

Re-Membering Redemption:
Bearing Witness to the Transformation of Suffering

by

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Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Theology
in the Divinity School of Duke University

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ABSTRACT

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Abstract

My subject is the redemption of profound suffering. I begin with the presumption that there is no suffering beyond the redemptive reach of God's grace. Drawing on insights from a number of academic disciplines, as well as on a wide variety of literary accounts of profound suffering, I consider the impact of the suffering of interpersonal violence on the formation of individual identity. I frame identity-formation in temporal terms, considering the impact of suffering in each temporal dimension: past, present, and future. In considering the past, I focus on the nature of memory, and argue that the memory of suffering resides in the body, soul, and mind, continually shaping the individual, and that a theological account of memory, therefore, cannot be reduced to cognitive recall. I also suggest that the integrity of the memory of suffering is often a casualty of suffering. In considering the present, I turn to an account of community which I argue is, likewise, an integral element of individual identity. I show the ways in which suffering, and the memory of suffering, continues to isolate those who have suffered. Next, I consider the future, and suggest that the anticipation of the future shapes both the memory of the past and the experience of the present. The memory of past suffering, I argue, threatens to obliterate the future in a way that can be devastating to present identity. I suggest that all three temporal dimensions are not only integral to identity but also embedded within one another. And I argue that, in light of the formative nature of suffering, the redemption of the individual necessarily includes the redemption of each temporal dimension. I suggest that there are specific ecclesial practices which develop habits of right vision, making this redemption evident such that the profound suffering of the past can be re-membered as a witness to God's redemption.

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Introduction

The Central Question

Can all things be redeemed? Or, are there some situations of suffering that are simply so horrendous as to be beyond the reach even of the power of God's redemptive touch? Is it possible for the memory of suffering, especially suffering at the hands of other human beings, to be so painful, so horrific, as to be beyond the hope of redemption? If not, is there any chance that such suffering can be redeemed in this lifetime? Or, if all suffering can ultimately be redeemed, does the memory of suffering have the power to block even the most inchoate experiences of redemption now?

In the fall of 2011, nine-year-old Zahra Baker, a cancer patient with a prosthetic leg, bright blue eyes, freckles, and a huge grin, disappeared from her home. Her stepmother was arrested and accused of her murder. Over the course of several days in October the sights and sounds of search helicopters became oddly commonplace in her small community. Zahra's body had been dismembered and the parts scattered across several local rural areas. As the story of Zahra's death and dismemberment became public, so did a history of past abuse – black eyes, bruises, a child rarely allowed to play with other children and routinely locked in a room for hours, perhaps days, at a time.¹

For Zahra, redemption is now coterminous with salvation. But what if Zahra had survived her childhood? What if Zahra had lived through the years of trauma and abuse? What about the thousands of Zahras in the world – those who suffer untold violence, but rather than being condemned to death as a result of that violence, are condemned to live

¹ Zahra lived – and died – not far from where I live. The story of her death, dismemberment, and the abuse leading up to it, dominated the local news media for several months in the midst of my working on this project.

with its memory?² Is there any chance of surviving such violence and experiencing redemption *in this lifetime*?

What this Project Is

The claim of this project is four-fold. First, human identity is inherently temporal. Second, the experience of profound suffering, as a temporal experience, has a formative impact on identity.³ Third, God is actively at work in the world making *all* things new. (This claim necessarily means that suffering *can* be redeemed; that there is no suffering, no memory of suffering, which can ultimately overpower the redemptive work of Jesus.) And fourth, that the redemptive work of Jesus is evident, if only in occasional glimmers, in even the most profound situations of suffering. That it is evident does not, however, necessarily mean it is immediately visible. Redemption, I suggest, is a particular type of revealed knowledge that can only be seen by one who has been trained to see. The community of the church has been gifted with particular, concrete practices which shape the imagination of disciples such that they can see, and are therefore called to bear witness to, this redemption. Secular therapeutic practices help individuals learn to cope

² Though I am not limiting this study to incidents of child abuse, it is precisely such situations that often pose the greatest questions of redemption – in part due to the inherent vulnerability of children, and in part due to the crucial role of childhood in the formation of identity. Because what constitutes child abuse legally varies from state to state, and because child abuse, both physical and sexual, is notoriously even more under-reported and under-recognized than adult domestic and sexual violence, it is impossible to say with any certainty what percentage of children are presently being abused, let alone what percentage of adults today experienced abuse as a child. Statistics suggest, however, that an average of five children in the United States die – like Zahra – as a result of abuse per day and that, nationwide, there are more than three *million* instances of abuse allegations severe enough to require intervention of state child protective services per year – which suggests that the number of children who survive such abuse is astronomical. *National Children's Alliance Statistical Fact Sheet*, 2010.

³ I begin also with the presumption that the formative experience of suffering is a past-tense event – recognizing that the questions are radically different in on-going situations of violence and abuse.

with the memory of suffering; by contrast, ecclesial practices train both communities and individuals to see its redemption.

In this project my claim is that remembering the past with an imagination shaped by the promise of the future actually allows suffering to be re-membered as Christians learn to view and imagine the past from a different perspective. And it is such a way of remembering that turns the memories of the past into a witness for the future. Such an understanding must take seriously the *reality* of memory and yet not envision memory as an ultimately defining power because it takes more seriously the ultimate reality of redemption.⁴ I suggest that it is *in* the remembering of the past that it is possible to witness the redemptive hand of God, transforming memory from a burden of the past into a gift of grace, and the promise of a future over which the painful memories of the past have no power. The remembering of suffering is transformed into remembering redemption.

John Howard Yoder claims that all history is doxology. Doxology is more than praise: “It is a way of seeing; a grasp of which end is up, which way is forward.”⁵ Yoder understands history to be rightly told only through the lens of the resurrection of Jesus. To remember doxologically is to remember “in terms dictated by the knowledge that a once slaughtered Lamb is now living.”⁶ By extension, I would add that all memory is doxology. The memory of profound suffering, like any other memory, is now to be re-

⁴ In *The Politics of Jesus*, John Howard Yoder says that the present not only leads us to the future but that the present is, itself, only intelligible insofar as it participates in God’s eschatological promises. (John Howard Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus: Vicit Agnus Noster*, 2nd ed. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994), 241.

⁵ John Howard Yoder, “To Serve Our God and to Rule the World” in *The Royal Priesthood: Essays Ecclesiastical and Ecumenical* (Scotsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1998), 129.

