] She writes, "to have a moral memory is to recognize the past we carry within us, the past we want to carry within us, and the past we need to make right."[512] It would be healthy to encourage perpetrators to pursue moral

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[504] Crisp, "Spirituality and Sexual Abuse," 308-309.
[505] Draucker et al., "Healing from Childhood Sexual Abuse," 452.
[506] 1 John 3:1.
[507] Durà-Vilà, Littlewood, and Leavey, "Integration of Sexual Trauma in a Religious Narrative," 33.
[508] Ibid.
[509] There are numerous publications by the Church of England such as *Responding Well to Those Who Been Sexually Abused* (2011) and *The Gospel, Sexual Abuse and the Church: A Theological Resource for the Local Church* (2016).
[510] Doyle is known for being one the first people in the Catholic Church to bring attention to sexual abuse by clergy. In 1985, he published a research paper entitled, "The Problem of Sexual Molestation by Roman Catholic Clergy: Meeting the Problem in a Comprehensive and Responsible Manner."
[511] Kelly Brown Douglas, *Stand Your Ground: Black Bodies and the Justice of God* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2015), 221.
[512] Ibid.

memory, to avoid repeating the heinous behavior that made them a perpetrator of sexual violence. This would challenge the cycle of violence, the relational ecosystem of sin and suffering, that Schmutzer mentions.[513]

However, if moral memory is not fully realized, the survivor has her moral memory to contend with. Brown writes that it is not about exonerating ourselves, but to take responsibility.[514] For a survivor, this means take responsibility for your healing and your growth. A moral memory would be to identify what brought them to that place, the wrongs inflicted on them, and contend with the subsequent emotions that harm – the shame, the guilt, and the pain of "unforgiveness" or "trivial forgiveness," whatever they pursued. She goes on to say that we can practice a "moral imagination," where one's life is not constrained by the pain and institutions that keep you ungrounded.[515] "A moral imagination is grounded in the absolute belief that the world can be better."[516] The emphasis here, on the word moral, is to emphasize a positive and fundamental belief that the world can be better, and should be better.[517] The truth has the opportunity to transform the self and your own worldview.

Volf would refer to Douglas' work as part of our moral obligation to remember truthfully: our memory is limited and so, our moral obligation is also limited.[518] However, every scrap of memory is useful in the pursuit of speaking truth. Volf does not use memory in the same way however. Instead, he is saying that speaking truth, which arguably may not be the full truth because of our limitedness, is not about naming wrongdoings and pointing fingers, but truthful memory is an act of love.[519] To make this more palpable to a survivor, I would focus on what he means by an act of love: "the highest aim" of truthful memory is to help bring about the repentance, forgiveness, and transformation of wrongdoers.[520] At the beginning stages of recovery, this is a tall order. I instead propose that remembering truthfully is about sharing the narrative in a manner that allows the victim to forgive herself. It also serves to speak one's truth before God.

Herman[521] refers to this truth-telling as telling your story, to transform a traumatic memory and integrate into one's life story.[522] The issue is that it makes the abuser a part of one's life story, however it is used as a tool of empowerment. If normal memories are like the action of telling a story, and traumatic memories are wordless and rely on imagery, then the act of telling the narrative is about translating trauma into an ordinary memory.

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[513] Peterman and Schmutzer, *Between Pain & Grace,* 37.
[514] Douglas, *Stand Your Ground*, 221.
[515] Ibid, 225.
[516] Ibid.
[517] Boopalan, *Memory, Grief, and Agency*, 206.
[518] Volf, *The End of Memory*, 52.
[519] Ibid, 64-65.
[520] Ibid, 65.; Volf also writes "reconciliation between wrongdoers and their victims" but that is a reference to God's kingdom and not necessarily the here and now.
[521] Please note that, in the context of recovery, Herman is almost exclusively talking about all of this occurring in a therapy setting. The therapist-patient relationship is a key component in what Herman believes constitutes recovery. However, I have adapted some of her material to focus explicitly on the theory.
[522] Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 175.

How could this be empowering? Firstly, it emphasizes the survivor's choice. By having the choice of re-entering the memory, as opposed to the lack of choice they had in their experience of sexual violence, the survivor is already empowering herself by choosing confrontation.[523] The story is first reconstructed using the truth, or facts; out of the fragmented traumatic memory, the survivor pulls out descriptive words, gets oriented in time, and established a context.[524] The goal is to translate that traumatic memory into words, though the first attempt may be under the affect of dissociation.[525] Furthermore, "the traumatic event challenges an ordinary person to become theologian, philosopher, and a jurist…the survivor is called upon to articulate the values and beliefs that she once held and that the trauma destroyed."[526] She must visit her past self, she must use her moral memory to construct her new perception of the past, and with recovery, her moral imagination will help her truly envision a life without the dark cloud of trauma.

