The Rupture That Remains: A Trauma-Informed Pastoral Theology

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The Rupture That Remains:

A Trauma-Informed Pastoral Theology

by

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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Pastoral Theology in the 21st Century

What happens when you have been formed in a way that has not prepared you to do ministry in the milieu you find yourself? For me, it was not the emerging post-Christian, secular age, which provided such a challenge, but was something else entirely: trauma. In 2012, I began to serve as a hospital chaplain at an inner city, level one trauma center, where the worst of the worst traumatic injuries are brought. It was here, in the midst of systematic poverty and violence, random car accidents and airplane crashes, and no small share of murders that, despite the fact that “traumatic loss lies at the very heart of the Christian imagination,” standing in those ruptures, I found myself with a theology and a pastoral identity that did not stand. My identity and formation had been prepared for crosses and resurrections, for Good Friday and Easter Sunday.¹ Yet, I found myself squarely in the middle of that dialectic, on neither side, between, in a Holy Saturday, over and over again, witnessing death that “has not concluded.”² I slowly came to realize that the Church itself was a traumatized people, who “simultaneously remember too little and


too much,” and had pastors who had never been formed to bear witness to this space between.³

That experience of a formation that did not prepare me for the experience of the contemporary world is a reoccurring problem in practical theology. Particularly in its relation to theological education, and left me to believe that “unless we can find new and interesting words, metaphors, images and symbols that ‘cut the world at its joints’ to encapsulate our pastoral experience, pastoral theology will be . . . a bloodless cadaver which is of interest only to necrophiles.”⁴ And it is this question of what stories, theologies and images shape the identities, imaginations, and practice of pastors that must be a core question of practical theology, particularly as we enter a new contemporary epoch. Practical theology “mediates between critical or theoretical theology and practice…[its] special task is to start with the concrete, historical, immediate reality critically evaluating and enabling the practical life of the Church [and its pastors] in all its many forms.”⁵ In each era, practical theology has helped the Church draw on its own biblical and theological resources in conversation with other disciplines and real, lived experience to help formulate a pastoral identity that helps pastors imagine, form, and lead Christian communities.

Following the lead of John Swinton, it is my understanding that practical or pastoral theology is “that aspect of the theological enterprise that focuses on the


interpretation of the practices of church and world as an ongoing source of theological interpretation and understanding. Further, it is the place where theology meets and dialogues with the experiences, questions, and concerns of the contemporary world, like trauma theory.

Works of practical theology follow many different trajectories in organizing their inquiries, from Schleiermacher to Farley, but this thesis will generally follow the method of Emmanuel Lartey, who has argued for a five-fold pastoral cycle of theology: experience, situational analysis, theological analysis, situational analysis of theology, and response. This first chapter identifies the experience above as the propagating moment, and will follow with a situational analysis of the landscape pastoral identity. Chapter two will act as a theological analysis of trauma theory, drawing from neurobiology, psychology, theology, and trauma theory, with a close eye in the first half of the chapter towards introducing the neurobiological work of Bessel Van der Kolk and trauma theory in general, while the second half will take an in-depth theological analysis guided by the work of Shelly Rambo, and to a lesser extent, Serene Jones. Chapter three will address a situational analysis of trauma theology, one addressing trauma theory via a midrashic reading of Holy Saturday and the theological world of Alan Lewis by exploring a reclamation of the ability to go places that pastors have been unable or unwilling to in the ruptures of life. It will conclude with an analysis of how trauma theory helps pastors

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7 Emmanuel Lartey, “Practical Theology as a Theological Form” in *Spiritual Dimensions of Pastoral Care*, eds. David Willows and John Swinton (London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2000), 75. This work also serves as a cursory introduction to different forms and methods of practical theology, focusing on three major other forms: branch (Schleiermacher), process (Farley, Whitehead, and others), and being and doing (Segundo, and other liberation and feminist theologians).
actually respond theologically to their own trauma and the trauma of those in their care, focusing on the Holy Spirit and Luther’s concept of the ex nihilo. Finally, chapter four will serve as a response and conclusion, exploring how trauma theory be helpful in pastoral identity and the cultivation of Christian communities, putting it in conversation with a new partner: curatorial theory. The chapter will explore the curation of communities and faith of meaning making and remaking in pastoral care and the centrality of the Eucharist as the re-enactment of Holy Saturday.

This project is driven by the two core questions of pastoral identity: who are pastors? What is the purpose of our work? And at its heart is the belief that our contemporary models and images, while fruitful are far too indebted to business management and clinical professionalized models, and are unprepared to deal with the lived, experience of traumatic realities of our time. Instead, we must work towards a new pastoral theology of trauma, giving “voice to the fact that listening to and telling stories lies at the heart of all human experiencing and forms part of the practical theological task.” In this thesis, that task is to use new conversation partners: trauma theory and its sibling Christian imagining, Holy Saturday, to articulate a formative practical theology for pastors.

This reimagining of pastoral identity is vital, as Shelly Rambo argues, because “in many Christian traditions, the movement from passion to resurrection, enacted liturgically is seamless. Death is behind and new life comes . . . [but] the forgetting of

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8 Following the British tradition of practical theology, I will use the terms pastoral and practical theology interchangeably throughout the thesis.

Holy Saturday symbolizes the elisions of history, of the truths, that are so to speak, swept under the rug.”\textsuperscript{10} A lack of attention to Holy Saturday has created a theology and an entire pastoral ministry in which the suffering of Good Friday is glorified and Easter is quickly turned into triumphalism, failing to account for the day that marks a distinctive break between them. Alan Lewis echoes this, writing: “That intervening time of waiting, that strange, empty territory standing so ambiguously between his dying and his rising, sever those two happenings and keep them disjoined in their very continuity.”\textsuperscript{11}

What Rambo and Lewis propose is relevant to pastoral identity, as humanity faces the aftermath of repeated trauma and crises on a regular basis, because we must have a theology and pastoral identity that is witnessing and “taking seriously and incorporating fully the diversity of human experiences (regarding them, not simply as illustrative material, but as unique ‘moments in the drama of divine revelation).”\textsuperscript{12} More than ever, the people whom pastors interact with find themselves in these middle spaces, between life and death, belief and unbelief, after the crisis but before the resolution, in spaces of trauma, suffering, and rupture. But pastors have not been trained for a ministry of standing in the rupture, but of the edges on either side of the Cross and Resurrection. Therefore, this thesis will argue that defining and furthering a pastoral theology of Holy Saturday, that pays attention to and actually curates the ruptures attested to by trauma theory, in forming the identity and function of pastors is essential to the practice of ministry.

\textsuperscript{10} Rambo, \textit{Spirit and Trauma}, 129.

\textsuperscript{11} \textit{Alan Lewis, Between Cross & Resurrection: A Theology of Holy Saturday} (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001), 59.

\textsuperscript{12} Willows & Swinton, “Introduction,” 12.
What is needed is a formative practical theology that “lives close to the dark, unexplained and unacceptable parts of life and treats of God whose face is hidden in reality, whose presence is known more by its perceived absence and revealed in the longing desire which is part mourning over loss, part hopeful expectation.”¹³ But before we can move into this sort of an alternative construction of pastoral identity, we must wrestle with the deficiencies of modern pastoral identities and look towards emerging alternatives for this contemporary era. This chapter is by no means a comprehensive survey but merely a brief overview and will deal with two questions of pastoral identity in particular: what have been the driving images and stories and conversations of pastoral identity in our most recent times; and, where do we find ourselves now? What is required of contemporary pastors?

**Modern Pastoral Identities**

In 1972, Richard John Neuhaus, then a Lutheran pastor, argued that pastoral “models are crucial to [make sense of who we are and what we are doing] because, in a very down-to-earth manner, we all live from models . . . Such a variety [of models] can be splendid and liberating, and it can be terribly confusing . . . It is little wonder that some ministers leave congregations in order to move on to some more ‘specialized’ work.”¹⁴ Neuhaus is correct to say that the models we use directly impact how we create pastoral identities and how we imagine such work, and that those models are particularly situated in the cultural and religious milieu of our time, because “we each have a

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placement within general patterns of religious [and cultural] life in America. These deal with communal expectations and behavior.”¹⁵ In our time, particularly in the post-war West, this “clerical paradigm” which has affected the teleology of theological education, has also marked pastoral identity with a major identified: professionalization.¹⁶

What are the marks of professionalization and how has it affected pastoral identity and imagination? Neuhaus points to a 1972 study by the Carnegie Commission on Higher Education, *Professional Education*, which illuminated ten points that bear a striking resemblance to markers of modern pastoral identity:

1. A professional is involved in a full-time occupation that provides one’s principal source of income.
2. A professional has a strong motivation or calling to a field of endeavor.
3. A professional possesses a specialized body of knowledge and skill acquired over a prolonged period of education and training.
4. A professional makes particular decisions concerning clients in terms of general principles, theories, or propositions.
5. A professional is assumed to have a service orientation.
6. A professional’s service is based on the objective needs of the client. Hence there must be frankness and confidentiality between client and professional.
7. A professional is assumed to know more accurately than the client what is best for the client. This attitude, of course, places the client in a potentially vulnerable position, which in part explains the need for ethical codes.
8. A professional associates with professionals in the same field, establishing standards, licensing, and other formal entry examinations.
9. A professional’s knowledge is assumed to be limited to a particular professional field. It does not give a license to be an expert in every area.
10. A professional makes services available but normally is not allowed to advertise or seek out clients.¹⁷

The inclusion of professionalization here should not be assumed in its totality as a negative, but simply as a note on its prominence within pastoral formation, in which how

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¹⁵ Neuhaus, *Freedom for Ministry*, 41


we think about the work of pastors and how they should understand themselves: professional boundaries, specialized training, etc. . . . Positively, this has meant that pastors are well-trained, well-educated, and for many decades, were accepted as a discipline on the multidisciplinary professions of the West. Conversely, this has meant that pastoral identity has often looked outside of the Christian narrative in a search for purpose and formative identity, particularly to other locations of professionalization. This has led, in some ways, to pastors that look more like social workers or CEO’s, than the calling illuminated by the Christian narrative to care for and shepherd God’s people.

Two of the defining ways in which professionalization has impacted the narrative of pastoral identity, is in two of the focuses that have been emphasized: the curing of souls and the role of success in leadership. If you go hunting in the pastoral theology section of a major seminary library, you will find both of these narratives have been emphasized when thinking about pastoral identity in the last century, and they both correspond to the dominant narratives and professions to which the Church has looked for guidance: the clinical and the business. It is my contention that both contain “values implicit . . . that are often antithetical to Christianity.”

The Clinical Identity

The “cure of souls” should not be confused with the translation of the ancient Latin word that meant the exercise of a pastor or priest’s office in a specific location or congregation. Instead, what the “curing of souls means” is the dominance of the idea of

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the pastor as an intervener in the midst of social crisis. This is the view taken by the founder of Clinical Pastoral Education, Anton Boisen, which has come to hold a vice-grip on the imagination of pastors in the West. As Boisen writes: “My thesis is that religious experience is rooted in the social nature of man and arises spontaneously under the pressure of crisis situations . . . As one stands face to face with the ultimate realities of life and death, religion and theology tend to come alive . . . we frequently find the sense of contact with that ultimate reality to which we give the name of ‘God.’”19 In Religion in Crisis & Custom, Boisen explores this thesis through mainline contexts that bear a great deal of familiarity to our own, arguing that “crisis experiences result in a religious quickening; they are creative; but they may break as well as make.”20

Boisen’s assertion that crisis is the primary operating point of religious experience, and therefore the center of pastoral intervention, helped to grow the clinical pastoral education movement, centered in the clinical experiences of pastor/chaplains in the hospital, in which the pastor serves a regular course of intervention to those in crisis. Of course, the acute intervention leaves the long-term post-crisis care to others, what is most important is to be present in the crisis. A different way to read this by following the Christian narrative, and the work of this thesis around Holy Friday/Holy Saturday/Easter, is that it is vital for the pastor to be present with the women and others at the crucifixion of Jesus.

Boisen’s thinking is a Good Friday-oriented gaze, in which crisis is central, and life’s normative transition points and crises are the places of where pastors should be focused.


20 Ibid., 5.
One need not look far to see how deeply this has impacted pastoral identity, where pastoral life and energy is directed towards precisely the places that Boisen has in mind when he writes: “Crises are likely to arise in the normal course of development. Coming of age, getting married, birth of children, and bereavement.”\(^2^1\) Here we find our companions: baptism, confirmation, marriage, baptism, funeral, and some pastoral care in-between.

While Boisen includes, what he terms “pathological crises,” they are mainly limited to social crises (like economic distress) and mental illness, he even goes so far as to exclude the focus of this work, trauma, from his work when we find him arguing that “the case of war is an apparent exception to the principle that crisis situations tend to be associated with religious quickening. Even though war is a social crisis of the greatest magnitude, it is difficult to find any important religious movement which has arisen out of a war situation.”\(^2^2\) It is my contention that Boisen helped to create a pastoral identity unable to grasp its presence and work in trauma and rupture, and is instead more naturally inclined to the sort of crises and natural life transitions that are a part of his clinical ideal of the pastor.\(^2^3\)

These clinical models have become deeply embedded, resulting sometimes in a blurring between the distinction of a social worker, psychologist and pastoral ministry, even in hospitals. In many ways, this is because the two post-war eras of Western life

\(^2^1\) Boisen, *Religion in Crisis*, 69.

\(^2^2\) Ibid., 106.

\(^2^3\) Boisen’s practical writings are where he goes so far as to create intervention profiles, questions, and things to look for in crisis and transition in *Problems in Religion and Life: A Manual for Pastors with Outlines for Cooperative Study of Personal Experience in Social Situations* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1946).
came to define much of what we understand to be pastoral work, particularly the hyper-focus of the pastor on individual insight within the congregation:

We are evidently at the opening of a new era of the history of the cure of souls,” wrote John McNeill in 1934. “The new ministry to personality will be both scientific and religious” . . . reshaping clerical attitude towards social reform, sermon, and pastoral counseling [as the focus of their work and identity]. In the background of that change could be seen the relatively new them of self-realization.24

While Holifield’s comments focus primarily on the practice of pastoral care, how deeply this work came to shape pastoral identity is clear. These narratives of spiritual growth, self-realization in the reality of God and helping people move from Friday to Sunday in their crises, became the normative work on pastors in America and across the West in the 20th century. The focus of pastors became clinical, in that it focused their work and identities primarily on their patients, who were their parishioners. In this sense, pastors were a ‘helping’ profession, assisting people return to the most normal lives as possible, fixing and curing when possible, unprepared for ruptures that left them and their communities unable to return to normal.

Additionally, these practices and foci formed pastors that were seeking to “‘deepen the community’s respect for the minister’ during a period when pastors who ministered to the urban middle classes felt most deeply the absence of public esteem.”25 A focus less on the narrative of the Christian story, but more on establishing the pastor in the post-world war realities of middle class life, adopting “explicitly or implicitly, an ethic of self-realization which defined growth as the primary ethical good.”26 It is this reality that


25 Holifield, History of Pastoral Care, 232.

26 Ibid., 276.
reverberates down to this day in pastoral identity and the current ecclesiological landscape of America.

The professional role of clinicians is distinctive from the embedded role of a pastor within a community, in which pastors stand as not as the one with answers, but as a signpost to the One that does. The confusion of the clinical with the pastoral meant that pastors were but another psychological stop on the American and Western journey of self-discovery, growth and happiness. And since pastors had been trained to do those things, the deepening traumas of the 21st century left them increasingly irrelevant, unable to form identities that were capable of witnessing to God by pastoring soldiers returning home from never ending wars, young women devastated by a culture of rape, and increasing violence tied to poverty across this country.

In this time, maybe the most prominent example of the clinical pastoral identity is Edwin Friedman’s concept of the pastor as a leader within the family system, using Bowen’s Family Systems theory. In many ways, Friedman’s is the clinical model writ-large, zoomed out to a systemic perspective, where “the aches and pains (the pathology) in the system” that throw off leaders is the enemy, and the solution is pastors “who have clarity about his or her own life goals, and, therefore, someone who is less likely to become lost in the anxious emotional processes swirling about . . . Someone who can be separate while still remaining connected, and therefore can maintain a modifying, non-anxious presence.”