⁶ *Ibid*, 128.

remembered through the lens of the knowledge that the world is moving from Resurrection to Parousia. And this knowledge – which always comes as revelation – means that suffering must not be forgotten in order to be redeemed, but that it must be remembered doxologically.⁷

Remembering redemption rather than forgetting suffering is compelling theologically, ethically, and pastorally. Memory is an integral part of human identity. Therefore, theologically, any account of redemption must include the redemption of the most horrendous of memories. Put quite simply, if memory is not redeemed, the individual is not redeemed. An account of redemption which omits the worst of memories is an account of a god whose power is severely limited. Ethically, if Iris Murdoch is correct in asserting that we only act in a world we can see, and if Karl Barth is correct in asserting that redemption is an objective reality independent of our apprehension, learning to see the redemption of God as the ultimate reality is the *primary* ethical act for a Christian. Pastorally, I suggest in chapters 2-4 that it is only the promise of redemption as an eschatological reality – and the recognition of that redemption now, even if only in fleeting glances – that is able to adequately address the damage of suffering.

What this Project is Not

Though this project is primarily a claim about the nature of redemption, I am not offering a theory of the atonement, nor am I offering a new perspective on traditional

⁷ Contra Miroslav Volf's claim that there are some memories which are simply so horrible as to be irredeemable. For Volf the memory of suffering is antithetical to the notion of heaven to the extent that the memory of suffering limits the eternal experience of joy. Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion & Embrace* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1996), chapter 3. The claim of this project is that there is no suffering which is irredeemable. Therefore, rather than limiting joy, the memory of suffering *is transformed* into the memory of redeemed suffering – which is an altogether different type of memory.

atonement theory. I do not attempt to explain *why* or *how* Jesus' life, death, resurrection, and ascension are redemptive; I begin from the theological presumption that they are. So, rather than trying to explain redemption, I assume it – even in the midst of the most profound situations of suffering. Consequently, rather than trying to prove redemption, I offer what I hope is a compelling case for learning to see and to recognize redemption in situations of suffering, while remembering that redemption is always both a mystery and a gift, and never a dissectible theorem.

Throughout this project I make extensive use of the social sciences, including psychology; however, I make no attempt to offer a therapeutic model for responding to situations of suffering. This project is not intended as a replacement for legitimate therapeutic work which may be helpful to those who have experienced, and been subsequently shaped by, profound suffering. Rather, I acknowledge the contribution the social sciences make to an understanding of human identity, while likewise recognizing their limits in understanding, or even recognizing, the eschatological reality of God's redemptive activity in the world.

Suffering is not a monolithic experience. In chapter one I do offer a brief typology of suffering, but this project is not an attempt to consider every type of suffering and the ramifications of various contributing factors to questions of redemption. Such is simply beyond the scope of this, or any single, project. My focus is solely on individual situations of suffering which have been caused by human violence. However, even within this considerably narrower scope, the varying faces of suffering defy any attempt at a comprehensive treatment. Thus I make no claims of having comprehensively

considered every conceivable form suffering may take, nor the infinite variety of shapes redemption may take.

Though throughout this project I take the ontological reality of the church for granted, this is not a study in ecclesiology. Nor is this a study in sacramentology. I speak at length about a number of ecclesial practices, each of which I presume is situated within the context of a community which is always already formed by the constitutive Christian sacramental practices of baptism and Eucharist. Similarly, I make extensive use of ecclesiological language – speaking, for instance, of agency and identity, hope and desire – with the presumption that such language is only rightly understood as an inherent part of the grammar of church.

Method

Temporality is at the heart of this project. This is so in large part to reflect the reality that created human identity is experienced temporally. Suffering, of course, is also a temporal experience. And, redemption is a temporal reality both in that it is experienced *in* time and in that it takes place *through* time.⁸ Thus, the primary theological chapters (chapters 2-4) are laid out in a temporal manner: past, present, and future, respectively. Each of these chapters has a similar structure. I begin by drawing from the corresponding discipline (psychology, sociology, and philosophy, respectively) in order to shed light on various aspects of human identity. I then consider the ways profound suffering affects identity within this dimension. How, in other words, does

⁸ The Gospels, as well as the letters of Paul, speak of salvation in all three temporal senses – salvation is past tense, present tense, and future tense. Salvation and redemption are not strictly coterminous. For the purposes of this project, *salvation* is intended as an exclusively eschatological event whereas *redemption* is intended as freedom from the bondage to past situations of sin and suffering in the form of new life; it is our participation in that eschatological event now.

suffering shape identity in relation to memory, community, and vocation? The claim of each chapter is that the experience of suffering forms – or rather *de*-forms – identity in unique but predictable ways within each temporal dimension. I then consider the theological implications of this de-formation before turning to a consideration of the role ecclesial practices have in making visible the redemptive work of Christ within the life of the individual.

Another methodological note concerns my use of narratives. I use previously published narratives, both fiction and non-fiction, in order to honor the contingency of suffering. That is, by relying on a variety of published accounts, I cannot simply manipulate the narrative in order to make it say what I want it to say. This reflects the element of givenness inherent in the experience of suffering. I have deliberately sought out narratives of seemingly intractable situations of violence and suffering. Thus I have framed the whole project with a narrative from Toni Morrison – *The Bluest Eye*.⁹ In the prologue I summarize Morrison’s novel, focusing particularly on the suffering of young Pecola. I do this to set the stage for the remainder of the project, by highlighting the degree of suffering with which I am wrestling. I use similarly horrific stories of violence and suffering to begin each chapter. These are drawn from a variety of sources; they are both fiction and non-fiction, and include accounts of adults and children, both male and female. This use of narratives is both illustrative and analytical. There is no way to abstract suffering or redemption from the very concrete situations in which they occur; narratives, therefore, provide an indispensable context for discussing suffering and redemption. Narrative has the ability to universalize suffering while simultaneously

⁹ Toni Morrison, *The Bluest Eye* (New York: Washington Square Press, 1972).

particularizing it. That is, there is no one story that can embody *all* possible situations of suffering and redemption, and yet every story of suffering and redemption potentially creates a space for viewing other situations of suffering from a new perspective.

Outline

I begin with a prologue in which I frame the project by offering an account of a situation of horrific violence and suffering – the story of young Pecola Breedlove.