Volf writes, that remembering "truthfully" is a key aspect of "remembering rightly."[527] As the therapeutic process is about reconstructing the event, overcoming it through narrative therapy, Herman does not address whether or not the memories are truthful or not. For Herman, her life's work is about stabilizing the victims of trauma, while Volf is writing objectively about memory, and noting that "memories are particularly vulnerable to distortion."[528] There is a temporal distance between the act and the memory, and what we do remember, we remember truthfully, and what we do not remember truthfully, we have imagined through embellishments and guesses.[529] Remembrance is a balance of truth and construction.[530]

It is clear that "step one" of the healing process is not the same across all disciplines and experiences, and "step one" can encompass many different approaches. I propose bundling it all together: remember (and mourn), tell the truth (share your story), and identify the aftermath (physically, mentally, spiritually). The concept of remembrance and mourning is particularly important, and is something that perhaps spans the entire process of healing, though it is also a starting point.

Herman has an entire chapter dedicated to safety, where she advocates for re-establishing safety as principle in the road to recovery.[531] Because the sexual violence has robbed the survivor of a sense of power and control, they feel unsafe in almost all contexts – including in their own bodies and in relation to other people.[532] The process is slow, starting by establishing control of the body and gradually moving outward towards the environment and community. In the next section, the topic of "divine solidarity" will be discussed as the role of God in the recovery process begins on an individual level first, then extends to a communal one. Therefore, God also plays a role in "establishing safety," though this will be discussed later. Though it is important to focus on the emotional and lengthy healing process, there is a physiological component to

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[523] Ibid.
[524] Ibid, 177.
[525] Ibid.
[526] Ibid, 178.
[527] Volf, *The End of Memory,* 44.
[528] Ibid, 45.
[529] Ibid, 48.
[530] Ibid, 49.
[531] Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 159.
[532] Ibid, 160.

address. Survivors seek immediate medical care for physical harm, then they look to restore their biological rhythms of sleeping and eating, and reducing hyperarousal and intrusive symptoms.[533] In some cases, medication is sought for things like anxiety and depression. Taking control of the body is one way to take control of the situation, and re-establish a relationship with the self. In re-establishing safety, important decisions are made to create a safe environment. The survivor must choose people she trusts to be around, decide what action to pursue against the abuser, and often, make sacrifices to prioritize her safety; an example of this would be a battered woman leaving her husband, their home, and their friends and family, to seek a fresh start.[534] The process of re-establishing safety can be long and arduous, but the hard work of processing the experience cannot begin otherwise.

Faith and Community

In Draucker et. al's theoretical model of healing, they found evidence of a dynamic spiritual process occurring in the third stage (tackling the effects of CSA).[535] Some expressed feeling a presence of a divine being accompanying them and sustaining them throughout their recovery.[536] Others felt an integral part of their healing came from a spiritual awakening.[537] Some even believe God provided them with their trials and tribulations as a means of making them stronger in the healing process.[538] So, where is God throughout the suffering and in the recovery?

The cross is the very center of the Christian faith and the role of the cross is impossible to ignore. In the process of feeling safe with herself and learning who she is in life-after-trauma, the survivor also examines her faith. Nothing is the same in the wake of trauma, and even a lifelong faith is called into question.[539] Many victims of violence, or really anyone who has experienced any negative experience, question why God would allow something like this to occur.[540] If God loves me so much, if God died for me, why do I have all this pain? There is another question to consider, one of equal importance: where was God, when I suffered? There are several Bible verses that put it plainly: "because it is the Lord your God who goes with you; he will not fail you or forsake you."[541] The answer is simple and yet difficult to digest. The Lord was with you; this knowledge can be used for comfort, empowerment, and recovery.[542]

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[533] Ibid, 161.
[534] Ibid, 172.
[535] Draucker et al., "Healing from Childhood Sexual Abuse," 453.
[536] Ibid, 455.
[537] Ibid.
[538] Ibid.
[539] Ibid, 452.
[540] Peterman and Schmutzer, *Between Pain & Grace,* 216.
[541] Deut. 31:6. Similar sentiments are shared in Josh. 1:9, Isa. 41:10, Zeph. 3:17, Matt. 28:20 and many more.
[542] Theodicy has been a sub-theme throughout the thesis. It needs to be discussed but I am unable to explore it in full due to the constraints of the parameters of a Master's thesis.

Dr. Hilary Jerome Scarsella writes, "the discipline of Christian theology is itself a response to trauma."[543] The traumatized look to Jesus and see a fellow survivor, a fellow victim of trauma. A Jesus that lived into his twilight years, died peacefully, and stayed buried, would elicit a very different type of theology. However, because Jesus was persecuted, was tortured, died, was buried, and then rose again, the theology that comes out of that understanding is a response, an investigation, of trauma; trauma is the very starting point of theology.[544] In this respect, the cross is the center of Christian theology. Readings of the Bible that highlight God as a co-sufferer serve to help survivors feel empowered and connected to their spirituality.