In Friedman’s conceptualization, the self-realization and spiritual growth has shifted focus, from the parishioner to the pastor, making the pastors identity as a non-anxious

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presence the most important part of being a pastor. Friedman goes so far as to write:

“What counts is the leader’s presence and being, not technique and know-how.”28 By diagnosing the system, one can gain distance from it in order to emotionally engage it without being sabotaged.

The issue with Friedman, as with Boisen, and much of contemporary pastoral identities, is an identification of the problem in formation as a psychological one, not a theological or spiritual one. For instance, Friedman identifies reactivity in hostile environments as one of the core issues plaguing leaders, which has deep echoes of middle-class clergy and the issues that plague them.29 One must wonder if the goal of these clinical identities is merely the formation of middle-class professionals, not clergy formed by the narrative of Scripture, and the theological drama of the Triduum, most specifically the Holy Saturday in which many find themselves surviving.

The Managerial Identity

The other major thread in pastoral formation is the recent movement in the late 20th and early 21st century towards leadership theory that finds its genesis primarily in business, another professionalized sphere of our modern world. For management and leadership theory, the primary source of issue in any organization is its ability to navigate change. Therefore, the primary challenge of the leader, a CEO or entrepreneur, is how to successfully navigate change and stimulate growth. As Ronald Heifetz writes in his seminal work, Leadership on the Line, “The deeper the change and the greater amount of

28 Friedman, Failure of Nerve, 17.

29 See esp. chapter four in Friedman, Failure of Nerve, in which he argues that hostile environments are most often met with empathy instead of being seen as pathological. But these environs and their examples are most exclusively middle and upper class.
new learning required, the more resistance will be and, thus, the greater the danger to those who lead.”

For Heifetz, the core work of leaders (and pastors) is adaptive changes, which are challenges that require significant shift in the makeup and DNA of a community. This shift “creates risk, conflict, and instability because addressing the issues underlying adaptive problems may involve upending deep and entrenched norms. Thus, leadership requires disturbing people—but at a rate they can absorb.” For pastoral identity, this obviously centers gradual and steady change as a key focus of pastoral functioning. From a theological standpoint, change is not the central foci of the Christian narrative, instead sin, grace, and one might even surmise God’s disruptive, not gradual, transformation of the world.

Managerial theory is extremely helpful in a practical sense for pastoral identity in the 21st century, which is navigating major shifts in church health, attendance, and change-resistant communities. As someone who has benefitted from this approach, particularly as advocated by Duke Divinity’s Leadership Education Institute, its value is certainly immense. But Stephen Pattison has argued that what it brings in theory, it loses in the values to which it is indebted, particularly in its idolization as “a universal panacea for organizational or societal problems.”

Underneath these drivers of change is of course the desire for companies to experience growth and profit as the key indicators of successful leaders, amongst other

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31 Ibid., 20.

values that are oft uncritically adopted within pastoral identities. Stephen Pattison’s short list of the faith assumptions of managerial theory is instructive:

- Human beings can control the world and colonize the future effectively so long as they have the right techniques
- Individuals should be subservient to organizational goals and to their superiors
- Relationships are fundamentally hierarchical and require clear lines of upward accountability and downward responsibility
- The nature of organizational work should be such as to extract the maximum from the employee
- Everything that is significant can and should be measured objectively
- The prosperity and flourishing of the organization is the greatest good and the priority for all organization members
- Productivity and profitability determine the value of individual and organizational endeavor.  

Growth and profit, indebted as they are to neoliberal ideology, are central to leadership theory, which Heifetz and Linsky make clear when they attempt to show just how fall IBM has fallen since the early nineties due to their inability to change and adapt at a quick enough pace. As Pattison argues, management theory makes theological themes that are clearly troublesome to place in the narrative of pastoral formation, even if they should are held in the periphery in some leadership ideas. Growth, whether financially or emotionally is a deeply held middle-to-upper class assumption, deepening a proclivity to triumphalism within Christianity, particularly in the West, own towards avoiding pain, doubt, and trauma for the joy of the Resurrection. As growth appears in the clinical too, it is a reverberating theme of pastoral identity, both in theory and practice in pastoral life.  

The newest iteration of this in pastoral formation is the emphasis on


34 Heifetz and Linsky, Leadership on the Line, 21.
entrepreneurial qualities in pastoral formation, where personality and creativity are valued highly. Clayton Christensen’s famous book, *The Innovator’s Dilemma*, was at the forefront of this movement, which found its genesis in Silicon Valley in the early nineties. Christensen’s insight on how great firms fail, in particular in the disk drive world, where “keeping close to your customers,” instead of looking towards disruptive trends, is extremely valuable for pastoral formation. When translated into theory, the most disruptive leaders are those with large personalities who are prone to resiliency.

Yet where we find ourselves, as Shelly Rambo has argued, is not in a world that is in need of disruption, but in one where we have failed to pay attention to significant disruptive ruptures in our world of meaning already present all around us. While entrepreneurship is a helpful concept, its own record of transitiveness has been its own downfall more often than not. In particular, one of the places where we find a weakness in the application of business theory in general, and entrepreneurial theory in particular, is the overvaluation of charismatic leaders for growth and success. This has led to a pastoral identity that continues to value charisma and success, over the ability to be present in the midst of rupture and trauma that continues to proliferate. One might notice that some of the most charismatic leaders and their communities are precisely the ones unable to witness and endure trauma with their members and within their communities. This problem is particularly contagious in evangelicalism and leaders like Mark Driscoll,

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36 See the busted tech bubbles of the nineties and early aughts as an example. Today, this problem presents in the overvaluation of charismatic leaders and investment in the newest apps and tech innovations.
and mega church pastors like Joel Osteen, but is true in mainline protestant settings as well. At the core of growth and change is the desire for success, something deeply at odds with the narrative of a practical theology that “lives close to the dark, unacceptable and unexplained parts of life.”\(^{37}\) Yet, even Heifetz and Linsky understand the limitations of this narrative of success, even in the business world, when they write: “Meaning cannot be measured, yet we live immersed in a world of measurement so pervasive that even many of our religious institutions measure success, significantly, by market share . . . We even witness religious organizations distorting their mission to mean ‘reaching more people,’ as if people were a measurable commodity.”\(^{38}\) If these prevalent identities leave something to be desired in contributing to pastoral formation, let alone a practical theology of trauma, where else can we turn for emerging alternatives to these dominant paradigms?

### Viable Alternatives

Of course, there are alternative, more subversive trends within pastoral theology, that seek to render pastoral identity through the lens of a much closer reading of the Christian narrative, as well as via the lens of other constructive theologies. As Eugene Peterson has argued, “it is not easy these days to figure out what it means to be a leader in

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\(^{38}\) Heifetz and Linsky, *Leadership on the Line*, 212.
Christ’s church.” Awash in some of the images as I’ve outlined above, these alternative renderings are necessary because, as Peterson himself argues:

> The so-called spirituality that was handed to me by those who put me to the task of pastoral work was not adequate. I do not find the emaciated, exhausted spirituality of institutional careerism adequate. I do not find the veneered, cosmetic spirituality of personal charisma adequate. I require something biblically spiritual—rooted and cultivated in creation and covenant, leisurely in Christ, soaked in the Spirit.

Attempts at constructive articulations of pastoral identity is a deepening need, because even in the most creative moments where there have been “significant stabs at re-conceptualizing ministry . . . those feeling their way into this rethinking have not yet been able to offer an alternative vision of ministry other than the deconstruction of the passing regime.” But, here we will take a quick look at two recent conceptualizations: Eugene Peterson’s work with Jonah and Andrew Root’s constructive pastoral theology of the incarnation utilizing Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s concept of vicarious personhood, *stellvertretung*.

**Peterson and Jonah**

Eugene Peterson’s *Under the Unpredictable Plant* is the most concise articulation of Peterson’s understanding of pastoral identity and is, more or less, a practical theology of Jonah. Peterson renders the pastoral vocation through the lens of movement and narrative of Jonah story, particularly the divergent places of Tarshish and Nineveh and the “two broad movements that locate Jonah’s vocation, along with the vocations of those

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40 Peterson, *Unpredictable Plant*, 4.

who read him, in spirituality . . . The Jonah story pulls us into dry dock and scrapes off
the ponderous false dignity, the fantasy-bloated ambitions. *The first movement in the
story shows Jonah disobedient; the second shows him obedient.*”

In Peterson’s conceptualization, “we American pastors, without really noticing
what was happening, got our vocations redefined in the terms of American careerism.”

Utilizing the Jonah narrative, Peterson identifies Tarshish as the place of gloriously
successful careers and professional life, but instead finds the center of his pastoral
theology of Jonah in the congregation, which “is not glorious. The congregation is a
Nineveh-like place: a site for hard word without a great deal of hope for success, at least
as success is measured on the charts . . .” Utilizing the story analogically, Peterson is
able to draw the Jonah story into a fully realized pastoral theology.

Additionally, Peterson shows how the oscillating movements of the Jonah story,
between obedience and disobedience, can help shape pastoral imagination where we
discover the “wonderful, gracious surprise . . . that in both movements in Jonah’s life, the
disobedient and the obedient, God used him to save people . . . [working] his purposes
through who we actually are, our rash disobedience and our heartless obedience, and
generously uses our lives as he finds us to do his work.” In this way, Peterson combats
the clerical paradigm of professionalism, in which competency and skill is raised up,
instead of attentiveness to the grace of God, which propels pastors regardless of how
competent they are.

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43 Ibid., 20.
44 Ibid., 16.
45 Ibid., 32.
Intriguingly for this thesis, Peterson finds the proper location of the pastor, to be neither Tarshish nor Nineveh, but “the center of the story, a center located in the belly of the fish.” In the belly of the beast, Jonah discovers *askesis*, an emptying that is “conspicuously life-deepening and reality-creating.” This *askesis* of Jonah has its nearest comparison in Holy Saturday, something that is directly attested to in Matthew’s Gospel: “For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the sea monster, so for three days and three nights the Son of Man will be in the heart of the earth.”

Peterson notes that these moments of *askesis* are “weakly imagined and slightly practiced,” particularly Holy Saturday, which is “virtually ignored.” Like Jonah, the desire of people during Saturday is busyness, in which the work of preparing for Easter takes hold. In the same way, pastoral life is driven to busyness without images and identities that ground it in a different narrative. But the story of Holy Saturday is not one of activity, but stillness, as is Jonah’s time in the whale’s belly. It is Peterson’s creativity with Jonah’s story, particularly in the belly of the whale, that shows how to use these stories in a way that provide a riches of meaning for theology and pastoral formation. And in that way, how we might go about forming a pastoral theology of trauma that deepens pastoral spirituality and resilience.

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46 Peterson, *Unpredictable Plant*, 74.

47 Ibid., 90.

48 Matt 12:40.

49 Peterson, *Unpredictable Plant*, 91.
Root and the Vicarious Jesus

In a different direction, utilizing a conversation between scripture and theology is Andrew Root’s pastoral theology of relationality in *The Relational Pastor*. For Root, “ministry [is] the encounter of human person to human person, sharing deeply in relationship as the way to encounter the presence of Jesus Christ.” As I raised earlier, Root argues that the clinical self-help model became deeply embedded in pastoral identity in the 20th century, reflecting the wider culture of pastoral ministry, arguing instead for “empathic encounter,” where pastoral ministry is “the practice of facilitating personal encounter, of setting a space for people to be in relationships not of individualized self-help but of human person to human person.”

This happens, not by a model of incarnational ministry, but by “helping persons encounter the dynamic incarnate person,” helping others participate both in human personhood, but also in the life of Christ. This conception of pastoral identity is grounded in the middle space between scripture, drawing on the incarnation, and theologically, drawing on Bonhoeffer’s *stellvertretung*, in which Jesus ontological existence is *pro me*, sharing the place of humans.

Like trauma theory, and Peterson’s pastor in the belly of the whale, Root finds this pastoral identity theologically grounded in a middle space, a space between, “the space between God and humanity, making in-between spaces the place of his presence.”

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50 Root, *Relational Pastor*, 17.
51 Ibid., 45.
52 Ibid., 113.
53 Ibid., 161.
54 Ibid., 163.
But not just any space, but this space is Jesus, the space between and together the divine and the human. Again, these spaces of rupture, of between-ness, of the middle, reoccur in these pastoral identities that are seeking to articulate both our contemporary moment and a creative alternative to the dominant identities of the 20th century. In this sense, Jesus stands in a space that we cannot, between humanity and God, and acts vicariously, “in that he does for human beings what they cannot do for themselves.” Jesus creates a whole new humanity via this vicarious action in his incarnation, where humanity is reconciled with God once more and empowered by the Holy Spirit, forming the basis of Bonhoeffer’s concept of stellvertretung.55

By constructively drawing the incarnation and stellvertretung together, we are compelled to wrestle with a new conceptualization of pastoral identity altogether. In this vein, Root uses a particular word, which has deeply influenced the direction of this thesis, to describe the practice of this relational pastoral identity: curating. He writes:

Ministry is the curating of these places, these in-between spaces, through facilitation of locales that allow people to share in each other’s needs, to see each other as persons. No pastor has the power to create these spaces. They are spiritual; they are outgrowths of the Holy Spirit . . . We cannot force these places, but we can curate them . . . We as pastors are not called to be incarnate, to do the work only Jesus [can do]. But we are called to be place sharers, to be attentive to curating places where the sharing of persons can happen, and in all of this to confess the presence of Christ—the person who is the relationship of the sharing of two natures.56

While we will return more fully to this concept of curation, what needs to be highlighted is two-fold. First, Root is arguing for a new conversation partners is conceptualizing pastoral identity, just by using curation as a concept, we’ve left the professionalized

55 Clifford Green, Bonhoeffer: A Theology of Sociality (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 56.
56 Ibid., 163.
world, and entered a space of art and weakness. Second, both Peterson and Root, in line with Shelly Rambo, and trauma theory itself, have identified a vital contemporary reality that re-occurs in all of their works: the ruptured, in-between, middle spaces as the site of constructing a theology of pastoral identity and praxis.

What Shall We Do Now?

If these assessments are correct, then we must wonder how we can move beyond simply deconstructing these old models, and ask the question: what shall we do now? What is a required of a pastor and the images and stories that inform that identity in this epoch? There is no return to these previous practical theologies of pastoral identity in the face of escalating and unfaced trauma in our world. Instead, we must begin to turn towards the contemporary traumas, ruptures, and middle spaces in our world. As Giorgio Agamben has written:

The contemporary is he who firmly holds his gaze on his own time so as to perceive not it’s light, but rather its darkness . . . The ones who can call themselves contemporary are only those who do not allow themselves to be blinded by the lights of the century, and so manage to get a glimpse of the shadows in those lights, of their intimate obscurity . . . contemporary is the person who perceives the darkness of his time as something that concerns him, as something that never ceases to engage him. Darkness is something that more than any light-turns directly and singularly toward him. The contemporary is the one whose eyes are struck by the beam of darkness that comes from his own time.\textsuperscript{57}

This firm gaze into the darkness, a difficult and painful view into the gaps of meaning, which is the reappearing thread that is necessary to be grasped in order to articulate a formative pastoral theology of trauma. We must turn towards trauma and the theory that

articulates it in order to discover just how formative these spaces can be for reimaging pastoral identity and function.

This peering into middle spaces unearths a darkness, a rupture, a chaos which is both without form and formative simultaneously, places where the “Spirit oscillates over the abyss of re-creation and redemption.” As in the beginning, in the first creation story in Genesis, in which the Spirit hovers over darkness and chaos, in which formlessness and not yet given way to form, we find an incredibly traumatic chaos that is a site of God’s fragile but imaginatively creative action. And it is these spaces, articulated in trauma theory, attested to in the narrative of Holy Saturday, which present a challenge to the conceptualizations of pastoral identity articulated in this chapter, which are built on linear and progressive understandings of success and cure, presenting instead a rupture in the dialectic tension between life and death, humiliation and glory, a gap of formlessness in the in-between.