In chapter one I offer a definition of the terms *suffering* and *redemption* as I will use them. I begin with a consideration of suffering. Suffering is not a monolithic entity. I suggest that experiences of suffering can be classified as one of four types: redemptive, educative, creaturely, and profound. I argue that it is profound suffering – the suffering inflicted by human cruelty – which presents the greatest threat to the narrative integrity of both individual and communal identity, and consequently presents the greatest challenge to the notion of redemption. I then turn to a consideration of redemption, in which I suggest, following Barth, that redemption is an objective reality, regardless of its apprehension. Redemption is the promised new creation of which Isaiah speaks. Prodded by David Kelsey's question of what difference Jesus makes for redemption *now*, I suggest that even the most profound situations of suffering can be, and are being, redeemed, and that this redemption can be witnessed, even in its partiality. I then suggest that redemption can be witnessed in its three interrelated but distinct dimensions of redemption (narration, incorporation, and vocation) which can be mapped onto the temporal experience of identity. Finally, I suggest that there are particular ecclesial practices which work to shape communities and individuals such that they are enabled to see glimpses of the redemption of the memory of even the most profound suffering.

Chapter two begins with an exploration of the interplay between memory and identity. Building on the insights of the field of psychology, I demonstrate the permanence of memory in relationship to its power to form identity. I then show the unique ways profound suffering is remembered, and how this, in turn, embeds suffering within the identity of the individual. One of the most significant results of such suffering is a loss of narrative agency. Those who have suffered profoundly often lose the ability to narrate their lives coherently because of the collision of narratives suffering introduces. I further argue that contemporary therapeutic models offer coping skills for living with the memory of suffering, for learning to narrate suffering in its incoherence, rather than redeeming these memories by being enabled to re-situate the narrative of suffering within the larger narrative of God's redemptive activity in the world. I end the chapter by suggesting that two practices in particular – lament and repentance – make possible the transformation of memory necessary for, and integral to, the narration of a new, coherent story.

Chapter three recognizes the communal nature of identity. Using the work of contemporary psycho-social identity theorists, I show the ways individual identity necessarily exists within a complex web of relationships, past and present, apart from which there is no individual. In this chapter I show the various ways suffering isolates individuals from the very communities by which they are constituted. The isolation of suffering, of course, begins in the past, at the time of the suffering, but the primary problem of such isolation is its continuation into the present, often long after the event of suffering itself. Because there is no individual self apart from community, and because suffering damages communal relationships, suffering diminishes the very core of one's

identity. Thus the redemption of communal ties is a constitutive part of any notion of redemption of the self. Finally I suggest that, whereas the individual body is the locus of suffering and suffers the resultant isolation from social bodies, incorporation into the communal body of Christ through the embodied practices of anointing and friendship offers a glimpse of redemption.

In chapter four I make the somewhat counter-intuitive suggestion that individual identity now is as dependent upon the *future* as it is upon the past and present. To support this claim I rely on Paul Ricoeur's account of time and narrative in order to develop a theological account of identity that suggests that identity is both retroactive (reflective of past and present experiences) but also anticipatory (reflecting anticipated future experiences). That this is possible is both an eschatological and teleological claim which grounds human identity in the promise that we are becoming who we are ultimately called to be in and through the resurrection of Jesus. Suffering, however, damages the capacity to imagine the future – leading to either the impossibility of imagining the future or imagining an impossible future. I argue, therefore, that the redemption of the memory of suffering requires the reception of a future story made possible by the narration of the memory of suffering from within the community of the body of Christ. I look specifically at forgiveness and bearing witness as ecclesial practices which open the future. This future dimension of redemption is embodied in the reception of the vocation of bearing witness *not* merely to the memory of the profound suffering of the past *but even more* to the memory of the transformation of the life of one who has suffered profoundly. As such, the narration of the suffering of the past is no longer merely one of past burden, but of a past, present, and future gift of grace because it

is the redemptive activity of God, not the suffering of the past, which is ultimately definitive of identity.

Finally I include an Epilogue in which I return to the story of Pecola and ask the question of what it might look like for her to experience redemption. In order to address this question I engage in an act of theological imagination in which I suggest three divergent possible scenarios for Pecola's adult life in which redemption may be glimpsed in varying degrees.

Summary

This project is not an attempt to prove the reality of redemption. Rather, it is an attempt to illuminate its mystery. This is not an exercise in theodicy; it is not an effort to explain suffering or to exculpate God. Rather, it is both an assertion and an illustration of God's gracious presence in the midst of the most profound situations of suffering. My hope in this project is not to offer a logical proof, in the absence of incontrovertible empirical data, that all suffering is, in fact, redeemed. Rather, my hope is to contribute to the church's ability to see rightly, even in the midst of the most horrific situations of suffering, the very redemption which God has promised is the ultimate reality such that – in, with, and through those who have suffered profoundly – the church may bear witness to this redemption.

Prologue

The story of Pecola Breedlove is one of unremitting suffering.¹ Pecola is an eleven-year-old girl growing up in Lorrain, Ohio in the midst of the Great Depression. Her father, Cholly, is a heavy drinker, prone to violence. At the beginning of the story, Cholly sets his family's house on fire. His drinking leads to frequent and violent altercations with his wife, Pauline. Violence is, in fact, routine in Pecola's world. Her older brother, Sammy, deals with the violence by frequently running away – sometimes for months at a time. Pecola, however, “restricted by youth and sex, experimented with methods of endurance.” (38) Her primary means of endurance in the midst of her parents' bouts of violence is to will herself to disappear. While lying in bed she methodically commands her body to disappear, one body part at a time, working her way up from her fingers and toes. And she almost succeeds, but, “try as she might, she could never get her eyes to disappear.” (39)

Much of the story, in fact, focuses on Pecola's eyes. She is convinced that she is an ugly child and that her ugliness is the root cause of the violence in her life. Pecola becomes enamored of Shirley Temple and decides that, if she only had blue eyes like Shirley Temple, she would be beautiful and loved – and the whole world would, in fact, look more beautiful. Blue eyes become a symbol, for Pecola, of everything that would make her world a safer and happier place. “It had occurred to Pecola some time ago that if her eyes, those eyes that held the pictures, and knew the sights – if those eyes of hers were different, that is to say,

¹ Toni Morrison, *The Bluest Eye* (New York: Pocket Books, 1972). Subsequent citations are referenced parenthetically in the text.

beautiful, she herself would be different.” (40) Eyes that looked different would, she reasoned, actually see differently.