Not all survivors make the connection early on. When survivors experience symptoms of mental illness, like PTSD, it takes a toll on everything from relationships to spirituality – and it often leads to believing God is complicit in the betrayal they have experienced.[545] Some professionals do not even know how to handle faith when it comes to sexual abuse survivors, even fearing "Christian faith is a real hindrance to their healing."[546] This is because Christians who have been sexually abused report higher instances of feeling guilty and unworthy.[547] They feel as if God wants them to suffer, or that God does not love them or accept them as they are.[548] People abused by male figures even struggle with the idea of God as another male authority figure (God the Father,[549] Lord,[550] or King[551]) and cannot relate to Him or feel comforted by His authoritative role.[552] Others feel as if they have slipped through the cracks; if God protects His own, then they must not belong to God and so, they are to blame.[553] God is all-knowing, all-powerful, and yet, God chose not to save them. Experiences that are normal parts of a denominational church service might even be re-traumatizing, and yet, survivors feel they must continue participating. For example, Janet Fife shares the experience of a Christian woman who was a victim of incest:

> It's in church that I often find things hardest. The people leading the service are nearly all men, the priest tells us what to do and what not to do, and when it's my turn to take round the chalice at the Communion service I nearly die of fear every time...but I don't want to have to exclude myself from serving in church because that's really important to me...the whole thing gets to me sometimes… the having to put Jesus in your mouth at Communion…The thought of another man getting that close inside my mouth is horrible sometimes... sometimes I seem able to forget... but at other times I can't and when it's bad

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[543] Hilary Jerome Scarsella, "Trauma and Theology: Prospects and Limits in Light of the Cross," in *Trauma and Transcendence* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2018), 256.
[544] Ibid.
[545] Peterman and Schmutzer, *Between Pain & Grace,* 216.
[546] Janet Fife, "Sexual Abuse and the Spirituality of the Christian Survivor," *Contact* 130, no. 1 (1999): https://doi.org/10.1080/13520806.1999.11758876, 20.
[547] Ibid.
[548] Ibid.
[549] 1 Cor. 8:6.
[550] Ibid.
[551] Zech. 14:9.
[552] Fife, "Sexual Abuse and the Spirituality of the Christian Survivor," 20.
[553] Ibid, 21.

> it feels as if I'm being raped all over again but this time with the priest pushing that stiff Communion wafer into me…[554]

In cases of incest, or intimate partner violence, the abuse of love and trust become associated with those painful experiences and the idea of a God who we trust and love, a God who loves us,[555] is almost incomprehensible. Psychologically, it can become difficult to distinguish God from their abuser, especially if the abuser also was an authority figure.[556] Basic trust is the foundation of faith and relationships, and without that, a crisis of faith is possible.[557] A belief in a meaningful world came from positive relationships, built on that foundation of trust.[558] Now, the survivor is faced with a damaged self: they feel disconnected from themselves, from relationships, from community, and from God.[559] The very nature of God becomes distorted. Instead of God the loving Father, the survivor might know God as terrifying and demanding of dominating obedience. This becomes part of her inner belief system, and contributes to her lack of self worth.[560] She might even seek this in her church experience and is drawn to abusive churches or religious groups, with a dominating male at the head of the organization.[561]

The Christian survivor has a unique challenge in her recovery: she must reconcile the God of scripture, the God who loves and is worthy of worship, with the experience of sexual violence. She is living with a profound disconnect, that God somehow loves all but her, and somehow her trauma and the loving deity coexist.[562] However there are two basic considerations in Christianity, discussed in the previous chapter, that I believe are significant. First, God made humans in His image – that is, you are a reflection of God. Secondly, God has seen it all, God knows all, and God still made the choice to experience humanity through the life and death of Jesus. God knows what it means to be human and to be human is to be in a relationship with God.

Scarsella notes that some of the fundamental areas of humanness are interpersonal relation and human-divine relation.[563] The very notion of personhood is theological; the person is both a concept and a living reality.[564] Humans are not just relational beings, they are relation.[565] Identity is shaped by the relationships we have, from the basic trust-building we receive from our first caregiver to our first foray into romantic love, each relation we experience becomes an intricate part of identity. Humans are formed by the world around them, the society and the culture, and even more importantly, they are formed by God – without God, there are no

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[554] Ibid, 21-22.
[555] Ps. 36:7.
[556] Fife, "Sexual Abuse and the Spirituality of the Christian Survivor," 25; Peterman and Schmutzer, *Between Pain & Grace,* 217.
[557] Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 54.
[558] Ibid.
[559] Ibid, 54-55.
[560] Fife, "Sexual Abuse and the Spirituality of the Christian Survivor," 25.
[561] Ibid, 25-26.
[562] Peterman and Schmutzer, *Between Pain & Grace,* 217.
[563] Scarsella, "Trauma and Theology," 263.
[564] Ibid, 264.
[565] Ibid.

relations. Without God, there is no world. Serene Jones, a scholar who has extensively engaged with trauma theology, emphasises that humanity is accompanied by divinity.[566] God promises to be with and to remain with humanity,[567] and this is an essential part of the human condition.[568] How does this relate to the survivor? The survivor can take comfort in the idea of divine accompaniment, or divine solidarity. To be human is to never be alone in suffering, it is to be "persistently graced with divine presence."[569]

God's love is also a gift of possibility and opportunity. Womanist theologians speak of a divine gift to humanity, which is "making a way out of no way": God presents unforeseen possibilities, paired with human agency.[570] God assists the oppressed and the suffering by providing options "that are not wholly determined by the unjust or traumatic circumstances of either past or present."[571] This divine gift is what Jones calls grace. Grace is found in God's promise to stay by our side,[572] and His love and presence creates a world of possibility. God empowers us and though we may feel as if all is decimated and lost, grace offers a future, for abundant life to be cultivated in the wake of trauma.[573] Grace disrupts the disorderly nature of traumatic memories.[574] God's gift of possibility does not mean that all will be well, and orderly – but possibility is essential in the struggle for survival and well-being.[575]