Instead, trauma theory presses us to search for a pastoral theology that can convey an identity that is able to endure and witness to the bleakness experienced in these ruptures. That means that to answer Agamben’s question as a pastor then is to answer that a contemporary pastor is one who has been formed by a dialogue between the Christian story and the insights of trauma theory, attentive to the oft ignored places where God is hidden, in our own lives, in others lives, and in the life of the world. It is in this dialogue, between Holy Saturday and trauma theory that will emerge a pastoral identity that can be attentive to those places where God is most creative: the middle spaces, gaps, ruptures, in

58 Rambo, Spirit and Trauma, 116.
which we will find the creative Spirit of God hovering in an apparent meaninglessness, creating something new altogether.
CHAPTER TWO
THEOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF TRAUMA

If the Spirit of God is truly leading pastors in this time to be formed more deeply in the reality and theological complexity of trauma due to the fact that “trauma is a pervasive fact of modern life,” then two important questions must be surface: What is trauma? And how do we account for it theologically?\(^{59}\) This is a more complicated question than it appears on the surface, because trauma has only been an articulated reality since the “shellshock” of World War I, but can be approached as: trauma is both a neuro/bio/physiological reality, and it is also a critical theory that can be applied across disciplines, with echoes in philosophy, psychoanalysis, literature, and of course theology.\(^{60}\) This chapter will first account for trauma while drawing some preliminary connections with theology, and will conclude by looking at the work already done by Shelly Rambo and Serene Jones accounting for trauma theologically.

What is Trauma?

Many people use the term trauma colloquially, and they’ll say something like: “wow, that meeting was a traumatic experience!” This saturation of the idea of trauma in


\(^{60}\) One of the first books on the topic, written in 1941, and recently reprinted was Abram Kardiner, *The Traumatic Neuroses of War* (Eastford, CT: Martino Fine Books, 2012). Kardiner was one of the first to deal with ruptures and traumatic “gaps” in meaning for soldiers returning shell-shocked from WWI.
our culture has left it to be an extremely vague and oft misunderstood term, particularly with the presence of PTSD so prevalent. Peter Levine points to the DSM-IV explanation: “The official definition that psychologists and psychiatrists use to diagnose trauma is that it is caused by a stressful occurrence ‘that is outside the range of usual human experience, and that would be markedly distressing to almost anyone.’”61 While there are many definitions, this clinical definition is a helpful guide into understanding what is meant by trauma, which according to the DSM is a sort of disorder or disease caused by external forces.

“Trauma, by definition, is unbearable and intolerable,” writes Bessel Van der Kolk, the renowned clinician and expert on trauma.62 It is, at its core, something that happens to someone that “results in a fundamental reorganization of the way mind and brain [work]. It changes not only how we think and what we think about, but also our very capacity to think.”63 Most succinctly, trauma is an injury in which our normal systems of meaning and resilience are left in tatters.

Trauma leaves a gap, a remainder in its place, like a bruise or a broken bone or any other sort of physical injury. In this way then, trauma should be regarded as an injury “like a grievous physical wound, can remain and fester long after the initial harm.”64 These injuries leave lasting marks on the physical, emotional, spiritual, and religious well

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63 Ibid., 21.

being of those that are affected, and create a rupture or gap that is in flux, a space that can either be creatively cared for or left to fester, doing even further damage.

One of the defining features of trauma is the persistence of the original event, a sort of lingering or repetition of the traumatic event itself. As Van der Kolk writes: “Trauma is the ultimate experience of this will last forever.”65 In this way, trauma can be identified by the way the injury affects someone out of time whether physically, emotionally, or spiritually (flashbacks, disassociations, etc . . .). It is more accurate to say, as Shelly Rambo argues, that the injury of trauma is “not a one-time event,” instead it is an injury in which the excess marks its pain: “in trauma, distortions in time constitute the wound. The problem of temporality is at the root of the phenomenon of trauma.”66

Trauma theory has identified the way this excess of injury functions is to rupture the meaning-making capabilities of humanity, a deeply spiritual behavior. We should identify this rupture as the single-most important signifier of trauma, because the word, “deriving from the Greek τραυμα, implies a break, to wound: ‘he went up to him and bandaged his wounds [τραυμα].”67 This wound actually serves to fragment the memory and presence of the event, rupturing the memory and leaving it “not organized in a linear, narrative fashion as normal memories are.”68 These ruptures and gaps are left remaining, establishing the trauma as really present in, with, and under the humanity of those who experience it.

65 Van der Kolk, Body Keeps Score, 70.
66 Rambo, Spirit and Trauma, 19.
68 Hunsinger, Bearing the Unbearable, 11.
The obvious connections here between trauma and Holy Saturday, as well as the traumatic aftermath of Jesus’ crucifixion affects his family and disciples, should be becoming clear and will be explored in more detail in chapter three. Needless to say, the way the event itself ruptures time for those who experience it, follows directly in the course of these defining characteristics and makes it necessary for a theologically credible and readable account of these identifying points of trauma.

It is important to look at the ways that trauma is rendered biologically and philosophically. Trauma could be theoretically reduced to a neuro-biological phenomenon, though no one who practices trauma therapy has done that. Instead, two major trends dominate trauma theory, those that advocate the biological and physical reality of trauma like Bessel Van Der Kolk, and those that advocate for trauma as a more complex psycho-cultural reality, like Cathy Caruth and Kirby Farrell. But first, it will be helpful to gather a brief history of trauma.

A (Brief) History of Trauma

Trauma has not always been understood as a named phenomenon within human experience. In fact, it is really only in the post-Vietnam War era that trauma began to be understood at a clinical level. But trauma has always been understood as a real reality, even if known by different names. While “Herodotus’ account of the Athenian spear carrier Epizelus’ psychogenic mutism following the Marathon Wars is usually cited as

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the first documented account of post-traumatic stress disorder,” much earlier accounts of trauma, both individually and culturally exist.70

The Ancient Near-East in particular, in both Mesopotamian and Old Testament accounts detail early cultural depictions of trauma. Early religious cultures understood these traumas, both individually and at a societal or cultural level to be punishments from God. In the ancient world, “trauma was also commonplace in Iraq’s ancient civilizations. This involved not only traumata associated with daily life, industry and farming, but also traumata associated with warfare. Ašipus seemed to be working with armies, particularly in the Assyrian period (between 1300–609 bc). The majority of cuneiform medical texts on trauma were concerned with war wounds.”71 Early religious texts of floods and creation accounts, attest to this reality.

For our purposes, the fact that the Old Testament can be viewed, in many ways, as what Louis Stulman terms “trauma literature, or the legacy of the losers,” is of vital importance.72 This is because ancient Israel was "invaded and occupied repeatedly, each time becoming small provinces in vast empires … Israel [was] a tiny country buffeted by geopolitical forces it could scarcely repel.”73 While ancient Israel had no other recourse than to understand this as the wrath of God, one can understand a great deal of the Old Testament, particularly the Prophets and the exilic writings as “ancient Israel’s trauma


71 Ibid., 6.


73 Amy-Jill Levine, as quoted in Stulman, “Bible as Trauma,” 3.
and survival literature.” As Stulman argues, one can think of the Jewish scriptures/Christian Old Testament as “a complex literary response to the massive collapse of ancient Israel’s longstanding cultural arrangements. And this collapse is chiefly the result of war, forced relocation, and captivity—all traumatic events in ancient and contemporary times.” And as will be seen in a later chapter, this understanding can be applied to the New Testament as well.

In the medieval times, trauma was particularly suffered as a collective, whether via plague or crusade. Across the world, violence and death was experienced at a newfound awareness of its consequences. As some scholars have argued, in medieval times, the symbolic losses of war and trauma are particularly noticeable. Megan Cassidy-Welch, a medieval scholar, writes about the capture of the relic of the True Cross in 1187 by Saladin armies, that:

. . . according to Christian commentators, the battle of Hattin was particularly brutal and its effects were long lasting. Yet it was not the battle itself that was recorded by western commentators as particularly damaging. Rather, it was the capture during the battle of a piece of the True Cross, one of the holy land’s most precious relics, that was recorded by eyewitnesses, later chroniclers, artists and preachers as the most shattering aspect of this event.

In this way, one could even understand the Western crusades as a violent processing of trauma and an attempt to reclaim memory and theological meaning that was lost to Muslim armies.

74 Stulman, “Bible as Trauma,” 5.

75 Ibid., 5.

Our modern time has been filled with great cultural traumas that resonate up to this day. One need not look any further than the continuing traumatic effects of colonialism across the world on Native populations, including First Nation reservations in the North America to see this. As well, the continuing effects of the slave trade are undeniable, something that will be addressed in the following section. During the early 20th century, the idea of shell-shock began to be recognized by Abram Kardiner, what he termed “traumatic neuroses,” where soldiers returning from World War I “were overtaken by a sense of futility; they became withdrawn and detached, even if they had functioned well before.” 77 This eventually became known today as PTSD (Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder), which began being fully understood and diagnosed in the aftermath of the Vietnam War, where soldiers returned without any reference of meaning to what they had experienced and suffered.

Today, cultural trauma has entered what some have termed a “post-trauma” era, but what truly is a beginning of understanding trauma as an enduring communal reality of the anthropocene era of climate change, nuclear war, and military capitalism. This is why Slavoj Zizek has called trauma the “return of the repressed.” 78 In particular, these scholars understand a connection between ideology and trauma, in that ideology serves to repress trauma and assign theological meaning to secular sources, whether in Mao’s cultural revolution in China, or the return of totalitarianism across Eastern Europe. For them, the trauma always makes its way back as an ideology. It is in this space, where

77 As quoted in Van der Kolk, Body Keeps Score, 11.

trauma is understood as an intersectional, multidisciplinary concept that is our current understanding.

The Biological Approach

The rupture and gaps that define trauma as are not merely theoretical or ideological realities. Trauma has real physical neurobiological, and physical effects that leave this excess of injury as a reality in the lives of those who suffer or witness it. It is such a powerful rupture that trauma survivors can have their “past flashing back to them, carrying them psychically and physically back to the scene of the action. Their bodies were brace as if the threat were imminent.”79 These memories continue to rupture time and meaning in such a way that they are literally relived.

Bessel Van der Kolk, a psychiatrist who has devoted his life to the biological research into trauma, recounts the story of Stan who was involved in an 87-car pile up in Canada that saw him witness a young girl burn to death and his wife nearly be killed.80 While under an fMRI brain scan, Dr. Van der Kolk and a colleague used sensory prompts to trigger Stan’s recollection of his trauma, leading to a full-blown flashback, and his amygdala, the “smoke-detector of the brain,” making “no distinction between past and present. It activated just as if the car crash were happening in the scanner, triggering powerful stress hormones and nervous-system responses.”81

This is essentially your brain on trauma, where a real rupture has occurred in your neuro-biological functioning. In fact, in their research, Van der Kolk found that the

79 Rambo, Spirit and Trauma, 19.
80 Van der Kolk, Body Keeps Score, 65.
81 Ibid., 69.
trauma deactivated people’s prefrontal cortex, which “tells us how our present experience relates to the past and how it may affect the future—you can think of it as the timekeeper of your brain.” In many ways, the brain has suffered a physical rupture within its core functions because of trauma, that changes how one perceives the world around them, and makes the perception of linear time in some cases almost impossible.

We can see how trauma itself acts as a very real interruption, a space between in the brain, in the same way that the trauma of the crucifixion leaves Holy Saturday, a day of interruption acknowledged within the Christian narrative. As we will soon see in the work of Shelly Rambo, we can discern that the Christian narrative has taken up this traumatic theme, but it has been largely left unexplored in the same way that Dr. Van der Kolk was unable to understand these traumatic effects on the brain until the recent advent of advance brain imagery.

One of the ways that Van der Kolk’s approach is most relevant theologically, is that it means that the rupture of trauma affects the whole human person, created in the *imago dei*, and that these ruptures appear across the reality of humanness. Instead of a merely psychic, or spiritual injury, trauma affects the way that humans were created to function, particularly in their meaning making, perception of time, and their grounding in reality. Pastors and communities must account for this as a spiritual crisis, which is affecting a wider and wider swath of humanity.

But it is not just the brain that shows evidence of rupture, of a gap left behind by trauma, but the human body too. As Peter Levine argues, because of the innate connection between the brain and the body, trauma presents “a muscular and visceral

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82 Van der Kolk, *Body Keeps Score*, 69.
reaction in [the] body first, and that the perception of this body reaction that then
generated the emotion.\textsuperscript{83} The inseparability of mind and body means that the body then
begins to bear the yoke of trauma, a heavy weight, in which your body and your mind
both account for what has been ruptured.

This traumatic rupture being remembered is not merely contained within an
individual, but evidence exists that the trauma can actually be passed down genetically
from generation to generation. Rachel Yehuda, a researcher at Mt. Sinai Hospital in New
York City, has done initial research on the epigenetics of trauma. Essentially, epigenetics
posits that environmental realities can effect how genes are expressed. In her work as the
lead researcher on a study that looked at Holocaust survivors and their offspring, Yehuda
and her team found that:

\begin{quote}
Parental trauma exposure is associated with greater risk for posttraumatic stress
disorder (PTSD) and mood and anxiety disorders in offspring. Biological
alterations associated with PTSD and/or other stress-related disorders have also
been observed in offspring of trauma survivors who do not themselves report
trauma exposure or psychiatric disorder.\textsuperscript{84}
\end{quote}

This is not only true for survivors of the Holocaust, but also appears in relevant research
applied to African-American descendants of the slave trade and the Middle Passage.\textsuperscript{85}

Theologically, if this research is correct, this means that trauma is analogous to the way
that Augustine and the Western tradition of Christianity have understood sin, a
fundamental trait of many generations of those traumatized, not native to our humanity.

\textsuperscript{83} Peter A. Levine, \textit{In An Unspoken Voice: How the Body Releases Trauma and Restores

\textsuperscript{84} Rachel Yehuda, et.al, “Holocaust Exposure Induced Intergenerational Effects
on \textit{FKBP5} Methylation” \textit{Biological Psychiatry} 80, no. 5 (Sept 2016): 372.

\textsuperscript{85} Matthew V. Johnson, “The Middle Passage, Trauma, and the Tragic Re-imagination of African
American Theology,” \textit{Pastoral Psychology} 53, no. 6 (July 2005), 541.
Trauma is a fundamental rupture that ripples out, distorting time, brains, bodies, and even offspring. This means that trauma has a vitally important insight into the human being, how humans create meaning theologically, and how pastors can help cultivate and curate spiritually resilient individuals and communities capable of holding ruptures of trauma in a way that allows for God’s re-creating Spirit to be allowed to work. It also allows for the possibility that trauma is not just limited to individual bodies and minds, but something much more complex.

The Psycho-cultural Approach

It might go unacknowledged, but Kirby Farrell argues that “Western culture is grounded in traumatic stories,” first and foremost in the Judeo-Christian tradition. It is Farrell’s own theological rendering of trauma that is helpful step in understanding a trauma-informed pastoral theology. From the beginning, these stories feature the gaps and ruptures that define trauma, from the initial void of creation to the fact that “the Genesis stories make history itself post-traumatic: an original injury endlessly re-experienced.” At its core, we must understand trauma then not merely as a physical or psychic injury, but something much more complicated and pertinent for pastoral theology: psycho-cultural.

It is because of such a rupture opened by trauma that it must be interpreted, for better or for ill, constructively or destructively. Farrell argues:

Whatever the physical distress, then, trauma is also psychocultural, because the injury entails interpretation of the injury. I emphasize the phrase because terror

86 Kirby Farrell, Post-traumatic Culture: Injury and Interpretation in the Nineties (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 1998), 44.

87 Farrell, Post-traumatic Culture, 44.
afflicts the body, but it also demands to be interpreted and, if possible, integrated into character . . . For exactly this reason—because trauma can be ideologically manipulated, reinforced, and exploited—it calls for critical analysis.  

At the core of this argument, is critical reality that the rupture of trauma leaves the rupture as an open space, a void of creation and re-creation, recalling the first chapter of Genesis.