One spring Saturday afternoon Pecola is home alone when her father returns home drunk. He sees Pecola washing dishes in the kitchen, and he is overcome with a variety of emotions. He is simultaneously moved and revolted by her smallness, her vulnerability, and most of all, the way she appears so lonely and unhappy. “The clear statement of her misery was an accusation.” (127) Cholly crawls up behind Pecola, catching a foot she has raised to scratch the back of her other leg. This throws the girl off balance; Cholly catches her and gently lowers her to the ground. He fluctuates between what he experiences as feelings of overwhelming tenderness and a violence borne of hatred and fury. He rapes his daughter on the kitchen floor. By the time he is finished, his daughter is unconscious. “Cholly stood up...Again the hatred mixed with tenderness. The hatred would not let him pick her up, the tenderness forced him to cover her.” (128-29)

When Pecola’s mother, Pauline, returns she finds her daughter still unconscious. “[W]hen the child regained consciousness, she was lying on the kitchen floor under a heavy quilt, trying to connect the pain between her legs with the face of her mother looming over her.” (129) The reader later discovers that Pauline does not believe Pecola’s account of what happened. And her response is to beat Pecola savagely. Pauline is not the only one to blame Pecola; other women in the community suggest that she might “carry some of the blame” (147)

if for no other reason than that she did not – as far as they know – attempt to fight him off.

Pecola becomes pregnant as result of this rape, but the baby is born prematurely, and does not survive. Pecola is then raped a second time by Cholly before he runs away. Pecola, who has from the beginning of the story conflated her desire to have blue eyes with a desire to be loved, and whose only understanding of pregnancy is that it has something to do with being loved by a man, suffers a mental breakdown in which she convinces herself that the reason she is now shunned and isolated in the community, the reason others will no longer look her in the eyes, is because she has finally gotten the blue eyes she has always wanted and everyone is spitefully jealous. As the story ends we are told, “The damage was total.” (158) The violence which Pecola has suffered is so overwhelming, so profound, as to suggest that there is simply no hope for redemption, no future for Pecola that is not always already determined by the suffering of her past.

1. The Meaning of Redemption

“The meaning of redemption is precisely that we do not have to be our history.”
-Flannery O’Connor¹

The primary claim of this project is that there is no situation of suffering so profound as to deny the possibility of redemption, that even the most horrendous situations of suffering can be redeemed – albeit often only partially – through God’s grace beginning here and now. Furthermore, my claim is that the practices of the church offer a glimpse of the promised eschatological redemption now. This claim is not based on a naïve denial of the profundity of suffering, but on the theological conviction that God’s redemptive imagination is sufficient to redeem even the lives of children like Pecola.

In this chapter I set the stage for the project by carefully articulating what I will mean when I speak of suffering. I suggest that there are varieties of suffering and it is the most profound cases of suffering, stories like Pecola’s, I am interested in considering because, insofar as it is the purpose of this project to explicate how such a story may be redeemed, it is necessary to focus on those stories most likely to be regarded as irredeemable.² I then shift my focus to questions of redemption. I suggest that

¹ Flannery O’Connor. Letter dated 31 October 1956. (Flannery O’Connor collection of letters to Betty Hester, box 1, folder 2, Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Books Library, Emory University).

² This is, in a sense, analogous to Elijah’s demonstration of YHWH’s power to the priests of Baal. Elijah challenges the priests to make sacrifice to Baal and call fire down on the altar. When Baal does not reply, Elijah mocks the priests, suggesting that perhaps their god is asleep or has wandered away from them. Then, Elijah makes a similar sacrifice on an altar to YHWH but has the altar drenched with water first, such that there is a trench of water around the altar. Only after the altar is saturated does Elijah pray to YHWH and “then the fire of the LORD fell and consumed the burnt offering, the wood, the stones, and the dust, and even licked up the water that was in the trench.” (1 Kings 18:20-39) Elijah’s point in going to such extreme measures in preparing the altar was to illustrate that any fire was, indeed, an act of YHWH as there is no other god capable of such a demonstration of power. Similarly, the choice to focus on situations of

redemption cannot be restricted to the promise of life after death, but is necessarily a question of healing *now*. I suggest that there are three crucial dimensions to redemption: narration, incorporation, and vocation. Finally, I turn to a consideration of the concrete ecclesial practices which are vehicles of God's redemptive activity in the world, and, at the same time, lenses through which situations of profound suffering can be seen anew.

1.1 What is Suffering?

In this section I consider the meaning of suffering. I begin by suggesting that suffering generally falls into one of four categories: redemptive, educative, creaturely, and profound. I suggest that it is profound suffering which poses the greatest questions of redemption – questions both pastoral and theological. In order to explain why this is so, I explore experiences of profound suffering and demonstrate the connection between psychiatric “trauma” and a theological definition of suffering. Finally, I discuss what I refer to as the logic of suffering, a logic which presumes the impossibility of redemption.

Suffering can be classified as one of four different types. The first category is the suffering that is often thought to be redemptive. It is “when you suffer for doing good.” (1 Peter 3:17) This is the suffering Luther refers to as one of the marks of the church.³ The story of this sort of suffering is found in accounts of the church's martyrs, beginning with the stoning of Stephen in Acts 7. Such suffering is understood to be an expected

profoundest suffering is to suggest that the redemption of such situations is never a matter of time healing all wounds or of even the best of human therapeutic intentions and interventions, but is always evidence of the power of God's redemptive love.

³ Mary E. Hinkle, *Signs of Belonging: Luther's Marks of the Church and the Christian Life* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2003), chapter 8.

part of faithful discipleship, and is often considered something of a badge of honor.⁴ It is because such suffering is earned through a sacrifice of self for the sake of the Gospel of Jesus Christ that suffering is often spoken of as being itself redemptive.⁵ It is the suffering which St. Paul writes is both productive of hope and evidence of the activity of the Holy Spirit. (Rom 5:1-5)

The second category of suffering is that which is often thought of as educative or character-building. This is the suffering that results from one's own sinful actions; in a sense this suffering is self-imposed, contingent upon the actions of the sufferer, even if suffering is not the intended outcome. This self-inflicted suffering is of the same sort as that which Israel experienced in and through the Babylonian exile. It is "self-inflicted sorrow...that *need not have been*."⁶ And though such suffering may or may not be rightly understood as divine retribution – that is a question for another study – such suffering is often considered under the broader theological category of justice rather than

⁴ See, for example, Acts 5:41: "As they left the council, they rejoiced that they were considered worthy to suffer dishonor for the sake of the name." See also 2 Thessalonians 1:4-5.