Vulnerability is an integral part of personhood.[576] It is a consequence of humans having freedom and being relational creatures.[577] Without it, relation and freedom would be impossible: because we are vulnerable, we are free to create and bond and love. Vulnerability can be used for harm because, as a consequence of freedom, humans can impact each other in ways that harm. As noted in the section "Terror and the Self," trauma threatens and destabilizes the self. The self, unable to defend itself and overwhelmed and disorganized by the traumatic event, can even become fragmented.[578] This fragmentation comes in the form of dissociation, flashbacks and intrusions, and a lack of self-preservation.[579]

Fife notes that, when it comes to vulnerability, it helps for the survivor to think of God as vulnerable, choosing not to use His power during the crucifixion.[580] Schmutzer writes that God relates to His creation in willing vulnerability: by committing to a relationship with a rebellious creature like humankind, God experiences an inevitable pain.[581] While the Bible is divine

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[566] Serene Jones, *Trauma + Grace: Theology in a Ruptured World* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2019) 52.
[567] Josh. 1:9; Is. 41:10.
[568] Ibid.
[569] Scarsella, "Trauma and Theology," 266.
[570] Ibid, 269.
[571] Ibid, 269-279.
[572] Josh. 1:9; Is. 41:10.
[573] Jones, *Trauma + Grace*, 72.
[574] Ibid, 159.
[575] Scarsella, "Trauma and Theology," 270.
[576] Ibid, 271.
[577] Ibid.
[578] Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 34.
[579] Ibid, 35.
[580] Fife, "Sexual Abuse and the Spirituality of the Christian Survivor," 25.
[581] Peterman and Schmutzer, *Between Pain & Grace,* 62.

revelation, it does rely on narratives, poetry, and story to get it's point across; humans strongly rely on metaphors to communicate who and what God is, which can lead to interpreting God incorrectly (either too literal or not literally enough).[582] Classical theology often argues for the "impassibility" of God, which is to say that God cannot experience pain because God cannot experience anything external to Himself.[583] Placher writes that divine impassibility serves two functions: first, it rules out vulgar passions (no more vengeance) and it preserves divine power (impassibility guarantees omnipotence). [584] However Schmutzer would disagree as scripture reveals the opposite: God's love for humanity makes Him willingly involved in humanity, such as in the role of Jesus, and that makes Him vulnerable.[585] Schmutzer contends that while the metaphors about God's emotions are abundant, we can use that to affirm that God does indeed experience emotions and suffering because there is no passage in the Bible to suggest the opposite.[586] Therefore, our God suffers as well. God experiences vulnerability. Classical theology's aversion to a suffering God comes from a Greek understanding of God. God cannot be passive or affected by something else because God is self-sufficient, and vulnerability would imply a weakness in God.[587]

This thesis maintains that God does experience emotion, as evidence in the following scripture: God is slow to anger (Exodus 34:6), God is compassionate and merciful (James 5:11), and God restrains Himself but also cries out (Isaiah 42:14). Though God experiences a similar spectrum to human emotion, He is also unchanging.[588] In Genesis 6:5-6, we see evidence of God being willingly vulnerable: "The Lord saw that the wickedness of humankind was great in the earth…And the Lord was sorry that he had made humankind on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart." Furthermore, what could be more vulnerable than choosing to die in a public execution.[589] Survivors can see themselves in the grieving, suffering, vulnerable God. But how can survivors of horrific events make sense of God's loving presence?

The survivor must learn to trust God. Research has found that many believers' have an attachment to God, similar to the one they exhibit with their parents.[590] The love experienced between God and human is the same love that a parent and child share, and it is also a central component of the divine-human relation.[591] As they rely on their parents to protect them as children, Christians rely on God. God is a safe haven, and a secure connection to God is linked to

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[582] Ibid, 63.
[583] Ibid, 65.
[584] William Carl Placher, *Narratives of a Vulnerable God: Christ, Theology, and Scripture* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996) 5.
[585] Peterman and Schmutzer, *Between Pain & Grace,* 66. This is also a theme explored in Moltmann's *The Crucified God*.
[586] Ibid, 64.
[587] Ibid, 66-67.
[588] Heb. 13:8.
[589] Matt. 27:50.
[590] Pehr Granqvist, Mario Mikulincer, and Phillip R. Shaver, "Religion as Attachment: Normative Processes and Individual Differences," *Personality and Social Psychology Review* 14, no. 1 (2009): https://doi.org/10.1177/1088868309348618, 51
[591] Ibid.

greater confidence and greater comfort in stressful situations.[592] In a review of the literature around attachment and God, those who viewed religion, or service to God, as a "master motive" in life correlated it with: freedom from worry and guilt, and a sense of control and competence.[593] God is the wise and secure base, from a mental health perspective. The spiritual relationship with God is often linked to that expectation of God as protector so when sexual abuse occurs, this belief is negated and trust in God is lost.[594]