In fact, the work of interpreting trauma, where a “victim builds on past experience and anticipates a future outcome—a process that depends on cultural meanings . . . has roots in ancient religious techniques for calming the central nervous system to prevent or relieve terror.”  

Of course, this has particularly important implications for informing pastoral theology, particularly in the attention that must be paid to the interpretation of trauma, and central role that pastors play in individual and collective interpretation, curating interpretive communities.

If Farrell is right, and it seems clear that he is, trauma requires a theology that can capably stand in these ruptures and not only witness them, but create communities and relationships that can create meaning, because “people not only suffer trauma; they use it, and the idea of it, for all sorts of ends, good and ill. The trope can be ideologically manipulated, reinforced and exploited.” This means that pastors and their communities must be curated in such a way as to help people reconstruct a God-breathed meaning in trauma, and be resilient and resistant to the ways that their pain can be exploited.

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88 Farrell, Post-traumatic Culture, 7.
89 Ibid., 13.
90 Ibid., 21.
Jeffery Alexander has expanded on the basic core of Farrell’s thesis, developing a theory of cultural trauma, “when members of a collectivity feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks upon their group consciousness, marking their memories forever and changing their future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways.”\(^91\) In this understanding, trauma occurs on a cultural level and is passed down in an existential way in a culture, with the obvious example being the Holocaust, as well as lesser traumas such as the collective wartime trauma of both world wars.

Most importantly for our theological account, Alexander argues that cultural trauma requires a very particular process of recovery, healing and meaning-making. When this is avoided, it leaves the rupture unaccounted for.\(^92\) Instead, creating a space for the traumatic gap to be acknowledged “can allow collectivities to define new forms of moral responsibility and to redirect the course of political action . . . when they draw, for better and for worse, on the moral lessons that seem to emanate from them.”\(^93\)

Both Alexander and Farrell’s accounts make it clear how trauma ruptures culturally and collectively, as well as paradoxically occurring as an opportunity for re-creative action, for meaning making, whether on an individual or collective level. This raises the question, as Farrell does, about this ruptured space being allowed to be manipulated or allowed to fester, as opposed to being curated and allowed to be constructively formed out of the ashes of trauma. It is this question of how we speak of this theologically and curate such communities that must be at the core of a trauma-


\(^{92}\) Ibid., 30, Alexander points to the massacre of Nanjing by the Japanese just before WWII, as well as the collective traumas in Guatemala, Rwanda, Sudan and Cambodia, where they have become what he terms ‘distant sufferings,’ where the rupture has been left untouched and unacknowledged

\(^{93}\) Ibid., 30.
informed pastoral theology. And, as we are about to see, this has been noticed primarily by two astute theologians, Serene Jones and Shelly Rambo, who have begun to articulate at a constructive level what trauma might mean for Christian theology, as well as a smattering of others.

**Theological Accounts of Trauma**

These developments in trauma theory deserve a sustained engagement from theology, in particular answering this question: “Can theology witness to this suffering that does not go away, to the storm that is ‘always here?’ If so, how?” In this second half of the chapter, we will examine how Serene Jones and Shelly Rambo have answered this question in a different ways in their theological accounts of trauma, particularly looking at the practical ways that pastors can witness to this suffering, and what that might look like, because “to witness trauma is a complex and disorienting process. It is a process of witnessing death and life in radical reconfiguration. Because trauma shatters so much of what we understand to constitutes life, the very definition of life is in question.”

In many ways, just like other disciplines, Jones and Rambo have accounted for trauma differently in their constructive works. As we will see, Jones has a focus on how the Cross and Jesus’ death informs our understanding of collective trauma, particularly in the aftermath of 9/11 in the United States, while Rambo focuses on her crucial idea of how we remain and witness trauma as the core theological reflection of trauma. And both have different ideas of what this means for pastoral theology.

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95 Ibid., 25.
The Rupture of the Cross

For Serene Jones, who was serving in New York City in September of 2001, collective psycho-social trauma became real with the terrorist attacks on that fateful day. In the aftermath, she began to wonder, after being asked to preach soon afterwards, about “what does it mean to minister to people in the midst of such an immediately traumatized world? What is the church called to do and be in times of collective trauma?” 96 This is an important question that Jones raises, because collective trauma is deeply embedded within the Judeo-Christian narrative, from the tyranny of Pharaoh to the persecution of the Church in Acts.

As she notes, 9/11 brought a collective trauma upon the psyche of the United States, drawing the “nation as a whole into the trauma drama of its violence.” 97 While she doesn’t reflect on it, one is forced to wonder whether this was true for both the violence experienced and committed by the Israelites, and the persecution of the early Church. It seems clear that in the same way that America was left “on [their] couch that morning, with a sense of powerlessness that overcame palpable,” is the same story as God’s people. 98

One way to understand this theological turn of trauma for Jones is that it means that God’s people are a traumatized people who have long experienced that powerlessness, and that in some ways, our recorded stories in Scripture are part of our retelling of our trauma stories, and about how God has healed and created meaning in

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97 Ibid., 28.
98 Ibid., 29.
those voids. From the earliest days, our task has been the “telling of stories” and “recrafting imagination” in a way that is faithful to our traumatic experience and our experience of God in that rupture, something that Scripture attests to.\footnote{Jones, \textit{Spirit + Grace}, 31.}

In fact, as Jones argues, this might be one way to understand what we might term an “ecclesiology of trauma,” where “the church is called, as it exists in the space of trauma, to engage in the crucial task of reordering the collective imagination of its people and to be wise and passionate in this task.”\footnote{Ibid., 31.} In this way, the church actually serves as a creative and re-creative space that inhabits and witnesses to the ruptures of trauma as core to its being, since the story of God’s people is one of trauma. This is one way that theology in practice responds to the persistent suffering of trauma, by helping to create speech, storytelling, and language that helps not only narrate one’s own experience of the ruptured life, but also the persistence of God in that void. In fact, we actually should be actively creating and curating these spaces, an idea we will return to in chapter four, as Jones notes: “We called to be those who testify, who try to tell the story of what happened in its fullness; those who witness, who receive the story of violence and create a safe space for its healing; those who reimagine their future by telling it again—without denying the event of violence now woven into it—the story of our faith,” and I would add the story of God’s presence as well.\footnote{Ibid., 33.}

From this perspective, one of the ways that Jones approaches the question laid out earlier about theology addressing trauma, is to wonder about storytelling as “the
challenge of preaching about the cross to [people who have lived through trauma].”¹⁰²

For Jones, Mark’s gospel provides an example of this sort of traumatic storytelling, in which we remember a traumatic rupture (the Cross) and “bear witness to God’s forming grace and mercy.”¹⁰³ In this way, the shorter ending to Mark’s gospel honestly witnesses to the fear and continuing trauma of the Cross, even in the face of resurrection.

Unfortunately, Jones focus on the cross ends up spending little time with the indeterminate rupture of Holy Saturday, instead focusing on the teleological “ending” of trauma, which brings endings in relation to the present sufferings, a long standing Christian engagement with the Cross. We might even say that this is the “teleological temptation” of Christianity, which leads to the constant battle with triumphalism that even finds life in the more tenuous reading of the Cross, which Jones offers. Jones theologically probes into the limits of meaningful preaching in the rupture of trauma, coming closest when she finds the in some way the Gospel actually inhabits gaps and ruptures, that previously were experience as a “fixed and closed” system.¹⁰⁴

Instead, by coming to “the limits of language [that] leave us on the threshold of silence, we find more is needed of our pastoral imagination, of even preparing such an imagination, to be able to handle an imagined space where the power of [traumatized] emotion is acknowledged” as a space of uncertainty in a church where he have prepared sermons and liturgies marked by their certainty.¹⁰⁵ It is this uncertainty, which is one of

¹⁰² Jones, Spirit + Grace, 85.
¹⁰³ Ibid., 86
¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 96.
¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 97.
the clear theological turns that Jones identifies within trauma for pastoral identity and practice.

While we will return to this uncertainty, it is worth noting how much of a departure from normative pastoral theology this is, but yet essential to the fabric of trauma-informed pastoral theology, particularly to the practice of preaching and creating community. As Jones herself points out in her attentiveness to the trauma of reproductive trauma in *Trauma + Grace*, when an imagined future collapses, one’s ability to envision and imagine a different future is radically reconfigured.\(^{106}\) To help people regain this theological and eschatological creativity, we have to move our practice towards uncertainty, and away from triumphal certainty.

To not only live with this uncertainty, but to inhabit it as a place of necessary formation for Christian community. A pastoral theology that takes trauma seriously would understand a pastoral vocation that is interested in spaces of meaning-creation and openness to God’s creative work in the ruptures and voids that trauma opens up in the lived experience of God’s people. This is a daunting task that requires a rethinking of how/what we proclaim in our preaching that is informed by trauma, but as Jones writes, it is where we must move, as the women did:

Towards the tomb—with fear and uncertainty—and acknowledge what Mark does, that God’s gospel cannot ever be finished. Its edge is unsettling and unnerving. It brings us to the voids and chasms in our experience where gestures of grace are imagined and at long last embodied. In these voids and silences we find we are not alone: we are in a vast landscape of grace, broad and beautiful

\(^{106}\) Jones, *Spirit + Grace*, 137. Her whole section on reproductive loss, trauma, and theology is deserving of a book in of itself, but for the purposes of this work, its helpfulness is primarily around the space found after a miscarriage or abortion, while the hope of future child-bearing is present, but deeply obscured.
enough to hold all the fracturing of our lives, and in so holding us, to give us back ourselves made whole. 

And to move towards this tomb is to move away from both the Cross and the Resurrection, and back towards a different, more uncertain day in the Passion narrative: Holy Saturday.

While most of Christian theological reflection focuses on Friday and Sunday, a turn towards trauma in pastoral theology would force us to ask a new question: is there something to be found in the day between? In the rupture between Jesus’ traumatic crucifixion and his resurrection, does the day of silence known as Holy Saturday, offer insights into the Christian life and the pastoral life that have been overlooked? It would be difficult to answer no to this question if one is to take the insights of trauma seriously.

While Jones has spent most of her time at the Cross, exploring the pain that follows trauma, she never makes a move to explore Holy Saturday, which has been left for another theologian. In many ways, Shelly Rambo picks up this turn towards trauma and brings it to fullness in her work, which finds its fullest expression in Spirit and Trauma: A Theology of Remaining, in which she takes up Holy Saturday as the rupture which can serve as the space to explore trauma and theology, planting the seeds for a pastoral theology of trauma and of witnessing to the ruptures that persist.

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107 Jones, Spirit + Grace, 97.
Remaining in the Rupture

“There is a total end and there is a total beginning, but . . . what comes in between them?” asked Hans urs Von Balthasar about Holy Saturday, but he might as well been speaking about trauma.\(^{108}\) It is this day of trauma that forms the ruptured center of Shelly Rambo’s work on trauma and theology, where she focuses on “the middle [which] develops in the Christian tradition into a rich literary and liturgical landscape of the underworld . . . a more indecipherable time and place in which death and life are brought into unique relationship.”\(^{109}\)

Rambo, like Jones, seeks to answer the question of whether “theology [can] witness to this suffering that does not go away, to the storm that is ‘always here?’” To begin to answer this question, she looks to Hans urs Von Balthasar’s work with the mystic Adrienne von Speyr, one of the few sustained efforts on Holy Saturday in 20\(^{th}\) century theology. While this is a beginning point, Rambo quickly finds the Christian triumphalist drive to “develop a logic of redemption from the site of Holy Saturday [which] leads them away from a vital testimony of the middle . . . their testimony to the tensions of this day are increasingly occluded by a particular polemic and a desire to establish theological legitimacy.”

While we will return to Balthasar’s conceptualization of Holy Saturday in the next chapter, it is suffice to say at this point that Rambo is looking for a Christian witness that must be patterned “differently on Holy Saturday than it is on Good Friday.”\(^{110}\) What she

\(^{108}\) As quote in Rambo, *Spirit & Trauma*, 45.

\(^{109}\) Ibid., 45-46.

\(^{110}\) Ibid., 71.
identifies is that “the puzzle of Holy Saturday is the emergence of a form of life from death,” a reality that extends to trauma in her reading.\textsuperscript{111} It is not the death of the Son, or the triumph of the Father which can speak to this pattern of Saturday, but instead what she terms “the middle Spirit,” that is the Holy Spirit that creates a “Christian faith [that] is about living in the mystery of this strange beginning.”\textsuperscript{112}

This middle Spirit is at the core of Rambo’s theological rendering of trauma, where “the thread is fragile, easily broken” that leads between death and life. In her clearest rendering of the work of this middle Spirit and the reality of trauma, she writes:

The picture of resurrection is a beginning out of death . . . [but] is the picture of salvation an accurate one? Perhaps we plunge into the abyss instead of being spared it. We therefore need to be carried out of the fractured and disoriented space of death’s end—to be resurrected out of the space. Our beginning is the radically disorienting space of death and hell.\textsuperscript{113}

The Holy Spirit then is the one who inhabits this ruptures space, witnessing to its reality, to what remains and persists there, mainly a creative and surviving love.\textsuperscript{114}

It is this Spirit that makes a way from that traumatic rupture following Jesus’ death, bridging it by the work of the Holy Spirit in which “grace, faith, and prayers weave around this thread, strengthening it to hold the weight of those crossing.”\textsuperscript{115} It is clear that a pastoral theology must take seriously the activity of the Holy Spirit as what remains in those traumatic ruptures, together with those who stand with others there, not

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{Rambo, \textit{Spirit and Trauma}, 75.}
\footnote{Ibid., 73.}
\footnote{Ibid., 77.}
\footnote{Ibid., 79.}
\footnote{Ibid., 75.}
\end{footnotes}
as a way of triumphantly introducing love and faith in such a gap, but instead by witnessing it, not merely securing it.

In lieu of just another triumphalist rendering of Christian theology, trauma has pushed Rambo to articulate the “ever-greater Spirit of the middle, the fruit of love forged through death. This middle Spirit rewrites an understanding of love in significant ways, attesting to a form of divine presence that is difficult to see, to feel, to touch.”116 This form of divine presence, a creative activity in ruptures and voids, was what Luther once termed God’s hiddenness in creation, an idea we will return to. Rambo makes this connection too, noting a Spirit that hovers over the abyss of creation, while in her work, “the Spirit oscillates over the abyss of re-creation and redemption.”117

The middle Spirit and Rambo’s concept of witnessing are intimately tied, and mark an important turn due to trauma theory: away from “the dialectic of death and life, and the overcoming of death by life, [which] has pervaded much of Christian theology.”118 This dialectic, which is so central to Christian theology, meets a defining challenge in trauma. Here this dialectic is shown to be false, where and when death seeps into life through trauma. This dialectic is not only insufficient, but also unhelpful in conceiving of and constructing pastoral theology and practice in the face of the “nature of death and life in the aftermath of trauma.”119

Instead, this liminal, middle space must be acknowledged consisting of trauma and Holy Saturday. It is not triumphant resurrection that we learn in this space, but

116 Rambo, Spirit and Trauma, 79.
117 Ibid., 116.
118 Ibid., 118.
119 Ibid., 114.
instead the fragile witness of death and the persistence of life there. As Rambo describes, witnessing is what is needed because “to witness trauma is a complex and disorienting process. It is a process of witnessing death and life in a radical reconfiguration. Because trauma shatters so much of what we understand to constitute life, the very definition of life is in question.”120

Even in the life of the church, Rambo’s analysis lays bare the ways in which we have failed to witness to and acknowledge these places of trauma, going so far as to reduce Holy Saturday to an expectant vigil, of which the earliest disciples of Jesus would not have experienced. Instead of a day where death has been shown to be stronger and more adept in its traumatic seepage into life than expected, the Church turns triumphant to the day that makes witnessing its darkness and silence unimportant. In many ways, the Church is no different than the rest of the world, where a “collapse of witnessing [is] at the heart of trauma.”121

The pastoral theology that drives Rambo underscores the necessity of remaining, remaining in the lives and spaces that have been ruptured by trauma, and not leaving them too quickly. To find God’s Spirit in such a tenuous place requires one to stay in such a rupture, remaining in a space that is marked by pain and suffering, in order to witness any possibility of re-creative and redemptive action on behalf of God in the face of trauma. Because in that space, as Rambo points out, is another unspoken reality, that the ruptures that are left by traumatic happenings are not simply empty, but eventually

120 Rambo, Spirit and Trauma, 25.
121 Ibid., 27.
become pregnant with possibility for new creation, not a continuance of a previous life, but something new altogether born out of death.