⁵ There is a clear tradition of the church which speaks of such suffering as redemptive. This seems to me to be theologically problematic. It is better, I think, to recognize that it is *not* the suffering that is redemptive, but Jesus. Suffering for Jesus' sake may indeed be the calling of a Christian, but to conflate one's own suffering with the redemptive work of Christ seems troublesome. Regardless, *that* such suffering is thought to be redemptive does *not*, however, mean that it is to be sought out. Martyrdom, though having a rather complex history within Christianity, is to be accepted by the faithful, but not sought out. For more on martyrdom see Elizabeth A. Castelli, *Martyrdom and Memory: Early Christian Culture Making, Gender, Theory, and Religion* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004.). Nancy Pineda-Madrid illustrates the role a misguided glorification of martyrdom continues to perpetuate suffering for vulnerable groups, particularly poor women of color, in Nancy Pineda-Madrid, *Suffering and Salvation in Ciudad Juárez* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011).

Roman Catholic teaching understands any suffering, not just that which results from persecution for faithful discipleship, to be redemptive insofar as it is offered up in union with Christ's sufferings. See *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Liguori, MO: Liguori Publications, 1994), §1505.

⁶ Samuel Wells, *Be Not Afraid: Facing Fear with Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2011), 50.

redemption. Such suffering is sometimes understood to be an educative form of discipline.⁷

A third category, what I refer to as creaturely, might be thought of as the suffering of finitude. It is the ways in which human beings suffer because they experience finitude as an obstruction, as a reminder that they are creatures, and not the Creator. Finitude has to do with vulnerability of both body and soul. This would include the suffering of illness and of the heartbreak of damaged human relationships. Sometimes very difficult and painful things just happen – a parent develops Alzheimer’s disease, a child is born with Cystic Fibrosis, or love is lost – and human beings suffer in body, spirit, and mind. Such suffering is sometimes explained as having been a necessary way of accomplishing God’s inscrutable will. This third category is also where suffering as a result of human clumsiness would fall. This is where I include suffering which occurs as a result of careless words spoken, as well as of unintentional, non-violent acts which cause pain or grief for others. The reality of lived experience as embodied creatures in a fallen world means that there are times when the fragility of human existence is experienced more poignantly than others. This fragility is experienced as a type of suffering.

Created finitude is not limited to the vulnerability of humanity, but to all creation.

Therefore, this is also where the suffering as a result of various weather-related catastrophes would fall. Susan Nelson Dunfee refers to this created finitude as

⁷ See Hebrews 12:7-11, for example. Though at times such suffering is imaged as a warning for others. For instance in the fifth chapter of Acts Ananias and Sapphira sell a plot of land and lie to the church about the proceeds and are immediately struck dead. Clearly neither Ananias nor Sapphira learned much from their suffering, but the community did, “and great fear seized all who heard of it.” (Acts 5:5) In his healing miracles Jesus, at times, appears to associate sin and suffering, equating healing with the forgiveness of sins. For example, when Jesus heals the paralytic Jesus’ equates the healing with the forgiveness of sins. (Matthew 9, Mark 2, and Luke 5) However, in speaking of the eighteen who are killed by the tower of Siloam he refuses any direct calculus between the two. (Luke 13: 1-5) Likewise, in the Gospel of John Jesus refuses the equating of blindness with sin. (John 9:3)

“ambiguous creation.”⁸ The implication of such an expression is, however, that it is necessarily built into the fabric of creation rather than a result of original sin. Perhaps a more helpful image is Karl Barth’s reference to the “shadow side” of creation.⁹

There are some experiences of suffering, however, which defy any of the above categories. They cannot be attributed to any action on the part of the one suffering – neither in the positive sense of evoking suffering due to one’s faithfulness, nor in the negative sense of bringing about punishment for sin – and they are experiences of suffering, often profound suffering, which cannot be attributed merely to finitude. This is the kind of suffering that Israel experienced in Egypt.¹⁰ It is the suffering of oppression and violence, the suffering of hatred and abuse. Such situations can be neither explained nor justified as educative, character-forming, or redemptive. And to regard them as a necessary dimension of finitude, or to attribute them to the inscrutable will of God, is a distortion of the Gospel.¹¹ These situations of suffering constitute the fourth category –

⁸ Susan Nelson Dunfee, “The Sin of Hiding: A Feminist Critique of Reinhold Niebuhr’s Account of the Sin of Pride,” in *Soundings* 65, no. 3 (Fall 1982).

⁹ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, ed. Geoffrey William Bromiley and Thomas F. Torrance (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1975), III/3, 50.

¹⁰ Wells, *Be Not Afraid*, 49. Wells uses the images of Babylon and Egypt to draw a distinction between suffering that is, in a sense, self-inflicted, like the suffering of Israel in Babylon when Israel willfully turns away from God. The suffering of Egypt, however, is not, in any way imaginable, Israel’s fault. There is simply no way to blame Israel for the vulnerability which results in the suffering of Egypt. Wells points out that God’s grace is experienced differently in light of whether or not the suffering is that of Babylon or of Egypt. The suffering of Babylon is met with God’s forgiveness; the suffering of Egypt, with healing.

¹¹ Such suffering is often explained as a result of free will, though the so-called free will defense is not without its own set of problems. For an overview of, and argument for, the free will defense argument see Alvin Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1977). For a compelling argument against the free will defense see Kenneth Surin, *Theology and the Problem of Evil* (New York: Blackwell, 1986) and Stanley Hauerwas, *Naming the Silences: God, Medicine, and the Problem of Suffering* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1990).

the suffering of human cruelty.¹² The focus of this project is on this final category of profound suffering which results from intentional or willful human cruelty¹³ – the sort of suffering that may tempt some, if not to deny God, to desire to “respectfully return him the ticket.”¹⁴

Rather than categorizing suffering by type, in her essay “The Love of God and Affliction” Simone Weil speaks of what she sees as the constitutive dimensions of suffering: physical, psychological, and social.¹⁵ When all three exist concurrently Weil refers to the suffering as affliction. This distinction is helpful insofar as Weil suggests that any one element experienced in isolation is not only more easily overcome, but is less likely to endure in the soul of the sufferer. The suffering in only one arena of life is made bearable by wholeness in the others. Physical or psychological suffering can be made bearable by the support of a loving community. And even social suffering can be bearable for one who is well in body and soul. But for one who suffers physical and psychological distress in the absence of community the suffering becomes acute, it becomes, in Weil’s terms, an affliction. Weil’s observation is important for this project in that it illustrates the totality of the suffering of my fourth category of profound

¹² The distinction between the suffering of human finitude and the suffering of human cruelty is by no means absolute. There is, in fact, often an element of human cruelty – or at least human hard-heartedness – which contributes to the suffering of human finitude, as it is those who are already most vulnerable in society – the poor, the elderly, the sick, and young children – who are most often also the victims of human cruelty.