Another issue in trusting God, is that spirituality suffers from sexual abuse because it informs how survivors view God, and this in turn impacts how they view their faith and interact with their faith community. It can even impact whether or not they feel connected to their congregation, if they attend church regularly. In a study on sexual abuse and images of God, many participants expressed a need for their church community, but experienced doubt and discomfort when hearing sermons or hymns.[595] Christians hear the words of God through a personal filter, this is a fact of the human experience.[596] It stands to reason that the experience of sexual abuse also informs the experience of God. Sexual abuse is linked to a wavering relation to the congregation and a wavering relation to God.[597] As survivors begin to relate descriptions of God to their experience of sexual violence, they begin to feel different from their co-parishioners and feel that "the minister's words were not meant for them."[598] Despite their questioning, survivors report still feeling a need for validation from their parish.[599] Many expressed hope that other parishioners would offer them a form of security or support, but describe feeling unseen and unnoticed instead.[600] As they feel alienated from their church, they expressed an increase in loneliness and even feel abandoned by God.[601]

One way survivors remedy their distancing from God is by endeavoring to experience their faith anew. Discussions of faith can offer hope for a better life ahead, and is described as something that can carry the survivor, help them survive, and hope for the future.[602] Even though they spoke about feeling betrayed and abandoned by God, they still felt grateful to be able to turn to God and even long for Him.[603] There is a comfort in feeling like God wants your existence, and many survivors reported a yearning to find an ally in God – to believe that God walked

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[592] Peter C. Hill and Kenneth I. Pargament, "Advances in the Conceptualization and Measurement of Religion and Spirituality: Implications for Physical and Mental Health Research," *American Psychologist* 58, no. 1 (2003): https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066x.58.1.64, 7.

[593] Granqvist, Mikulincer, and Shaver, "Religion as Attachment," 52.

[594] Stacy Smith, "Exploring the Interaction of Trauma and Spirituality.," *Traumatology* 10, no. 4 (2004): https://doi.org/10.1177/153476560401000403, 223.

[595] Lisa Rudolfsson and Inga Tidefors, "I Have Cried to Him a Thousand Times, but It Makes No Difference: Sexual Abuse, Faith, and Images of God," *Mental Health, Religion & Culture* 17, no. 9 (2014): https://doi.org/10.1080/13674676.2014.950953, 913.

[596] Ibid.

[597] Ibid.

[598] Ibid, 913-914.

[599] Ibid, 913.

[600] Ibid, 914.

[601] Ibid, 916.

[602] Ibid, 917.

[603] Ibid.

through the hurt with them.[604] Though trust is shaken, it appears the original relationship with God, before sexual abuse, is salvageable. One survivor is quoted as saying that this was a shift for her "adult faith," that her view of God before trauma was naïve.[605] While the trust relationship is damaged, survivors still feel a sense of relation to God. The emphasis then, is on strengthening that bond which can be done in the survivor's external relationships.

When the survivor is healing herself and her relationship with God, she is also healing her community and relationships. Sexual violence breaks down the self and the ability to trust, which in turn effects the relationships the survivor sustains. When personhood is challenged, so are the relationships that person had:

> We are not individuals who need relation to maintain ourselves. We are relation organized in particular ways; without it we don't exist. There is, then, no separation between the disintegration of relation and the disintegration of personhood. When trauma undoes one's ability to sustain particular relations, it does not lead to the disintegration of the person; it quite literally is the disintegration of actual parts of that person.[606]

It is important to seek reconciliation in a communal setting, to form relationships again, and not be isolated in suffering. Schmutzer believes that religious communities can alienate survivors through "sacred silence" – faith communities will be selective about which issues they want to face.[607] Biblical passages about issues of rape and incest are rarely preached in a ministry setting.[608] In this way, the survivor feels isolated and frightened that their experience is too much for even the church to handle. This can be combatted by pastors "breaking the silence" before the survivor, rather than the survivor having to expose themselves by bringing sexual abuse up first.[609] Churches can only bring more people in when they become active in the healing process. Schmutzer brings up a second issue: the barrier of isolated suffering.[610] The survivor need not feel alone, if isolated suffering is instead replaced with collective grief.[611] "The wounded and the grieving mark the new society of God," which means we are judged by the quality of our love for one another – empathy for the other is a powerful expression of neighborly love.[612]

As survivors work on their psychological wellbeing, through processes like therapy or medication, they open up to the possibilities in these relations. They regain a capacity for "appropriate trust": they know when to offer trust, or trust in others, but they also learn when to withhold trust.[613] This is part of regaining the self, the survivor is becoming more autonomous and learning to make better decisions, especially in regards to boundaries and relations.[614] She has begun to take initiative in her life, and is steering towards a new identity. It may even feel

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[604] Ibid.
[605] Ibid, 918.
[606] Scarsella, "Trauma and Theology," 271.
[607] Peterman and Schmutzer, *Between Pain & Grace,* 229.
[608] Ibid.
[609] Ibid, 229-230.
[610] Ibid, 231.
[611] Ibid.
[612] Ibid; Matt. 22:39.
[613] Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 205.
[614] Ibid.