This is possible because Rambo interprets redemption differently, from “the middle rather than from either the death of life events.”122 In this sense, redemption is not the elimination of trauma, but a faithfulness that bears the marks of unresolved trauma. We might conceive of this as the persistence of God that allows one to remain in the aftermath of trauma, where death has exceeded the boundaries of life, and to begin to have one’s spirit and meaning remade. In trauma, we witness the love and creative grace of God when we await God’s persistent love that remains after trauma.

In the end, theology witnesses to trauma when “the promise of theology lies in its testimonial positioning instead of its confident proclamations.”123 This persistent testimony stands aware of the reality that trauma becomes a place of creation, another sort of void filled by the spirit of God, and “the would becomes the site of growth—creative, generative, and alive. This new origin . . . is a beginning that comes out of death . . . Chaos and nothingness mark the events of Holy Saturday, but the events are equally marked by the unidentifiable ‘fruit’ coming out of this wound.”124

The site of trauma becomes a place of possibility, not unlike other ruptures of apparent nothingness in the Christian story, and the narration of this story and its meaning allows for the possibility for the Spirit of God to create new life from death, yet informed and marked by the trauma. This means that any pastoral theology that takes

122 Rambo, *Spirit + Trauma*, 156.
123 Ibid., 165.
124 Ibid., 168.
trauma seriously, must take seriously the responsibility of creating space and community that witnesses, testifies, and allows for God to actively work in such a ruptured life.

The pastor in such a theology becomes a curator, not forcing traumatic ruptures upon people, but attentively caring for and keeping such spaces open when they appear, curating them in such a way that the creative and creating Spirit of God becomes witnessed, and a community becomes a living testimony to the persistence of God’s love. In this way, pastors can faithfully witness to the trauma that persists after death. And in so doing, does “the work of trauma healing, [where] the capacity of imagination is not a poetic luxury but, instead, a necessary component of survival and healing. Imagination is essential to revivification, drawing on a theological term.”

To do this work, we must first draw on resources already available to us, and so this work will now turn in that direction, continuing the work of Jones and Rambo in this chapter by exploring the site of Christian trauma, Holy Saturday, and its implications both theoretically and practically for understanding pastoral ministry and theology. In exploring its potency as a place of the unmistakable but traumatic stirrings of the Spirit in the rupture that follows Jesus’ death and before the possibility of resurrection, we will find new possibilities for a contemporary understanding of pastoral ministry.
CHAPTER THREE

THE DAY OF TRAUMA IN THE MIDDLE

What do we do with a day that has been effectively erased from Christian practice, whether corporate or pastoral? Despite the limited Christian reflection on Holy Saturday, this remains the question that haunts this chapter and has been threaded throughout this work, as well as giving life to contemporary pastoral theology that can render a witness to that which will not go away. With Holy Saturday, we find within the Christian narrative a traumatic rupture, a painful, mysterious gap that has been effectively removed from our theological imagination. And to find a pastoral theology that can live and breathe in our traumatic world, we must rediscover the potency of Saturday within our own story.

What Happened on that Saturday?

Good Friday, the day of the cross, far from being the first or second day, was “in the logic of the narrative itself, actually the last day, the end of the story of Jesus.” Indeed, it is Holy Saturday is the first day after the death of Jesus, the Jewish Sabbath ushering in anew the world, which is where we find our start. Alan Lewis reminds that there is no such pensive vigil retelling the stories of God’s salvation, “which simply waits

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125 Lewis, Cross & Resurrection, 31.
for morrow, but it is an empty void, a nothing, shapeless, meaningless, and anticlimactic: simply the day after the end.”

This empty void of Saturday gets a minimal showing in the Gospels’ recounting of those days, but because of the nature of traumatic ruptures this should be unsurprising. Yet, we should not think that Holy Saturday is all that unfamiliar to anyone who has gone through traumatic realities, as “these were anonymous, indefinite hours, filled with memories and assessments of what was finished and past; and there was no reason to imagine that an imminent triumph might render those judgments premature and incomplete.” Balthasar concurs that this is an “entirely understandable silence,” not only because of the “mourning of the survivors but, even more, because of what we know of the dwelling and condition of the dead.” If Lewis and Balthasar are correct, then how should we conceive of this traumatic, silent day? How should it be remembered and rendered? We will begin by looking at how Balthasar and Lewis themselves render it, before offering a reading of my own.

Hans Urs von Balthasar

Balthasar suggests that first, and foremost, that Holy Saturday should be remembered as an active, and triumphant day because “in order to assume the entire penalty imposed upon sinners, Christ willed not only to die, but to go down, in his soul, *ad infernum*.” And second, for Balthasar, is that Holy Saturday should be understood

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127 Ibid., 31.
129 Ibid., 164.
as a day of solidarity, where Christ becomes fully human in his descent to hell, “for all redemptive light comes from the one who was in solidarity until the end. And he can communicate it because he, substitutionally, renounced it.”

This active, triumphant Holy Saturday is where Christ is in solidarity with humanity. This exploration is regarded by “both friends and foes . . . [as] the central innovation of his thought.” Balthasar’s thinking around solidarity, a theme that Rambo explores further, is helpful when we consider the way that trauma changes human meaning and make-up, which we explored in the previous chapter. For Jesus, to be fully human then means that he must experience the trauma of human existence in its emptiness. In this way, what happened on Holy Saturday is that it is the day in which Jesus finally becomes fully human: dead, suffering and seeing the effects of a traumatic rupture all around.

This thread of thinking from Balthasar is something that should be held on to, in order to recall that Jesus’ solidarity in humanity is a core practice of a traumatic pastoral theology. If Holy Saturday teaches us a trauma-informed pastoral theology, at its core must be solidarity with those whose lives have been ruptured, but by practicing presence with and among them in the rupture, as Jesus did on Holy Saturday. In this way, as Shelly Rambo points out, we become witnesses to God’s work there, which is hidden and invisible to those are actively traumatized.

A second valuable thread of Balthasar’s rendering of Holy Saturday to pastoral theology is his rendering of the abyss of Holy Saturday and the conception of “weary

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130 Balthasar, Mysterium Paschale, 172.

love making its way through the chaos of hell.”

Balthasar understands well that the aftermath of trauma, of Good Friday, leaves a rupture, an abyss where the “effects of the Cross [cause] an abyss of deadly perdition.” In this way, trauma must take on its own shape and space in the Christian narrative, and in the practice of ministry, a space where we “guard against the theological busyness and religious impatience which insist on anticipating the moment of fruiting of the eternal redemption through the temporal passion – on dragging forward that moment from Easter to Holy Saturday.”

Unfortunately, Balthasar is besieged by his own tendency towards triumphalism. This triumphalism is due to both his mystical relationship with Adrienne Von Speyr’s visions of Holy Saturday, and his desire to see the victory reflected in the empty darkness. Triumphalism again acts to negate the power of the trauma of Saturday, when Balthasar writes:

In this respect, the dead Redeemer in the infernal Sheol does not really contemplate anything other than his triumph, though he sees that triumph not in in the shining forth of the Resurrection—for how could he who was awakened to eternal life still possess a point of contact with this chaos? —but in the one and only condition which allows such immediate contact, namely, the absolute emptying of life.

His anticipatory theology, which draws greatly on the mystical visions of Adrienne von Speyr, mitigates the trauma and nihilistic rupture of Holy Saturday, and requires a different vision, one that is weaker, weary, but radically free from Good Friday and Easter Sunday.

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132 Balthasar as quoted in Rambo, Spirit and Trauma, 57.
133 Balthasar, Mysterium Paschale, 177.
134 Ibid., 179.
135 Ibid., 172.
Despite his desire for the church “to follow at a distance,” Balthasar advocates understanding this day in a way that impels pastoral ministry and theology to take seriously this abyss, a traumatic rupture. Our preaching and our reflective ministry “should be understood as an action which plants within eternal death a manifesto of eternal life—no matter how that proclamation is made or which persons are its heralds, or what the positive, or less positive disposition of those whom the proclamation concerns.”\(^\text{136}\) This begins to point us in a helpful direction, of a pastoral theology of trauma that “can be characterized if not by way of a genuine, that is, a Christianly imposed, sharing in such a solitude: being dead with the dead God,” and being traumatized by the traumatized God.\(^\text{137}\)

Alan Lewis

If we are to practice being dead with the dead God, then we “must postpone all such triumphal, redemptive, saving thoughts and texts which might modify the original, stark, accusatory verdict of the second day. On the day after his death Jesus is no hero, savior or redeemer. He is dead and gone, convicted as a sinner, rebel, and blasphemer.”\(^\text{138}\) And with him, his cause dies and ends as a traumatic failure, leaving a blast-sized rupture in the lives of his followers. This is the argument put forth about Holy Saturday by its most recent and lucid interpreter, the late Presbyterian theologian Alan Lewis, who wrote


\(^{137}\) Ibid., 181, emphasis is mine.

\(^{138}\) Lewis, *Cross & Resurrection*, 45.
his book *Between Cross & Resurrection* while himself dying of a traumatic disease, cancer.

For Lewis, recent pastoral theology and its practice has failed because it has been unable to grapple with the traumatic depths of Holy Saturday, where Jesus “sank into an unimaginable abyss of evil and horror, to a point of measureless distance and unendurable separation from the love of God.”¹³⁹ Indeed, in the retreat into more comfortable and triumphalist readings of Holy Saturday, pastoral theology fails to properly account for the significant boundary that exists between the death of Jesus, the trauma of the disciples, and the surprise of Easter.

The question remains how to render Holy Saturday in our theological imagination, and whether we have, “even now, glimpsed the full dimensions of the crisis handing over human history on the second day.”¹⁴⁰ Until we consider the full weight of the traumatic rupture that occurs on Holy Saturday, we will be unable to understand a theological articulation of trauma that can remain with the traumatized. As Lewis writes, until “we are ready to hear that this is a story about God’s own Son, and therefore God’s own self, we can no longer shut our eyes to the terrible possibility, not that he has failed God in his death, but that in his death that *God has failed him.*”¹⁴¹

It is this failure of God that so richly haunts not only Holy Saturday, but all experiences of trauma in our midst today. And it is our inability to hear these apocalyptic endings, these traumatic openings, that keep us from the fullness of the Gospel as

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¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 53.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 54, emphasis is Lewis’ own.
expressed in that second day, and we will not be able to “until we have construed this
cold, dark Sabbath as the day of atheism. For now, the solitary sounds to be heard are
throaty cries of triumph from the word’s satanic despots, and strangulated wails of
disbelief from their indignant, disillusioned victims.”

This rendering of Holy Saturday as a day of atheism, of theological, spiritual, and
Divine failure, begins to create room for a meaningful space to answer the question that
haunts this paper: “Can theology witness to this suffering that does not go away, to the
storm that is ‘always here?’ If so, how?” For Lewis, how we begin to answer this
question with the reality that Holy Saturday is a “divine affirmation of the very persons
and realities which embody the world’s great ‘No’ to God, the living expressions of its
ugliness, destructiveness and sin.” As well as to those who experience traumatic
nothingness, ruptures of life that cannot be repaired, but instead must be inhabited. And it
must be inhabited, because the day itself is a rupture between meaning and
meaninglessness, a day of “mutual contradiction” between theism and atheism, between a
God of triumph, and a God who has died. In many ways, since the death of Jesus and
his eventual return, we have found ourselves in a continuous day of Holy Saturday, and
done all we can to escape it.

Just as importantly, “faith in God on the day when God is dead is faith of a very
different order from the certainties expressed in metaphysics; and it is faith in another
God than the distant, immutable, and omnipotent deity of theism, that supreme stranger to

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142 Lewis, *Cross & Resurrection*, 56.
143 Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma*, 15.
144 Lewis, *Cross & Resurrection*, 98.
145 Ibid., 236.
suffering and death.”\textsuperscript{146} Holy Saturday, similar to Good Friday and Easter, transforms living faith in a way as yet largely unexplored. It raises thorny questions, exposes gaps in the story and its meaning, and leaves even the most cherished theologians and hymn writers to exclaim, “God, Himself, is dead!”\textsuperscript{147}

Holy Saturday is rendered as a day of crisis for Lewis, where atheism is taken as a credible answer, where life has not shown itself victorious over death, where it appears that failure is the only conclusion to be drawn. In this way, Lewis is in agreement with the earlier arguments of this work in which Holy Saturday is rendered as a traumatic rupture contained within the Christian narrative. Saturday is not simply a day of absence, as it has been often portrayed within Christian theology and liturgy, but is instead a day of deep meaninglessness, of a void opened up. As Lewis writes:

> On the one hand, we can scarcely believe that when evil is triumphant and God is far away, there, precisely there, in the depths of human wretchedness, mortality, and sin, even there God is present, a victim of that godforsakedness and thus able to bring the godless and forsaken out of their haplessness and isolation into a new territory of light and joy. How, we ask, could God, eternal and immortal, righteous and holy, be in the grace beside the disgraced, the despairing, and the dead?\textsuperscript{148}

In short, God has been traumatized and the traumatic void that is opened in the aftermath has been left for the disciples to inhabit.

In renewing our listening of the actual story of the Gospel, it is clear from Lewis’ rendering of Holy Saturday, that our ears must be opened to hearing the traumatic resonance of such a day within the people and communities of our time and place, who

\textsuperscript{146} Lewis, \textit{Cross & Resurrection}, 236.

\textsuperscript{147} Johannes Rist, “O Darkest Woe,” \textit{Lutheran Service Book} #448.

\textsuperscript{148} Lewis, \textit{Cross & Resurrection}, 89.
find themselves in the ruptured, indeterminate space between Friday and Sunday, seeking a God who appears absent, and a meaning that remains elusive.

**A Midrash of Holy Saturday**

It might be better said that the ruptured, traumatic space of Holy Saturday is the universal norm of Christian experience. Not that it is a constant experience throughout our lives, but that it is the reality that we are all baptized into, into the death and resurrection of Jesus and the rupture that exists between them. It is an experience that almost no one will avoid, particularly what feels like the failure of God in the face of the death and life-altering trauma in both ourselves and others, coupled with the lasting grief and confusion that follows. Surely, this is why Fr. John Navone identifies failure and death as the “universal experience,” and in which “death, the lot of all mankind, it apparently the ultimate failure.”

In some ways, the Midrash of Holy Saturday is already written: “He descended to the dead.” Yet, it is otherwise unspeakable silence of this Sabbath day that echoes into our world. The echoes are nearly unbearable of the rupture that was opened in the disciples and Jesus’ family in the aftermath of his death. As Alan Lewis has written, by Holy Saturday, Jesus “is dead and gone . . . the price of tragic failure. He simply died, and his cause died with him, quite falsified and finished.”

For Mary, a lifetime of hopes and dreams for what her son might accomplish, and the promises that God had made to her during the pregnancy, his birth and baptism have been apparently crushed. For the disciples, whose lives have been dramatically altered, from failed students that

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150 Lewis, *Cross & Resurrection*, 45.
had gone back to their family professions, to being elevated to a Messianic mission. Now, they too are left on this Saturday with a traumatically opened, God-sized void, where the promises of God have apparently been left wanting.

The disciples are scattered, assessing the ruins of their lives and faith, as well as reassessing the meaning of these last three years, which held their hopes and dreams, and is now left as nothing. Peter and the other disciples, having witnessed Jesus’ death have returned to their homes to grieve, confused by what has happened, and have attempted to eat something as a Sabbath meal. But, they are unable to do so, because it appears that everything that they have understood the world to be and how God in Jesus was affecting it has left a void in the pit of their stomach, devoid of meaning and purpose, for which nothing can fill it. Some cry, others left too traumatized are glassed over, unable to emote anything at all. Where do they all go from this? Mary has lost her son, the disciples their Rabbi, the world its Messiah. And despite Jesus’ odd promises of a resurrection, all is now lost.