¹³ I recognize the complexity of intentionality. Humans have a remarkable capacity for self-deception and are often only semi-aware, at best, of intentions. Much human cruelty can be masked by a belief that the intentions behind the act are, in fact, good. However, in this project I will restrict my focus to the narrower category of cruelty which is knowingly and willfully inflicted.

¹⁴ Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov: A Novel in Four Parts* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1922), 258.

¹⁵ Simone Weil, *Waiting for God*, ed. Joseph Marie Perrin (New York: Perennial, 2001), 67-82.

suffering. There is no dimension of one's life or being that remains unaffected by such suffering.

To further consider the significance of the totality of the experience of suffering, it may be helpful to distinguish between *immediate* suffering in one dimension, which might aptly be called *injury*, and the *damage* of suffering which abides in the heart and soul sometimes long after the initial injury to the body has healed. The key to distinguishing between injury and suffering is context. An *injury* is the harm done to the body of a human person without consideration to the manner in which the harm was done. An injury is, in a sense, a merely pathological concern. A broken arm is a broken arm and needs only to be set properly. Suffering, however, takes into account the damage done by the circumstances in which the arm is broken. An arm that is broken while participating in one's favorite sport is quite a different thing than an arm which is broken in an attempt to protect one's child from the flying debris of a tornado. And an arm that is broken in a car accident is quite different altogether from an arm broken in the midst of a violent assault. Though the injury remains essentially the same and requires the same medical treatment in response, the concomitant suffering will vary drastically, from essentially no lasting damage to the extreme damage associated with traumatic injury.

A way to illustrate this distinction further is in terms of the remedy for the suffering.¹⁶ The nature of an injury – whether physical, psychological, or social – is such

¹⁶ For more on addressing and overcoming suffering see Dorothee Sölle, *Suffering* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975). Sölle divides suffering into three phases. The first is one of "mute suffering" in which the sufferer is unable to give expression to the suffering. The second is a stage of lament in which the suffering is expressed, sometimes in little more than cries of pain. This stage, however, is critical because Sölle suggests that it is only in lamenting suffering that the sufferer can begin to envision that circumstances might be different. And the final stage is one in which the sufferer seeks to change the situation causing the

that it is often something which may be cured, by which I mean that when the injury is remedied the injured person is restored to a previous healthy state. A broken arm, once it has been set, will, in time, show no evidence of having ever been broken. It will, assuming it is set correctly and in a timely fashion, be as good as new; it will be as if the injury never happened. Suffering, on the other hand, may well leave a wound that defies cure. The injuries which result from a weather-related disaster, car accident, or violent assault will ordinarily merely require the healing of medical treatment. Whereas an injury allows for a cure in which a previous state can be restored, due to the extensive nature of suffering, healing cannot simply restore a previous state; suffering such a wound changes the being, the very core of the identity, of the sufferer. Because of the all-encompassing nature of woundedness, especially when the wound has been intentionally inflicted by another's cruelty, there is no undoing of suffering, no way to return to a previous state as if the suffering had never been. Healing, therefore, has to refer to a *new* state of wellness, of shalom, of new creation. Such healing is the result of the work of redemption.

Due in large part to the amount of discussion and focus on Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) over the past decade or so, talk of trauma has become more common not merely in the therapeutic realm, but in popular literature and conversation as well.¹⁷

suffering. I find Sölle's breakdown of the phases of suffering to be helpful and instructive, and to some extent they will guide my thinking in this project. However, for Sölle the onus of alleviating the suffering is primarily on the sufferer, and God is understood to be a powerless participant in our suffering. While affirming God's presence in human suffering and with the sufferer, I want to suggest that God's very presence *is* the power to heal the suffering. The onus for change is not on the sufferer but on God, and to a lesser extent, on Christ's body on earth, the church.

Trauma, as used in the field of psychiatry, has a specific meaning which does not include every instance of suffering. Trauma is defined by the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders IV* (henceforth referred to as the *DSM*) as “experiencing or witnessing an event that involved actual or threatened death or serious physical injury to oneself or others and to which the traumatized person reacted with intense fear, horror, or helplessness.”¹⁸ Trauma was previously defined by the American Psychiatric Association in the *DSM III* as “an overwhelming event that was outside the range of usual human experience.”¹⁹ The current language has been changed in large part because of a recognition that trauma is actually within the range of usual human experience for a significant portion of the population.²⁰ However, in speaking of the suffering of trauma I will hold onto the sense of trauma as “outside the range of usual human experience,” as regardless of the statistical normalcy of the experience of traumatic suffering – no matter

¹⁷ Though I will not be using “trauma” in its medical or psychiatric technical sense, insofar as trauma necessarily results in wounding, not mere injury, the following works on trauma study inform my thinking on the importance of considering context in relation to injury and suffering: Serene Jones, *Trauma and Grace: Theology in a Ruptured World* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009); Shelly Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma: A Theology of Remaining* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010); Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996); Cathy Caruth, *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995); and Judith Lewis Herman, *Trauma and Recovery* (New York: BasicBooks, 1997).

¹⁸ *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders: Dsm-Iv* American Psychiatric Association. (Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Association, 1994-98), 309.81.

¹⁹ *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders : Dsm-Iii* American Psychiatric Association. (Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Association, 1987), 236.

²⁰ Herman, 33. According to the 2010 Center for Disease Control (CDC) report, nearly 20% of all women in the United States have been raped while 36% of women and 29% of men have been victims of intimate partner physical domestic violence. See C.C. Basile M.C. Black, M.J. Breiding, S.G. Smith, M.L. Walters, M.T. Merrick, J. Chen, and M.R. Stevens, *The National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey: 2010 Summary Report*. What such statistics suggest is that at least a third, perhaps as much as one-half, of the United States population has experienced, or will experience, traumatic violence at some point in their lives – problematizing the defining of trauma as something outside the statistical norm of human experience.

how statistically normative trauma may be or become – to speak of it as normal is a denial of the intended goodness of God’s creation.²¹

Examples of trauma per the *DSM (III and IV)* definition include, but are not limited to: war, torture, physical assault, sexual assault, child abuse, and kidnapping. In speaking of suffering I certainly include experiences of trauma, but do not intend to be limited by a technical understanding of trauma.²² An event does not have to be traumatic in a technical sense - there does not, for example, have to be a perceived threat to life - in order to provoke intense suffering. Suffering, like trauma, is, to some extent, a matter of perception. This suggests that suffering is experienced in very particular ways. For the purposes of this project suffering will refer to:

intense and enduring pain of a physical, psychic, or social nature, resulting from the violent actions of another human being, the memory of which is disorienting or disintegrating of personal identity, destructive of social bonds, and crippling of the individual’s capacity to imagine a future unbounded by the past.