like a second adolescence.[615] She may feel awkward and self-conscious, navigating social boundaries with trauma-informed parameters. She grows stronger in this practice. Christian survivors who feel stronger in their sense of self, ought to tap into the strengths of the faith community.[616] As it reads in John 15:12: "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you." The love of God ought to be reflected in God's community as well. God's grace is mediated through acts of neighbor-love.[617] Furthermore, interpersonal support and love has been found essential for healing.[618] When survivors have supportive relations, they are able to construct a stronger sense of self, and even begin practicing effective agency.[619] As relational beings, we are dependent on one another; that is how God made us.[620]

Survivors relate to God the Father, when they view Him as the protector and parent.[621] Survivors relate to Jesus when they think of the trauma of crucifixion.[622] Survivors relate to an emotional, vulnerable God.[623] The belief of a God who walks alongside strengthens a relation to God, which in turn, strengthens things like self-confidence and personal strength. Finally, recovery is furthered by a community connection, as it fulfills a need to belong.[624] In order for the survivor to walk the path of recovery, to walk towards a new life of reconciliation, it is all a connected process: she must recover the self through the relations in her life, leaning on the love of God and the love of her neighbor.

Post-Traumatic Growth

Forgiveness becomes an asset in the realm of post-traumatic growth. In the mid-1990s, psychologists Richard Tedeschi and Lawrence Calhoun coined the term "post-traumatic growth," or PTG.[625] PTG is a theory that explains a transformation that follows trauma, which is a positive growth towards things like resiliency and a new understanding of the self.[626] Essentially, enduring psychological trauma can influence a positive growth in the aftermath. PTG has also been proposed under different names such as, benefit-finding, adversial growth, and thriving.[627] PTG in Christian survivors can be in seen in, at least, two distinct behaviours: seeking resolution

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[615] Ibid.
[616] Peterman and Schmutzer, *Between Pain & Grace*, 233.
[617] Beste, "Recovery from Sexual Violence," 92.
[618] Ibid, 95.
[619] Ibid.
[620] Rom. 12:5.
[621] Rudolfsson and Tidefors, "I Have Cried to Him a Thousand Times," 918.
[622] Scarsella, "Trauma and Theology," 275.
[623] Fife, "Sexual Abuse and the Spirituality of the Christian Survivor," 25.
[624] Rudolfsson and Tidefors, "I Have Cried to Him a Thousand Times," 919.
[625] Lorna Collier, "Growth After Trauma," *Monitor on Psychology*, (2016): https://www.apa.org/monitor/2016/11/growth-trauma
[626] Ibid.
[627] Jessica M. Schultz, Benjamin A. Tallman, and Elizabeth M. Altmaier, "Pathways to Posttraumatic Growth: The Contributions of Forgiveness and Importance of Religion and Spirituality," *Psychology of Religion and Spirituality* 2, no. 2 (2010): https://doi.org/10.1037/a0018454, 105.

through a form of forgiveness and using the experience of trauma to engage with the wider world.

The survivor reconciles with herself. She may come to a stage where she no longer feels "possessed" by her trauma; she is "in possession of herself."[628] She is becoming who she wants to be, re-creating an ideal self.[629] In this process, she begins to forgive herself for who she became out of trauma. Herman shares a few examples. She cites a CSA survivor who became "addicted" to intensity and adrenaline, in her recovery she learns to wean herself off adrenaline and experience contentment instead.[630] She cites Linda Lovelace, a woman forced into pornography by her abusive husband, who "forgives" the Linda who acted in porn – she felt that the abuse was the only alternative to dying, and so past-Linda had no choice.[631] Another survivor shares the experience of letting go of sadomasochism: she realized that her sexual behavior was a product of her abuse and not her own desires.[632] The survivor begins making sense of who she is without the influence of trauma. She pieces together an identity that honors who she really is.

The survivor also uses forgiveness of the self, to piece together an identity. Forgiveness cannot be hurried or orchestrated by external participants.[633] However, when it does occur, the survivor is "letting go" as a means to disarm the power the trauma had over her.[634] If she "forgives," she moves forward. It puts the experience of sexual violence into a new perspective.[635] As mentioned earlier, this is what Tracy calls psychological forgiveness: she has let go of hatred and revenge (negative aspect) and she has extended grace to the offender (positive).[636] In doing so, she commits the abuser to God and God's justice.[637] By extending grace, the survivor also guards herself by asserting boundaries and not allowing abusers the freedom to hurt her again.[638] It is also an acknowledgment of the humanness of the offender, and the relational nature of beings.[639] God's grace is instrumental in empowering the survivor to let go of the negativity and forgive, just as God's grace is instrumental in empowering the abuser to seek true repentance.