On this day in-between, the middle day, how could they know what was to come? All the ways that they would have referenced any sort of surprising victory by God have been left in shambles by this trauma. Jesus’ death has now seeped into their lives, the boundaries left unclear, the trauma leaving no part of their lives, whether individually or as a community, untouched. And now? They are left to wait, as it is the Sabbath, unable to even visit his tomb to anoint his body, or to revisit the site of the trauma, to try to make sense of all that has happened.
The Gospels recount nothing during that day, except for the machinations of the Pharisees and Pilate, and why should this surprise us? For nothingness is literally present on this Saturday, there is nothing to report, because the traumatic rupture has left an entire day without meaning, and an uncertain future waits. While in hindsight, the Gospels can confidently report that this day was simply a holding place for the eventual resurrection; the absence of a Saturday narrative betrays the trauma that has taken place, in which there is nothing to report.

As the haze of that Saturday turned into Sunday, it was not a day of anticipation for an unexpected victory; there was no recitation of the stories of salvation and a vigil of the resurrection. For Mary and the disciples, it probably felt like one long day, where time and meaning had ceased to hold their space. As Shelly Rambo writes: “Witnessing his violent death, they awaken, disoriented and filled with grief. The way ahead is not clear; they are left to make sense of their lives without him and to continue the work, accompanied by the spirit he promised to them.” Yet, how could that work continue without the meaning that was infused in it by Jesus all but gone? Even that work had been left ruptured by this trauma.

Being forced to head the tomb was both a welcome relief and a dreaded ritual that would rehash all of the despair and failure that had been internalized within their bodies and spirits. Yet, even at the tomb, more trauma and confusion await. While each Gospel recounts those post-traumatic events of Easter differently, the rupture of Holy Saturday haunts them all. Matthew recounts a sudden earthquake, an angel appearing like

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lightning, and the guards becoming “like dead men.” Luke recounts the perplexity and terror that strikes the women at the tomb, and how like many survivors of trauma, they would later have their accounts disbelieved. John recounts a post-traumatic encounter with an empty tomb that is inexplicable and the appearance of Jesus to Mary Magdalene, which she is unable to recognize. And finally, the shorter ending of Mark tells fittingly of this trauma, in which the women flee the tomb, silenced and terrorized, as “they went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.”

As Rambo insists, even on Easter, “His followers, filled with grief, were not only uncertain about this future; they were now questioning the past. His ministry had been powerful, but short. Instead of ushering in a new reality, the present seemed to be closing in on them.” In Luke’s retelling of the Emmaus story, two unnamed and traumatized disciples are returning home, despairing of what has transpired. Even after Jesus himself had come near, “they stood still, looking sad,” and proceeded to ask the unrecognized Jesus whether he was the only one in Jerusalem who didn’t know what had happened.

In some ways, our triumphant Gospel stories when read through the lens of trauma theory and a theology of Holy Saturday, reveal something else: a post-traumatic story, one that is haunted by the memory and presence of Jesus in all that occurs. Rambo

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155 John 20.
156 Mark 16:8.
157 Rambo, Resurrecting Wounds, 17.
herself suggests that “this is a ghost story, and the spirits do not seem to be contained; in fact, they seem to multiply.”\textsuperscript{159} Is it any wonder that the earliest Christians came to regard the Holy Spirit not as the comforter, but as the Holy Ghost? A real, and present Spirit of the God who had come to haunt them in the death of Jesus, but also in the surprisingly creative new life that emerged in that death?

Even after that Easter reversal, the traumatic rupture persists in the lives of the disciples as well as the body of Jesus. As Rambo writes, “the fact that the gospel narrative provides testimony to the challenges of recognizing the risen Christ underscores how difficult it is to resurrect, to come to life again,” and just how truly persistent trauma and death are.\textsuperscript{160} As Jesus appears to the disciples, and Thomas in particular, the rupture that has been opened between them is clear, as both bear the wounds of his death, Jesus in his body, and Thomas in his spirit. And even in this space, between the finger of Thomas and the wounds of Jesus, the traumatic rupture of Holy Saturday appears again. Now, as “the space between the finger and the body [as] an interpretive space in Christian theology in which the meaning of Jesus’ return is forged.”\textsuperscript{161}

Remaining within the Rupture of Holy Saturday

The clearest way to articulate this rupture in Christian theology, the day of Holy Saturday, is as another space of chaos akin to the waters in Genesis. Formless, chaotic and void of meaning, it is a persistent rupture which must be read, listened to, heard, and most of all, remained in for the full weight of its nothingness to become apparent, and for

\textsuperscript{159} Rambo, \textit{Resurrection Wounds}, 19.

\textsuperscript{160} Ibid., 9.

\textsuperscript{161} Ibid., 20.
the hovering of God in this space to be made clear. As the narratives of trauma and chaos in Scripture teach, often buttressed by God’s Spirit, is that it is not a triumphal resurrection, but “the site of violence and suffering [that] is productive. The wound becomes the site of growth—creative, generative and alive. This new origin, this new beginning, is a beginning that comes out of death.”162

It is in the remaining in this rupture that we discover the truth enumerated in the earliest stories of Genesis, and in the mysterious emptiness of Holy Saturday, that it is here where God “witnesses to what cannot yet be envisioned as life.”163 It is where we discover a witnessing and creative God, not fully revealed nor hidden, but situated in the middle of the rupture, persistently reminding that chaos and trauma do not have the last word. In this way, a theology of Holy Saturday becomes a theology, not of the cross or of the resurrection, but of the middle. It is a theology of the rupture, where we discover both God and “theological language as language that calls from the abyss, as a language that survives. It is compelling . . . not as it contains truths but insofar as it testifies to truth that cannot be contained. The promise of theology lies in its testimonial positioning instead of in its confident proclamation.”164

Remaining in these uncertain spaces of trauma means a patient testimony in which they are filled with nothingness and filled with the potential for life, in a new key. The rupture of Holy Saturday in the lives of the disciples is not so much a places of hope or expectant waiting, but of holy imagination. An imagination that is more fragile and

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162 Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma*, 57.

163 Ibid., 139.

164 Ibid., 165.
uncertain, yet faith-filled about the post-traumatic realities of life continuing on and of God’s promises within such ruptures of life.

By reading these ruptures as the places that the Christian narrative reflects on as some of the most pivotal moments of God’s redemptive and creative action in the world, we recognize Holy Saturday and its familial middle spaces as where the fullness of the divine mystery of new creation out of chaos and trauma comes to be. As Rambo beautifully articulates that in these ruptures “life becomes newly configured through a series of witnessing relationships, narrated in the farewell discourse between Father, Son, paraclete and believers. Life becomes defined in light of death, and love is birthed at this interstice.”\(^{165}\)

A pastoral theology of trauma that takes seriously the narrative challenge of Holy Saturday will begin to articulate the ways in which the remaining within the void informs the practice of ministry, in particular the “puzzling birthing process [that] is taking place in the wake of the death, and someone is there to witness it.”\(^{166}\) It must take seriously both the nihilistic reality of traumatic rupture and the surprising persistence of God to knit together a new way of living in its aftermath, as God did for both Jesus and the disciples. This is not a triumphalist approach, but one that takes seriously the meaning-making imagination of God’s Holy Spirit that hovers over chaotic ruptures of life.

Indeed, to do this means to give witness to a God who forms post-traumatic life in ways we cannot imagine. In this traumatic age, a pastoral theology of trauma reclaims the creative action of God in nothingness, pulling “the Spirit back to the territory between the

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\(^{165}\) Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma*, 139.

\(^{166}\) Ibid., 59.
death-breath and the Pentecost-breath is to acknowledge the necessity of this imaginative moment, and the importance of making visible and giving new form to what remains in the aftermath of death.”

What emerges is something altogether new, a new creation from God, a new sort of imagination that could not be previously conceived of. A confounding sort of re-creation occurs in the traumatic rupture of that Saturday, as well as in the post-traumatic ruptures of our lives. It should not surprise us then that “in the work of trauma healing, the capacity of imagination is not a poetic luxury but, instead, a necessary component of survival and healing. Imagination is essential to revivification,” and to the strange knitting together of life in the resurrection.

For pastoral theology, this means a return to the beginning, a recommitment to the space of creation in a chaotic rupture, and the God who is able to create out of nothingness. For it is in nothingness that God creates both the world and us, and it is out of the traumatic nothingness of Holy Saturday that God reconfigures the living body of Jesus into something altogether strange and new. It is to this creation ex nihilo of God, and particularly to Martin Luther’s interpretation of it that we must now turn in closing this chapter.

God’s Ex Nihilo: A Traumatic Imagination

What do we make of such a rupture that threatens us with its nothingness? How can we account for it in the practice of ministry? And how can we speak of God in that Holy Saturday space? We must turn to the testimony of the Jewish and Christian

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167 Rambo, Spirit and Trauma, 123.

168 Ibid., 123.
narrative regarding the presence of nothingness in God’s creation, and to begin to speak soteriologically of creation as a defiant act of God’s imagination in the face of trauma. God’s creation in the face of a formless rupture, both in the beginning and in the aftermath of Jesus’ death, is a defiant act because it is an act of love bound up with God’s identity.

Where there is a rupture of meaning, where life is lived post-traumatically, God must do nothing more or nothing less than create. Because where there is nothing, God creates. As Ian McFarland writes: “For, as living, productive and present, God is love and the inherent productivity of this love makes it natural that it should expand beyond the bounds of God . . .”169 It is not a triumphal creation ex nihilo, but a defiant one that cuts to the very essence of God, one that seeks to lovingly defy the forces of nothingness and trauma which seek to unravel our well-knit lives, as the prophet Jeremiah once asserted.

As Martin Luther insists, God creates in order to bring presence and meaning into the suffocating nothingness, shining a spotlight on the rupture as both terror-inducing, but also “to expose to view the crude [void], is rather like an elementary seed, but one suited for producing something.”170 In that sense, traumatic rupture must be cared for and curated in such a way that the nothing becomes, not merely grounds for the possible, but what Dietrich Bonhoeffer calls the impossible where it is “the obedient nothing, the

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nothing that waits on God, the nothing whose glory and whose existence are neither in itself nor in its nothingness.\textsuperscript{171}

Indeed, it is in death and nothingness, where God knits together a new life for Christ, and one for us as well. In the fact, it is only in this sort of rupture, the one between death and life, beginning and end, that God makes us “cemented to Christ that He and you are as one person, which cannot be separated but remains attached” to God forever.\textsuperscript{172} It is a new creation from nothing, Luther argues referencing Galatians, where we are nothing and have been created anew, where now “abiding and living in me, Christ removes and absorb all the evils that torment and afflict . . . [causing] me to be liberated from the terror of the Law, pulled out of my own skin, and transferred to Christ and into his Kingdom, which is a kingdom of grace, righteousness, peace, joy, life, salvation, and eternal glory.”\textsuperscript{173} In the rupture, we are knit into something new \textit{ex nihilo} by the God who creates.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, committed to this Lutheran \textit{ex nihilo}, is who can begin to draw our eyes to the implications of this for pastoral theology, as he echoes the language about middle spaces of rupture and trauma. For Bonhoeffer, and for us, the middle, the place of nothing and rupture, is where we must locate ourselves:

In the beginning—God. That is true if by this word God comes alive for us \textit{here in the middle}, not as a distant, eternal being in repose but as Creator. We can \textit{know} about the beginning in the true sense only by hearing of the beginning while we ourselves are in the middle, between the beginning and the end . . . Here in the


\textsuperscript{172} Martin Luther, \textit{Luther’s Works, Vol. 26: Lectures on Galatians, 1535, Chapters 1-4}, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan (Saint Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1963), 168.

\textsuperscript{173} Ibid., 167.
middle, between the beginning we have lost and the end we have lost, we know of God as the beginning only—as God the Creator.174

The starkness of Bonheoffer’s language and exposition of creation could not be clearer. Is there a better way to describe the reality of trauma, and of the rupture left in its aftermath, than “here in the middle, between the beginning we have lost and the end we have lost”?175

As Rambo insists that the middle is somehow both the crucial matter for pastoral theology, and that “the knowledge of the middle . . . was somehow missed—unseen, un-witnessed, and unknown,” we find an echo in Bonhoeffer.176 He insists that because humanity finds itself situated in this middle space, mostly unknowingly, that “nothingness, as humankind in the middle conceives it without knowing about the beginning, is the ultimate attempt at explanation.”177 In this way, both Bonhoeffer and Rambo point to an important reality of trauma, which is that it serves to reveal our human positioning in the middle, in a haunting space of what appears to be nothingness. While we live most of our lives unaware of this space, trauma can serve to reveal this reality to us. Without pastors who identify this middle space as the crucial place to inhabit, people are left with nothingness. This is because, “where we do not recognize God as the merciful Creator, we can know God only as the wrathful judge—that is, only standing in

174 Bonhoeffer, Creation and Fall, 30. First emphasis is mine, second is Bonhoeffer’s.
175 Ibid., 30.
176 Rambo, Spirit and Trauma, 111.
177 Bonhoeffer, Creation and Fall, 33.
relation to the middle, between the beginning and the end.”

We cannot understand the beginning, recreate the past, or what God intends for the future. But, Bonhoeffer argues, in the middle, in the rupture places where God’s spirit hovers over the waters, we can come to know the grace of the God who creates, recreates, and knits together anew where there is nothing. There can be no doubt that God’s imagination is a traumatic one, informed by and attentive to the ruptures all around.

It is here that we begin to discover a pastoral theology of trauma, which focuses on creation, creating, and creatures. This is very different emphasis of pastoral identity than the current existing options as outlined in chapter one, one that focuses on “the dark deep – that is the first sound of the power of darkness,” wherever it is found. Whether it is in the dark deep at the beginning, the *tehom* of the Saturday of Jesus’ passion, or the unbearable rupture of trauma that happens to so many in our world. In these places, we discover not clinicians, or professionals, but the need for those who can be attentive to the surprisingly fragile, artistic, and creative power of God’s Spirit that leads to a new creation where we are knit together anew as a person where “Christ dwells [and] pours His grace into them.”

We can now see the need for a new conversation partner for pastoral theology, one that is prepared to deal when something emerges from the encounter of God “with bodies and words entangled, fragmented, and haunted by pasts not fully known.”

Where imagination and God’s creative activity are at the center of community and

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179 Ibid., 37.

180 Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma*, 133-134.
personal experiences of faith, and is attentive to what Andy Root describes as what me must conceive as the contemporary calling of pastors: “Ministry is the curating of these places, these in-between spaces, through facilitation of locales that allow people to share in each other’s needs, to see each other as persons. No pastor has the power to create these spaces. They are spiritual; they are outgrowths of the Holy Spirit . . . we cannot force these places, but we can curate them . . .”181

And if curating is the verb for this pastoral theology of trauma, then it makes sense to put pastoral identity in conversation with curators and curatorial theory. We must find what connections we might be able to make in forming leaders and communities that are attuned to the ruptures of our world, but also to the Creator God who hovers over these places, making previously unimagined ways of living possible in the face of nothingness. That is how this work will conclude, in conversation with the curatorial, and what we will find amongst curators and the theories that inform them will surely surprise us.

181 Root, Relational Pastor, 163.
CHAPTER FOUR
CURATING WAYS OF RESURRECTING

What might it mean for the traumatic reality of Holy Saturday to be true? A reality where “the liturgical proclamation and practice of Holy Saturday must not simply be revived: it must be the focal point of the Triduum.” What if the contemporary task, as Giorgio Agamben outlined earlier, is the curation of spaces where Holy Saturday is the focal point of communities and pastoral practice? What does that mean and what are some preliminary notions on how it might be lived out? That is the focus of this concluding chapter.

It is clear from drawing on what was learned in the previous chapter that the middle space of trauma that echoes in the Christian narrative of Holy Saturday holds an essential key to practicing and leading faith in this contemporary age. Instead of a triumphant community, it must be a trauma-informed community where people “literally learn to move in the world again, rather than being paralyzed by it.” The Church then becomes the place where together with God we learn to move in this world once more.