Though I do not think it is necessary for all three elements (physical, psychic, and social) to be present for suffering to be profound, I do think that profound suffering in any one aspect will necessarily lead to suffering in the others. However, I think there is little at stake in trying to draw a fence around what is or is not profound suffering as this too easily leads to a contest of comparative suffering which is counter-productive on

²¹ The suggestion that trauma is normative risks the implication that it is, therefore, an intended part of the created order. This is, of course, the logic that Hume refuted in his dictum that an ought cannot be derived from an is. Aside from, and of considerably greater theological import than, the logical flaw of such a suggestion, however, is the recognition that such goes against the scriptural witness that God created the world good and desires, not trauma and suffering, but abundant life for all of God’s creatures. That profound suffering may be statistically within the realm of the normal does not imply that it is within the realm of God’s desires.

²² That is, there are instances of trauma - events such as car accidents or violent storms - which are not situations of suffering for the purposes of this project.

every level imaginable. If an event is experienced and remembered as an intensely painful experience of suffering, and if this memory of past suffering poses a threat to the narrative coherence of one's life story, it is, for the purposes of this project, suffering. The key question, for my purposes, is less one of determining what is and is not suffering for another person, but of the damage done by suffering, and how this impacts the experience of redemption in this lifetime.²³

Though in speaking of intentional harm I will be speaking exclusively of physical violence, this is in no way to diminish the suffering of emotional abuse or neglect. It is, rather, to suggest, with Elaine Scarry, that physical pain is inherently incapacitating in a way that emotional pain may or may not be, as well as to suggest that where physical violence exists, suffering is necessarily physical, psychic and social.²⁴ It is possible for suffering to be psychic or social without being physical, but insofar as physical suffering is willfully inflicted by another it will necessarily also be both psychic and social.²⁵ Also, I will not work to disentangle sexual and physical violence; sexual violence is inherently a form of physical violence, whether there is physical injury or not. Sexual violence is an

²³ I am concerned with not delineating too carefully between what is and is not suffering because I am wary that such attempts to determine some minimal criteria for suffering lead all too easily to a culture of comparative suffering which serves no positive purpose. Though it seems foolish to suggest that there are not gradations of suffering, some suffering is qualitatively more pernicious than other suffering, a perceived hierarchy of suffering does nothing to help one learn to see God's redemptive activity in the midst of suffering and can instead become quite a distraction.

²⁴ Elaine Scarry notes that physical pain trumps all other as, "Physical pain is able to obliterate psychological pain because it obliterates all psychological content, painful, pleasurable, and neutral." Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 34.

Similarly, Leonard Shengold claims that child abuse is a form of "soul murder." Leonard Shengold, *Soul Murder: the Effects of Childhood Abuse and Deprivation* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1989).

²⁵ Illness, though physical, is not necessarily suffering per my definition. Because it is not intentionally inflicted, illness does not necessarily include psychic or social suffering. It is, in fact, quite possible for situations of illness to be experienced in ways in which there is little or no psychic or social suffering, and perhaps even in ways which bring about psychic or social healing.

exploitation of vulnerability by a person in a position of greater power – whether that power is exclusively physical or not.

Theodicy is the attempt to explain suffering, to determine suffering's cause. The book of Job is perhaps the most oft-referenced scriptural story of suffering. In the story Job's friends try to make sense of Job's suffering by determining a root cause – the sin that would make the suffering make some semblance of sense. There is a presumption that such suffering must have a root cause and that such a cause can be discovered. That suffering is perhaps even deserved. Further the assumption seems to be that if the cause of suffering can be discovered, it can be remedied, alleviating present suffering and preventing similar future suffering. However, David Burrell claims that using the book of Job to find meaning for suffering is misguided because, he insists, the key exegetical point of Job is that in the midst of inexplicable suffering Job speaks *to* not *about* God.²⁶ The witness of Job – and the greater witness of Scripture – is that God is present with humanity in suffering, that God's response to human suffering is not explanation but relationship.²⁷ Situations of profound suffering like that of Pecola cannot be explained. Or, rather, no explanation offers any justification or redemption for the suffering. As Pecola's nine-year-old friend, Claudia, says, "since *why* is difficult to handle, one must

²⁶ David B. Burrell, *Deconstructing Theodicy: Why Job Has Nothing to Say to the Puzzle of Suffering* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2008). Though neither the book of Job nor the project of theodicy are the focus of this study, Burrell's insight is an underlying conviction of much of what follows.

²⁷ Similarly, Kenneth Surin argues that the entire enterprise of theodicy is theologically unsound. He argues that theodicy is, at heart, an attempt to explain suffering so as to exculpate God. Rather than defending God, who needs no human defense, the faithful response to suffering is conversion, turning again to the one who continues to draw us into relationship. Kenneth Surin, *Theology and the Problem of Evil* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1986).

take refuge in *how*.”²⁸ But how is cold comfort at best. This project is not an exercise in theodicy. I am not trying to explain or justify suffering, but will instead be narrating suffering. But I will narrate suffering not to glorify suffering but to suggest that the narration of suffering is not ultimate. Because God chooses to be present in its midst, suffering is not the end of the story.

Profound suffering does not occur in a vacuum. That is, such situations of acute, profound suffering are often the foreground of situations of chronic suffering. Pecola’s environment was a crucible for suffering. Pecola is born, as an African-American girl, into a world of both racism and sexism. The message that she is ugly – in large part because of her race – and that her appearance is of primary concern – because of her gender – is a message she receives from adults, black and white, from the time of her earliest memories. That Pecola equates her experiences of domestic violence with her eye color is a reflection of the relatively peaceful lives she believes those in the white community enjoy.