In the process of forgiveness, the survivor releases negative sentiments like anger, revenge, avoidance, to make room for positive or prosocial responses like empathy and benevolence.[640] It has to be stressed that forgiveness and letting go are not the same as excusing the behavior. Forgiveness names the offense, in order to be an honest expression, but it does not excuse it.[641] Volf writes that every act of forgiveness is not a substitute of justice, but it does call

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[628] Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 202.
[629] Ibid.
[630] Ibid, 203.
[631] Ibid, 203-204.
[632] Ibid, 203.
[633] Fortune, *Sexual Violence*, 209.
[634] Ibid.
[635] Ibid.
[636] Tracy, "Sexual Abuse and Forgiveness," 222.
[637] Ibid.
[638] Ibid, 223.
[639] Ibid, 210.
[640] Schultz, Tallman, and Altmaier, "Pathways to Posttraumatic Growth", 104.
[641] Ibid, 104-105.

attention to the issue and offers a framework for which justice can be pursued.[642] In regards to releasing negative sentiments like anger, Volf uses the example of the Psalmist. The Psalms have many examples of anger being communicated, such as "let your burning anger overtake them."[643] The Psalms that express curses on enemies, calamities, and invoke judgment on enemies are called "imprecatory Psalms."[644] The release of anger towards enemies, or those who have wronged you, is a form of prayer – rage belongs before God, not to be held within and left to fester and grow worse.[645] Expressing our negative sentiments to God is a step to offering forgiveness, because we get to come face to face with our loving and just God, while we empty our hearts of anger and vengeance.[646] Of course, whatever forgiveness humans can offer each other will always pale in comparison to the justice that God offers.[647] That is judicial forgiveness, left for God to deal with as only God can offer appropriate justice.[648] However, the practice of psychological forgiveness can open the door for the perpetrator to really seek that judicial forgiveness. But if they don't, the psychological forgiveness is still a source of strength for the survivor.

Finally, the survivor acknowledges her changes. She may be less angry though still aware she was a victim of injustice. She has a better sense of self, evidenced in the boundaries and how she practices trust. She has changed her relationship with God from one of naiveté, to a mature understanding of the relational attachment they share. She trusts God and leaves her enemies in His capable hands and mercy. She may not feel like the trauma is resolved, so she seeks something outside of herself. Herman notes that a significant minority feel called upon to engage in a wider world."[649] This is what Herman calls "finding a survivor mission. [650] To find meaning in their experience of trauma and to feel liberated from said trauma, they share their stories.[651]

Social action empowers the victim, as she steps outside the confines of her personal life. A mission encourages her to step outside of herself and use the resilience and strength she gained from her traumatic experiences. "The trauma is redeemed only when it becomes the source of a survivor mission."[652] Altruism becomes a coping strategy. It can bring out the best in a survivor, but it can also lead to reciprocal connections with others that can reaffirm her ability to sustain relationships.[653]

In the end, it cannot be denied that trauma leaves a lifelong scar. Yet, like all scars, it has the potential to be less and less visible over time. A survivor claims the title "survivor" and not victim, because surviving is an active verb. In order to fade the scar, the survivor must learn her new reality. She experiences symptoms like a constant fear (hyper-vigilance) or intrusive memories, but she can conquer them through owning her narrative and truth-telling. She feels

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[642] Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 123.
[643] Ps. 69:24.
[644] Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 123.
[645] Ibid, 124.
[646] Ibid.
[647] Ibid, 125.
[648] Tracy, "Sexual Abuse and Forgiveness," 225.
[649] Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 207.
[650] Ibid.
[651] Rudolfsson and Tidefors, "I Have Cried to Him a Thousand Times," 918.
[652] Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 207.
[653] Ibid, 208.

abandoned by God, but she can still turn to Him and in her new reality, sees the God that weeps with her and suffers alongside her. As she once again begins to trust God the Father, she meets His people again – in churches, in support groups, on her therapist's couch. She relearns trust – to hold and withhold it, to gift it. In all of this, she is covered in God's grace. With His grace, she pieces back together an identity she had once lost. When she sees a semblance of the self, she speaks forgiveness to that self. When she forgives herself, she might forgive the offender. In reality, she just hands him over to God and asks for His justice, not hers.

To conclude this chapter on healing and forgiveness, the main points will be reiterated. The recovery of a sexual violence survivor, the aftermath of a life shattered by a traumatic experience, does not follow a linear path. It is, however, a transformative path marked by a relation to all things. It starts with a narrative of truth, to begin piecing together a "self" in the aftermath. The self seeks to know truth, to speak truth, and to gain control of the narrative. It seeks to separate itself from the disordered intrusions of trauma. The survivor's identity begins to strengthen and grow as she furthers her understanding of God: when she views God as walking beside her, vulnerable like her, weeping like her, she begins to understand the relational nature of existence. This in turn extends to the faith community, which ought to respond in the neighborly love God encourages from His people. Through all this, she is experiencing post-traumatic growth, gathering the strength to "let go" of the perpetrator, to forgive him in the sense that she will leave him in the capable hands of God.

Conclusion

This thesis set out to answer whether the biblical concept of forgiveness relevant to today's survivors of sexual violence, and if so, how can we adequately use it? In the four chapters included here, this thesis became a journey through the Bible, various theologies, and psychological insights. This thesis relied heavily on the work of Judith Herman, an expert in the field of trauma psychology, and theologians like Miroslav Volf, who ponder the nature of evil and life in the aftermath. The conclusion is that the answer is not, and cannot be, black and white.

This thesis began by defining sexual violence as a broad term that included a spectrum of physical and/or psychological violence of a sexual nature. This evolved into defining sexual violence as a sin, because it is an interpersonal attack that distorts the very nature of relationship that God gifted us. A key theme was identified: God made us relational beings. The violation of another person is an insult to God's creation, for we were tasked to steward His creation, not violate it. This thesis also defined victim and survivor, favoring the use of survivor towards the end. In discussions of healing, survivor ended up being favoured because "surviving" is an active process, similar to healing.