In this sort of community, where trauma and curation frame the work, the practice and authority of ministry is not based on credentials, or on clinical skills, or even on the triumph of Easter, but instead on the God who creates out of nothing. In these curated

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184 Ibid., 123.
communities, God makes new meaning and new life out of our encounters with the ruptures of our own lives, the lives of others, and in the trauma within God’s own being through the death and resurrection of Jesus. To find the resources to do this work, trauma theory pushes us to find new conversation partners, and to reclaim the spaces within our own narrative and communities to explore its reality.

Curating Difficult Knowledge

To do this, pastors must find new conversation partners who are highly attuned to trauma, rupture, and places of encounter, and the work of creating attentive communities and institutions. Oddly, a further turn need not be made to psychotherapists, but instead to curators, who have been discovering the work of caring for spaces, communities, and encounters with “difficult knowledge” in the art world for some decades.185 In reflecting on the curated exhibit of lynching photographs from America at the Andy Warhol Museum, Roger Simon writes that the difficult knowledge conveyed isn’t merely the trauma in and of the pictures, but “what comes to the fore when an encounter provokes substantial problems in settling on the meaning and significance of the images, objects, and texts encountered within an exhibition.”186

One can hear in those words knowledge of the realities of trauma and how important it is to create, not only spaces, but also communities that contain the capacity to encounter this sort of difficult knowledge. Echoing Shelly Rambo, Simon writes that in

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186 Ibid., 12.
curating exhibits of difficult knowledge, “one can sense the spectral presence of the past commingling with the everyday surroundings and conscious (and likely unconscious) psychic life . . .This seems to result in a loss of previously secured meaning, and, concomitantly, a deeply felt set of uncertainties as to how to respond.”187 It is remarkable just how similar the language used to describe the experience of curating exhibits of art that conveys difficult knowledge is to how trauma has been described throughout this work.

This suggests that not only can trauma reappear through the mere repetition of a symbol, object or story, but that the space around it is vital for how it is experienced and interpreted. This means both a vulnerability to abuse such a space, but also the opportunity to experience this reality in an entirely new way. This offers an opportunity to realize this practice as pastoral, where these spaces can be helpfully curated and created within spiritual communities to discover the God who can be found in traumatic ruptures.

Practicing the curation of ruptured spaces is vitally important on two fronts, which curatorial theory has come to recognize. Just like the church, curators seek to make spaces that are not merely “static remembrance,” but where they can “provoke a form of witness that might substantially alter the continued existence of what it witnessed.”188 That curators have come to understand their work in museums as not static and alive with possibility suggests that they have something to offer pastoral theology. An offer that consists succinctly of this: “Such revelations are important information essential to

188 Ibid., 33.
rethinking our present and opening new possibilities for a future beyond the repetition of the forms of violence depicted.”

The *Without Sanctuary* exhibition of lynching photographs at the Andy Warhol Museum opened a space of “ethical deliberation, judgment, and the re-articulation of future conduct in the context of an engagement with and acknowledgment of a central feature of traumatic American memory.” As Kirby Farrell insists about these experiences, the reality is that “trauma destabilizes the ground of experience, and therefore is always supercharged with significance and always profoundly equivocal in its interpretive possibilities. Like traditional religious-conversion experience, it can signify rebirth and promise transcendence, or open into an abyss.” While it can feel like hidden Gnostic knowledge, trauma is a universal experience that can happen directly, and be shared indirectly through entering ruptured spaces with others, and participating in God’s meaning-making and creating found there. What appears out of all this is a need for pastoral theology that is able to curate spaces of ruptured trauma and encounter with the God who creates out of nothing are able to open a space where we can experience not only re-creation, but also the beginnings of resurrection.

In short, curating difficult knowledge like trauma and Holy Saturday enables us to create space to discover ways of resurrecting. The need in the church is not further elaboration on the triumph of the resurrection, but “a need to imagine ways of

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190 Ibid., 131.
It seems probable that our practice and understanding of ministry has understood resurrection too easily, too triumphantly. As Rambo writes:

[The] narrative of the resurrection is both consonant with trauma’s afterlife and open to a reinscription of it in Christian theology. The fact that the gospel narrative provides testimony to the challenges of recognizing the risen Christ underscores how difficult it is to resurrection, to come to life again. The testimony to the challenges of locating the body, of determining whether the body is there or not there, can be read as a sacred witness to the complexities of healing.

This indeterminacy of the resurrection, the embodiment of the traumatic rupture of Holy Saturday is a weak space, not a strong one, which must be carefully entered and cared for to encounter God’s creative power.

In a museum, curatorial theory guides curators as they bring together objects, words, pictures, sculpture, film, and more in order to create a space where a new sort of encounter with reality can occur and new meanings can be made. As we will see, this offers a path forward for a trauma-informed pastoral theology that is focused on meaning making and encounter. The echoes of art with the creativity of God is unmistakable, and can be heard loudly when “resurrection appears as an invitation to weave a new kind of body, less pure, pristine, and perfected than the resurrected body often presented in the tradition. It appears as an invitation to a multilayered witness, involving senses beyond seeing.”

Unfortunately, “this invitation . . . has been repeatedly erased in the interpretive tradition [of the church].” Instead of creating space for the creative God, we formalized

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192 Rambo, Resurrecting Wounds, 8.
193 Ibid., 9.
194 Ibid., 14.
195 Ibid., 15.
a liturgical and theological structure that completely leaves out the rupture itself. In many ways, as the church has watched trauma occur all around it, it has been like the disciples on the road to Emmaus, wondering whether the world has heard just how bad things have gotten, but unable to see the Jesus walking right along side of them. It is that difficult knowledge that pastors must curate in their communities. It is the knowledge of Jesus’ death and the invitation of resurrection into that traumatic rupture that we must find ways to explore.

Curating Trauma-Informed Pastoral Theology

As Serene Jones notes, curating spaces that are attentive to traumatic ruptures is risky. If pastoral theology ignores the lessons that trauma theory and curatorial theory has to teach, we risk “the possibility that [it] might be performed in a manner that forcefully reinscribes the violence articulated, rather than healing it.”196 Instead, using some spiritual autobiography and the curatorial theory of Terry Smith and Nick Waterlow, I intend to give a brief introduction to how curatorial theory can inform a trauma-sensitive pastoral practice.

Three years ago, my wife Emma and I were on our honeymoon in Spain, and had recently traveled north from Malaga to stay in Madrid for a week. One of the first places we visited, the Reina Sofia, easily the world’s greatest modern art museum, houses sculpture, video, photography, and paintings. The Reina Sofia is known for its curation of exhibitions that are incredibly provocative and visually stunning. Having walked through the main galleries, Emma and I were on our way out, when we noticed that an enclosed

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196 Jones, *Trauma + Grace*, 65.
space on the bottom floor had been turned into a massive, curated exhibit called *de Principio Potosí*. Seeing religious artwork teamed with what appeared to be industrial artifacts and a walking path through the exhibit piqued my interest. Later in the week, we returned to experience the exhibit in full, which we came to find, was, in the words of the curators:

The 'Andean Baroque' works presented in *The Potosí-Principle* prove that cultural hegemony is a reflection not of cultural greatness, but of violence. The exhibition uses this form of painting to investigate structural similarities between the colonialism that brought forth Modernism and the current global regime of Neoliberalism. Contemporary artists respond to the baroque images with their own works. In this way, they create a link to issues still current today, such as the role of women in colonial society or the effects of the transnational soybean monoculture on modern-day South America.197

It was an emotionally tasking experience that confronted us with the trauma of South American workers, many of whom was Christian. This rupture within their faith of structural violence, trauma and death was something that took most of our day to make it through, but what became interesting to me about it was in the aftermath of our visit. For weeks later, I felt like I had encountered both the oppressed workers portrayed in the exhibit, some sort of oppressor within myself, *and* God. This was done without coercion, but with only a vague sense of direction (a map mainly), and ability to experience the exhibit with a community. I walked away with something stirring in me, almost like God was actively creating in me through that ruptured space of experiencing the *Potosí Principle*. In some real way, my experience with the exhibit was that it was curated in such a way that I was able to experience and process an encounter with a traumatic

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rupture of someone else, from a different time and place, and found God actively creating there.

It seems clear therefore that pastoral theology and practice, in having to respond to the reality of trauma, is called to engage in the kind of curation that contemporary art curators engage in currently, in creating these sorts of spaces. The risk is worth it, because the opportunity to encounter God as Creator is essential, as Bonhoeffer reminded us, in discovering what kind of God we are dealing with who would stay with us through these middle spaces of trauma and rupture and see to weaving a new kind of life, a resurrection, out of those ashes.

One can see the importance of this middle space for theology in its echoes within other art-oriented disciplines apart even from the conceptual framework of trauma. In orchestral music, we have multiple dimensions of middle space. First, a composer produces a work of music, which is then given to an orchestra and its conductor to perform. Second, the orchestral conductor in encounter with the music, begins to discern how the piece will sound and work with the actual orchestra, while the musicians begin to learn their pieces in isolation from other instruments. The orchestra then comes to encounter a middle space, a sort of rupture in the music, with both the conductor and the other families of musicians (1st and 2nd violins, cellos, oboes, percussion, etc...), and only in this space with the conductor, the music, and each other, in the space of an orchestra hall or rehearsal space, does the music begin to come to life.

More recently, this same idea of encounter and space has come to life in the world of literature, in the field of reader-response criticism. In reader-response criticism, the text is not a stable thing to be ‘comprehended’, but is a “magical object that allows the
interiority of the mind to play host to the interiority of an(other).”¹⁹⁸ In reader-response, an author creates a text, and a book (or article, or any other written form) serves as the middle space. The reader and the text then come into this rupture, which leads to a deeply spiritual encounter of the author and of the meaning of the text, described aptly by Stanley Fish, one of the foremost proponents of reader-response criticism (and communities of response), as being “no longer an object, a thing-in-itself, but an event, something that happens to, and with the participation of the reader. And in this event, this happening…that is, I would argue, the meaning of the sentence.”¹⁹⁹

What all of these middle spaces have in common is the opening of space that is previously devoid in order for something to be created. This is precisely what curatorial theory knows that it offers pastoral theology. Terry Smith, a modern curator, writes: “The exhibition – in this expanded, extended sense – works, above all, to shape its spectator’s experience and take its visitor through a journey of understanding that unfolds as a guided, yet open-weave pattern of affective insights, each triggered by looking, that accumulates until the viewer has understood the curator’s insight and, hopefully, arrived at insights previously unthought by both.”²⁰⁰

This is clearly a pastoral insight by Smith. If we can then think of curation as a pastoral function, then we can begin to see what that might look like in practical functioning. Smith explores distinctly pastoral note, where he writes that “place making,


world picturing, and connectivity are the most common concerns of artists these days because they are the substance of contemporary being.” 201 These are the core concerns of trauma theory brought fully into practical concern: the loss of meaning, the loss of time and the loss of community.

It is my contention that what Terry Smith suggests as the reality of contemporary curating is actually the articulation of a trauma-informed pastoral theology, where meaning and time and community are fully acknowledged as central to God’s creative activity within the Church. He writes that this sort of practice is: “embroiled in time, but not bound but it; entangled with periodizing urges, but not enslaved to them; committed to space, but of many kinds, actual and virtual; anxious about place, yet thrilled by dispersion’s roller-coaster rise. It does not follow a set of rules; rather adopts an approach arising from an emerging set of [realities].” 202 This is the sort of thinking that can enliven and embody the new ways of resurrecting that Shelly Rambo insists upon.

Surfacing and situating the practice of the pastoral within “those contemporaneities that remain in darkness, untheorized, and unlived” allows us to take seriously the persistent trauma of the world while being keenly attentive to the narrative of God creating in precisely those sorts of places in Scripture. 203 We must not return to triumphalism, but instead envision our practice and our churches as “if they were studios, staging places for artistic ideas-in-formation…housing an alternative, parallel world.” 204 And it is in these studios, housing the ruptures of our lives, that the God who creates is

201 Smith, Curating. 28.

202 Ibid., 29.

203 Ibid., 55.

204 Ibid., 131.
made known. The God who can create out of even trauma and nothingness, especially out of emptiness, is the full measure of our attention. This is what it means to curate a trauma-informed pastoral theology.

The Curator’s Eye

In turning to this attitude, now deceased curator Nick Waterlow, whose final wishes were embodied in the short film, *A curator’s last will and testament*, provides a tentative but helpful way forward.²⁰⁵ In the film, Waterlow provides seven practical rules (think more like the monastic rule) that should govern curatorship, which provide a wonderful trajectory for understanding the curation in pastoral theology:

1. Passion
2. An eye of discernment
3. An empty vessel
4. An ability to be uncertain
5. Belief in the necessity of art and artists
6. A medium – bringing a passionate and informed understanding of works of art to an audience that will stimulate, inspire, and question
7. Making possible the altering of perception²⁰⁶

1. Passion

Being a pastor in a curatorial role will mean to have passion for the role of serving less as an executive, and more as a facilitator of the encounter with the Creator God. It will also require that we have conviction that encounter with these sorts of ruptured spaces is at the center of our work as pastors. Having encountered our neighbors, and encountered God’s revelation in Jesus, we are empowered by the Holy Spirit to curate

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²⁰⁵ Juliet Darling, in collaboration with Father Steve Sinn, S.J., *A curator’s last will and testament*, DVD or Blu-ray, directed by Juliet Darling, 2012.

²⁰⁶ Darling, *A curator’s last will and testament.*
these spaces as they arise, paying attention to our own narrative of Holy Saturday. This follows Bonhoeffer’s idea of vicarious personhood, in that we function as the one who brings the passion for this kind of living and this kind of understanding of how encounter happens to the world. In this way, we live as Jesus’ lived, believing that the zeal (or pathos) of God is central to the complete transformation of the world, that only through the encounter with these spaces, will new life be able to be knit from the wounds and trauma of the past.207

2. An eye of discernment

Discernment has and does mean many different things to many different people, but in curatorial thought, it means to be able to see what is needed, what questions need to be asked, and what stories need to be told. This means that our central spiritual practice, as those who facilitate these spaces, is to be praying pastors. Not private office prayer, but what Andy Root calls the “essential practice of relational ministry.”208 This is essential to our own encounters with our brothers and sisters, and with God, in these spaces because “prayer itself is a relationship; it is an action and language that articulates that we are persons who are our relationships.”209 It is through prayer that pastors are able to discern the stories and spaces that need to be seen, told, and heard, and it is how they are able to discern how best to curate encounters in spiritual communities.

207 Is. 9:1-9

208 Root, The Relational Pastor, 169.

209 Ibid., 173.
3. An empty vessel

Pastors must, in this contemporary era, be willing to be created and recreated constantly in our encounters in these ruptures spaces. This means that we establish God’s revelation through Jesus as the central spoke of ministry, and allowing the rest to be flexible and responsive to the questions and ideas that need provoking in order to best facilitate relationship and encounters. Too often we have made a set order and structure the central part of our life together, when modern art museums for years have created spaces that are empty, yet filled with presence, while being flexible and responsive to change. It means thinking of our spaces, our liturgies, and our communities as being far more like a modern art exhibition than like a historical museum.

4. An ability to be uncertain

This may be the hardest part of all of this, for pastoral ministry has been built in our modern era as religious professionals. Instead, we must move towards an understanding of ourselves that is vulnerable to the uncertainty of trauma and the fragility of God’s weaving of meaning and new life. This looks much more like the art curator, who brings a particular work to exhibit, uncertain of how people may react, or what they may take from it, yet having a vague sense of its necessity for the creation of meaning and life that can endure death. This means that pastoral ministry moves from a culture of certainty to one of risk and a permission to fail and uncertainty. This means that the pastors are no longer dispensaries of theological truth, but are the ones who facilitate the discovery of truth and depth in the encounters in middle spaces in our communities.
5. Belief in the necessity of art and artists

One of the beautiful parts of modern curatorial thought has been the return to believing in the cultural necessity of the arts and those who produce them. In the same way, during an era of waning church relevance, and even bemoaning of its existence amongst church professionals, is a recommitment to the necessity of the church as the place where we can take trauma seriously and curate space for those ruptures to be crucial to our encounters with God and one another, and the necessity of the people in these communities.

6. A medium

This also means that we must affirm that the Church, that is the gathered people of God, what Bonhoeffer calls the “newly recreated humanity,” is our medium.\textsuperscript{210} It is the place where ruptures are honestly acknowledged, where trauma is truly explored, with God and with neighbor. They are curated with praying, preaching, Eucharist, confession, service, fellowship, play, and discipleship. It also means that the Church is precisely the place, in the same way that modern curators have brought change to the art museum, when pastoral ministry must usher in a wave of change and innovation that is built around the exploration of these fragile and creatively-empty spaces. It is through these means, in the Church, which God creates anew in our midst, weaving together new ways of resurrecting.

7. Making possible the altering of perception

Though it is the last rule, it seems to me, that this is the most important. As in the encounters from my gang-related gun violence and my encounter with the exhibition at

\textsuperscript{210} Bonhoeffer, Act and Being, 121.
the Reina Sofia, the major thing that happens in trauma, is the alerting of perception of
time, meaning, and even space. As we encounter the God who creates and recreates, our
perception of ourselves, the meaning that we assign to the world, and our relationship
with God and those around us is changed.

The Pastor’s Eye

What would a pastor’s eye, echoing the work of Nick Waterlow look like? How
can we practice a trauma-informed pastoral theology? What does it mean to curate
communities of faith that are centered, as Shelly Rambo has argued, in the liturgical
reality of Holy Saturday? Here is a practice-centered proposal for such an identity:

1. Eye for trauma
2. Center the arts
3. Start over again…and again
4. Resist triumphalism
5. Belief in the necessity of people and community
6. The medium of preaching
7. Prayer - making possible the altering of perception

1. Eye for trauma

While attention to specific-occurring events of trauma is important, for pastors, it
is important to keep centered in our preaching, praying and pastoral care this central idea:

“trauma has always already occurred.”211 This means an awareness that no one is
actually free from the realities of Holy Saturday, because trauma “cannot occur by
chance, that every empirical accident or shock impairs an already or a previously

wounded subject.” The first priority of pastoral instinct should not be healing, but identifying the rupture of meaning that has presented itself in the life of an individual or a community. As Bruce Rogers-Vaughn has argued, we must understand that trauma “in a neoliberal order . . . now refers to the ordinary state of affairs rather than the exception.” Pastors must preach, study, and care in such a way that they assume trauma as the norm not as the exception.

2. Center the arts

Performance has taken the center of most of pastoral and communal worship. Whether it is pastors who perform the liturgy on behalf of the people in traditional settings, or the centering of a performing band in more modern settings, what is valued is excellence in performance, not the messiness of artistic creation. In this time, pastors must return to curating communities of creators, and of being creators themselves. This means taking seriously the responsibility of worship and other venues that can serve as empty spaces, as middle spaces, and to create material that helps guide theological meaning-making and attentiveness to God’s creative activity.

Our communities are beset by outsourcing creativity to others, whether for music, for arts, for curating spaces. Instead, we must lift up the creative life within pastoral identities and within the identities of those who participate in our communities. What would it look like for communities to have paintings, poetry, songs, and liturgies created out of the lived experience of those within a community, particularly those that are attentive to trauma and suffering?

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212 Malabou, “Post-trauma,” 227.

3. Start over again . . . and again

If trauma teaches pastors one thing, it’s that meaning and structure is constantly vulnerable to rupture that leaves the past as untenable. What if we understood this in leading communities? That every rupture is an opportunity to start over again, not to merely update what has worked in the past. In this sense, the community becomes a canvas for new creation, in which when trauma occurs or is recognized throws the past into doubt, and opens up new possibilities, however fragile they may be, in order to be created anew.

This means adopting the ability to start over and over and over again in communities, to create spaces where the past isn’t updated, but created anew. One can imagine a community, like the ones that Marlon Hall curates in Houston as the Awakenings Movement, that are designed to have limited life-cycles, ready to start over when needed. For Hall, “his innovation disrupts predictable patterns and transforms ‘junk to jazz.’”214 This would mean that churches are improvisational communities, drawing on the past, embracing ruptures, and faithfully moving into God’s provisional future. For pastors, this means a distinct change in understanding in identity, particularly in embracing disruptive and meaning-making change.

4. Resist triumphalism

As argued earlier, Shelly Rambo’s case for resisting triumphalism must be fully embraced in a culture that idolizes victory. This is what Louis Stulman calls:

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... the narrative of the winners. The images seared in the minds of many, including a good number of my students, are biblical vignettes of power and privileges of multitudes leaving Egypt as a massive military machine, walloping wicked Canaanites and occupying their land by divine decree. Afterwards, this powerhouse appoints renowned kings who erect world-class temples and palaces, leaving an indelible mark on the world.  

The church is unable to resist this impulse, because it has embraced a triumphalist reading of the resurrection, which leads to a pastoral theology, and liturgical practice that struggles to embrace weakness, trauma, and rupture.

To resist this triumphalism, we must reinvent and rethink our own use of narratives within worship and the regular life of the church, whether reading the Bible not as God’s victory, but a testimony of God’s creative action for God’s people in the face of unbelievable trauma. This means a full retrieval of Holy Saturday as a day of worship and remembrance in the practices of Holy Week and the Triduum. It is not merely a day of anticipation of the resurrection, but the day that leaves the disciples traumatized and unprepared to encounter a post-traumatized and resurrected Jesus.

This also means a more tentative understanding of the care of souls, less focused of curative methods, and more focused on meaning-making and knitting together of new life that both utilizes the old and recognizes its fundamental uselessness after its rupture. If we are to renew our practice of soul care, it must do so with an eye towards what trauma has to teach.

5. Belief in the necessity of people and communities

One of the great poisons of professionalism has been the overarching theme of pastors set up to be over and against their people and communities under their care. The amount of hostility between pastors and their people seems to be anecdotally on the rise.

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215 Stulman, “Bible as Trauma,” 2.
due to what are, surely, a variety of modern pressures. One of the things that curators and trauma theory offer is a reassessment of this reality, because people and communities are essential to both.

For the creative process, for the remaking of meaning, and for the survival of trauma, real people and physical communities are of vital importance. It is only here where the necessary encounters with God and others can take place in order for new ways of resurrecting to appear and be able to be practiced. Pastoral theology must create pastors who are committed to curating and creating healthy relationships with people and their communities.

6. The medium of preaching

Maybe no other regularly available practice of pastoral life needs to be considered in these ways as preaching. The history of preaching is complicated, but has been marked most recently by focuses on teaching and homily, yet one must wonder what a trauma-informed preaching might look like. It is my suspicion that a preaching that understands these implications would be far more focused on how we create meaning by understanding the narrative of God’s creative activity, and how we can do that together by exploring texts. As opposed to homilies that are focused on word crafting, or on expositions that are lesson-crafted, a trauma informed sermon would be focused on the intersection of ideas, meaning making, and the ruptures of our modern lives, both individually and culturally.

7. Prayer – making possible the altering of perception

While Nick Waterlow describes curators as creating spaces for the altering of perception, pastors have a Christian practice already available that is precisely designed
for the altering of perception: prayer. This may require some level of reframing about how we understand prayer and its function. Prayer is less of a needs-based asking, or even a question of prayer being answered, but something else entirely. Prayer, influenced by a trauma-informed pastoral theology, would be the means by which God alters our perception of the world. Think of prayer, under this understanding, of being like a out of tune musician tuning themselves to the rest of the orchestra or someone putting on a pair of properly-prescribed glasses for the first time.

Prayer becomes the way that we can faithfully enter into the ruptures of the world, into the trauma of other peoples lives, not by asking for God to solve them, but for the ability to see clearly what is happening, to witness to those places, and to have our own and the perception of others altered by our prayers to God. Is it any wonder that God asks God’s people to pray for their enemies and for those that have persecuted them?

**Conclusion: Curating the Eucharistic Community**

What would it mean to take these seven proposals together? To take trauma so seriously that we integrate it into the foundations of our worshipping communities? Dirk Lange is correct when he writes, “the event I name as traumatic is the Christ event. As event, it was known no in its happening but only afterward, in a moment too late.”²¹⁶ A community curated around the rupture of trauma and Holy Saturday is in fact a

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community centered on the ruptured space of the Eucharistic celebration, where “the place of commensality becomes a place of dislocation, of disrupted access.”

There are many reasons to argue for its curative centrality, as Lange does when he argues the relevance of the Eucharist for its ritual disruption of religious violence and sacrifice. But, it is the clearest presence brought forward of Holy Saturday, where Jesus is broken and poured out for the sake of the world. It is the remembrance and continual re-emergence in every time and place of the traumatic brokenness of Jesus’ body that was fully expressed during the traumatic aftermath of Holy Saturday. The Eucharist is the sacramental invocation of trauma, of the reality of Holy Saturday, because “The Christ event itself is the traumatic event. It is a rupture, a departure, but it is also a return . . . This ‘something that returns,’ breaks open the realm of understanding.”

The Eucharist not merely a remembrance, but something that we should take “absolutely seriously . . . existentially committed to them.” It is a full return of the traumatic Christ event, fully felt on Holy Saturday. As Soren Kierkegaard once wrote: “The Lord’s Supper is called Communion with Him; it is not merely in remembrance of Him, not merely a pledge that thou hast communion with Him, but it is the communion.” This sacramental and Lutheran understanding of the Eucharist as the presence of the Christ event is essential to a curating a pastoral theology of trauma within our communities.

217 Ibid., 10.
218 Lange, Trauma Recalled, 98.
220 Soren Kierkegaard, as quoted in Pound, Veritas, 157.
This is because the Eucharist is Christ present for us, and present in his fullness, including his traumatic death and post-traumatic resurrection. As Marcus Pound writes “Christ’s body manifests as the traumatic kernel of the bread, immanent to time yet that which refuses to be fully integrated into it…Christ’s body is the bread, distinct yet inextricably joined: Christ’s body is the traumatic kernel of the bread as his blood is of the wine.”

A pastoral theology of trauma must find its ground here, in the Eucharistic celebration, as the center of the ruptured space.

It is not in the triumphal resurrection, but the in striking normality of the spaces of grief and trauma that we find God creating anew, and the Eucharistic space is a ruptures space of trauma and grief. Pound agrees, writing that “we encounter God not as a mysterious force; rather we encounter God in life’s very ordinaries.”

This encounter serves to open up a radically risky, but creative space in the ruptures where time, meaning, and community have been left empty. This is because the Eucharistic celebration opens a space of what Pound terms “liturgical therapeutics,” where “the Eucharist rehearses the past, while drawing upon the futural expectations and significations of the act in the presence.”

Curating a space where the liturgical therapeutics of the Eucharist is central to a pastoral theology of trauma because it allows for God to create through the broken body and blood of Christ, a physical means of creation in the space of nothingness and trauma. This is because it allows the question that haunts and troubles those who suffer to be fully

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221 Pound, *Veritas*, 159. Emphasis original.

222 Ibid., 161.

223 Ibid., 161.
surfaced: “How could someone die for me? How could God die? And, in even greater 
surprise, how could God dies for me? Once again, the enigma of survival is posited: Why 
did I survive?”  

It is this break in the space, this rupture when God announces that “This is my 
body,” that the fullness of “this failure of meaning – with the failure of self, of the 
individual” is realized. Here, where the weight of the emptiness is felt, is the only place 
that the God who creates anew can be discovered. It is only here, where trauma and 
nothingness become more than what they are, when life is added to death, that we can 
discover this reality.

This is the God who creates ex nihilo, who like an artist with a blank space and a 
blank canvas, interprets trauma and pain and reveals meaning, depth, and beauty. Here, 
there is no material that God cannot use, no space, which cannot be transformed, no 
trauma which cannot be knit into the fabric of something new. And pastors are called to 
inhabit identities and spaces that can handle the multiplicity of ways in which 
resurrecting life appears and occurs in these ruptures. That must be our calling in learning 
from curators, who know the contours of space and time and creation.

A pastoral theology of trauma must discover these surprising ways that 
resurrection is knit out of nothingness, that life is created out of trauma, the tentative and 
fragile ways in which God makes meaning and life anew precisely in the places in which 
we seek to deny their existence because of the sheer force of their terror. In this 
construction of pastoral theology, the pastor is not the professional or the clinician but

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224 Lange, *Trauma Recalled*, 115.

225 Ibid., 123.
bears the identity as the one curating a community of ruptures and encounters with God and one another. It is a weaker identity built on a more tentative understanding of how God creates meaning and life anew.

One of the unique parts of this era is the need for a *public* pastoral theology, since so much of our trauma is experienced communally. Speaking of the trauma of police-involved shootings of young black men, Shelly Rambo writes that the future of pastoral theology depends on the ability to meet “histories of past harm [that] surface in public, there are forces operating that threaten to push them away and to make them invisible once again. When they surface, there is anger, confusion, fear, and uncertainty. The politics operating at the surface of the collective skin suggest that there are few who are equipped to discern the dynamics taking place.”

As trauma surfaces publically and communally, which is happening as this is written in the Larry Nassar/USA Gymnastics sexual abuse scandal, the ruptures space becomes a communal one. Pastors must have the necessary understanding and skill to discern the return of the traumatic in the form of a Holy Saturday in their midst.

Once equipped, pastors are uniquely situated to be able to curate the space of trauma and rupture necessary for the Holy Spirit, which hovers over new creation, giving air to its breath. As Rambo writes:

> Spirit, as memory bearer, also releases into this space, bringing truths to the surface. The life that follows is not fully determined and has yet to be given shape . . . Yet, insofar as he is received as the Christ, this body ties them to histories of suffering across time, calling them to touch across the logics that confine and divide. Breath awakens those who gather, and they reattach to their senses . . . Newly resourced in this space, they will embody new ways of gathering and

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develop new articulations of how to live. Amid the ruins, they enter the wilderness.\textsuperscript{227}

In this way that the question of how theology can witness to the traumatic suffering that does not go away, can be answered.

The communities of triumphalism must be put aside for Christian communities built around the trauma and failure of Holy Saturday, where risk and meaning-making are made central. Where we can be honest that “failure is a universal human experience,” and that “Death, the lot of all mankind, is apparently the ultimate failure. [As] it raises questions of God’s existence, his goodness, and the possibility of new life.”\textsuperscript{228} Only here, where the fullness of trauma can be felt, can we come “to participate in the fullness of humanity embodied in Jesus.”\textsuperscript{229}

It is my hope that an upswing in awareness and knowledge of trauma theory will serve to deepen a pastoral identity that can adequately deal with the ruptures that living as a human in a fragile and often feels like a violent and random world inevitably brings. To find new conversation partners like curatorial theory can only enliven our thinking about how we care for and organize our communities and our worship in ways that our fully honest about the painful realities of the world, and less prone to a sanctified suffering or a triumphalist attitude.

Most of all, it is my prayer that thinking about trauma and ruptures and curation allows pastors to perceive the darkness of the contemporary time, not for our own gain, but so that we might see better those who are lost in that darkness. To be leaders in the

\textsuperscript{227} Rambo, \textit{Resurrecting Wounds}, 107.

\textsuperscript{228} Fr. John Navone, \textit{Triumph Through Failure} (Homebush: St Paul Publications, 1984), 19.

\textsuperscript{229} Ibid., 21.
way of Jesus “who do not allow themselves to be blinded by the lights of the century, and so manage to get a glimpse of the shadows in those lights, of their intimate obscurity.”

The church and its leaders, tempted by the triumphal promises of Easter, have been too quick to leave those who are languishing in the empty, yet creative space of Holy Saturday. Here we find victims of war, poverty, racism, sexual abuse, and random tragedies, for which our only answer has been: Sunday is coming. Maybe it is time for our answer to be: we will remain with you on Saturday, we will witness the darkness and trauma, and we will wait until God creates what is next.

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230 Agamben, *What is an Apparatus?*, 44.
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