Using the DSM-5 and Herman's *Trauma and Recovery,* this thesis extensively addressed the fallout of sexual abuse, as well as risk factors. This was done to express the full scope of sexual abuse, as it can be underestimated. For example, in 2015, Brock Allen Turner was convicted of sexually assaulting Chanel Miller while she was unconscious; his father argued that the sentencing "was a steep price to pay for 20 minutes of action."[654] In contrast, Chanel Miller gave a victim impact statement where she detailed how these "20 minutes" cost her: she cannot sleep alone at night without a light on, feared going out for walks by herself, and lives on the edge, having nightmares of being touched.[655] For any work on sexual violence to be adequate, it must document that the impact extends far beyond the moment it happens. There are physiological repercussions like adrenal fatigue, psychological repercussions like PTSD, and even spiritual repercussions, like a crisis of faith. This also sets the tone for the healing: it will be lifelong, because the repercussions are lifelong.

Another theme that emerged was defining sexual violence as trauma. This was further explored by looking at biblical narratives and comparing it to modern research on PTSD. For example, the character of Job was analysed with the DSM-5 diagnostic criteria and found to have multiple commonalities. This was used to show the role of sexual violence in the Bible. This thesis found its third theme, which is forgiveness as wounding. By analyzing examples of forgiveness in the Bible, this thesis noted that it was impossible to paint forgiveness with a single definition because of the various differences in each mention of forgiveness. It did note,

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[654] Elle Hunt, "'20 Minutes of Action': Father Defends Stanford Student Son Convicted of Sexual Assault," The Guardian (Guardian News and Media, June 6, 2016), https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2016/jun/06/father-stanford-university-student-brock-turner-sexual-assault-statement

[655] Chanel Miller, "Chanel Miller Reads Her Entire Victim Impact Statement," CBS News (CBS Interactive, September 22, 2019), https://www.cbsnews.com/news/chanel-miller-reads-her-entire-victim-impact-statement-she-wrote-to-address-brock-turner-60-minutes-2019-09-22.

however, that the Bible reinforces God's forgiveness and does encourage forgiveness among people (creation).

This theme was further explored with the work of Moltmann, Volf, and Boopalan. Moltmann and also drawing briefly on Luther were used to explain *theologia crucis* to connect the struggle of man to the crucifixion. I likened this to the experiences of a sexual abuse survivor. Volf was used to discuss "non-remembering." Essentially, Volf encourages an earthly forgiveness but believes when we enter God's Kingdom we will all be given the gift of "non-remembering." In other words, we cannot take our pain with us. Boopalan gives a critique of Volf's work, arguing that Volf does not address structural injustices enough in his discussion of conflict in humankind. Volf stresses that holding onto pain feeds into anti-creation feelings like rage and vengeance, while Boopalan maintains that these were healthy expressions of the oppressed. Overall, this chapter stressed that forcing forgiveness is unlikely to end in a positive result, and would only serve to harm survivors.

Finally, the final theme is forgiveness as healing. This thesis presented healing as a lifelong, non-linear process. The survivor is transformed by experiences of trust, and her post-traumatic growth is revealed in her post-trauma identity. The survivor uses forgiveness of the self as a starting point, but once she has owned her narrative and told her truth, and re-established trust with God, she "forgives" her attacker by trusting God with him.

Recommendations

I found a wealth of knowledge on issues like clergy abuse, CSA, and incest, but struggled to find research on spirituality and intimate partner violence. As a whole, I believe research on sexual abuse and spirituality can be expanded to include all aspects of sexual violence. CSA, incest, and clergy abuse are very situational, and come with their own challenges. It is important to acknowledge the survivors who were victimized as adults by their partners, or had a one-off incident with a stranger. How does this inform their spirituality and ability to trust?

I also believe that we need to modernize our discussions of sin. This is done in the academic world, but should be encouraged in churches overall. Churches need not present a unified front on all definitions of sin, but should take a unified front on what language to use around survivors of sexual abuse. If survivors are, for example, asking for forgiveness of the sin of being sexually violated, clergy should be trained to step in and explain that they were victimized. Sexual violence needs to be explicitly named a sin by leading church officials. Forgiveness of the self should be researched and discussed more in Christian circles as well. I am particularly thinking about the sacrament of Reconciliation, where one would seek forgiveness from God. There is plenty of discussion around the very human interaction with shame and guilt that occurs in the face of sin, but an interpersonal and future-oriented dimension would be interesting to look into for pastoral purposes.

Furthermore, churches need to be safer for survivors. Church leaders need to take a louder stance on sexual violence and receive training on how to approach these situations. Survivors spend too much time feeling isolated and misunderstood, when they should be embraced by their community. This means using survivor-positive language when it comes to rituals in the church, like in baptisms, asking when it is ok to touch someone or even allowing someone to be baptized without touch from another. In communion, if it is not offered already, there should be touch-avoidant ways of offering the Body of Christ. Overall, education is needed

in parish communities. The silence should be broken by someone strong enough to endure it – this ought to be a stance leadership takes.

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