Her parents have both suffered considerably in their own lives. Pauline has a lame foot and has felt isolated since moving to Ohio from Alabama as a young adult. Though she has moved into a predominantly African-American neighborhood, she feels most isolated from other African-American women. Pauline is aloof at home – so much so that her children call her Mrs. Breedlove. Pauline creates something of a fantasy world for herself, only really coming alive while in the home of a white family whose house she cleans, a house in which she feels more at home than in her own.

²⁸ Morrison, 9.

Cholly was quite literally thrown out with the trash by his mother immediately after his birth. He was rescued and raised by his great aunt who witnessed his disposal. The aunt beats Cholly's mother, who then runs away. Cholly's father, likewise, has run off even before Cholly's birth. One of Cholly's formative young adult moments, and a moment which cemented his hatred of women, was when two white men found him in a field with a woman whom he loved. It was his first sexual encounter and the men humiliated him, forcing him – at gun point – to continue while they watched. Rather than hating the white hunters for his humiliation, he turned his hatred toward “the one who bore witness to his failure, his impotence.”²⁹ Cholly's anger and hatred consume him and he, in turn, consumes copious amounts of whisky.

When Cholly and Pauline marry they are, at first, happy. But both quickly find themselves feeling trapped – Cholly with material family obligations he cannot begin to meet, a situation which furthers his sense of humiliation and contributes to his escape in alcohol. And Pauline in a life of martyrdom, a life where her sense of identity is predicated upon her acquiescence to the demands and violence of a drunk husband. It is into this world – a world already consumed by alcohol and violence, by prejudice and poverty, that Pecola is born. That Pecola is violently raped by her father, and consequently savagely beaten by her mother, is traumatic enough to raise questions of suffering and redemption. But it is significant that this acute suffering of violence is the foreground of an environment steeped in suffering. It is precisely such situations as that of Pecola that I will address in this project.

²⁹ Ibid, 119.

However, several examples I use are drawn from resources which address one-time attacks, particularly sexual assaults. That this is so reflects the availability of published material more than it does the intention of the project. Because the most intractable situations of suffering are the ones which most call into question the possibility of redemption, my theological attention has been primarily focused on situations of prolonged physical violence – situations such as child abuse, domestic violence, and state-sponsored torture – which are in many ways the acute foreground of a background of chronic suffering. There are, of course, many similarities between damage done by the suffering of such long term violence and by single attacks of violence. The difference is primarily one of extent of damage – what happens once, as horrible as it is, in a rape, may be a regular occurrence for those in ongoing abusive situations.³⁰ The negative of being forced to rely to a large extent on isolated cases of primarily stranger violence is that I fear I may unwittingly contribute to the mistaken notion that situations of profound suffering are rare instances of violent actions perpetrated by strangers whereas in fact the vast majority of such suffering occurs in homes at the hands of spouses, parents, and hitherto trusted friends.

Such profound suffering is pernicious by virtue of its own internal logic. The logic of suffering is predicated upon the belief that suffering is one's telos, that what has been always will be, and that what ought to be is, in fact, what is. Such a logic

³⁰ Octavio Paz problematically posits "A 'long-suffering' person is less sensitive to pain than a person whom adversity has hardly touched." Paz goes on to suggest that women, through long-suffering, develop a degree of impassivity which renders them more like men – a state of being clearly advocated by Paz. In addition to the patently obvious problematic portrayal of gender norms, Paz's argument is problematic in its suggestion that acclimation to suffering evidences a degree of protection from suffering. As I discuss in chapter 4, any acclimation of suffering is, itself, a form of suffering. See Octavio Paz, *The Labyrinth of Solitude: Life and Thought in Mexico* (New York: Grove Press, 1962), 38.

necessarily assumes that the past defines the future – that history is, indeed, “just one damn thing after another.” Moreover, the logic of suffering suggests that the sufferer is rightly defined by the suffering, that there is a moral calculus, an element of proportionality to suffering, and that the suffering one experiences is, in fact, one’s due. Such logic often entails a category error. That is, profound suffering is accepted under the guise of redemptive or educative suffering. Or it is accepted as a necessary, albeit unfortunate, aspect of God’s inscrutable will. Redemption is presumed to be ruled out by the very logic of such suffering. What I want to suggest, however, is that the Christian story of God’s redemptive and creative love working in the world both refutes and subverts suffering’s logic.

1.2 What is Redemption?

That I began this chapter with suffering and now turn to redemption may appear to suggest that insofar as suffering is the theological problem, redemption is the answer. What I am actually suggesting, however, is that redemption is the reality that suffering interrupts and is often presumed to obscure or even deny. It is my claim that redemption is ontologically prior to suffering. Suffering is a disruptive contingency that is experienced as potentially negating the possibility of redemption. In this section I define what I intend by “redemption” as it is used in this project. There are any number of images of redemption found in the Scriptures as well as in the Christian tradition throughout the centuries.³¹ I focus on two images in particular: liberation and new life. First, following Karl Barth, I suggest that redemption is, in fact, an objective reality. I

³¹ For more on the various images of redemption see Brenda B. Colijn, *Images of Salvation in the New Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2010) and David A. Brondos, *Fortress Introduction to Salvation and the Cross* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007).

focus on the image of liberation in this discussion, suggesting that redemption as an objective reality has a wide scope which entails liberation on a cosmic, a communal, and an individual level. I then focus on the image of new life. In order to discuss how redemption is new life I suggest that the objective reality of redemption does not render it abstract, but that it is always necessarily particular, dependent upon the contexts which cry out for redemption. Finally, in order to consider redemption as a particular and contextual reality, I focus on individual situations of profound suffering and suggest that there are three dimensions to the new life of redemption: narration, incorporation, and vocation.

1.2.1 Redemption as Objective Reality

It is the underlying premise of this project that God is, indeed, redeeming all things, making all things new. And that this redemption is happening now, albeit not in the entirety of the promised eschatological redemption. That there is nothing – no circumstances, no actions, no persons – beyond God’s redemptive reach is the primary claim which underwrites this entire project.³² As such, redemption necessarily extends to every aspect of creation which is marred by sin and violence – this includes situations of even the most horrendous suffering. This project is predicated on the presupposition that redemption is an objective reality, that God is, in fact, at work in the world, that Jesus *is* Lord, and that Jesus will indeed wipe away every tear from every eye. As such,

³² Though I am not concerned in this project with questions of universal salvation, the claim that redemption is an objective reality is, indeed, a universal claim. That Jesus is Lord and that God is redeeming all things are not contingent claims. As will be apparent, it is mistaken, I believe, to equate redemption with a geographical and temporal conception of heaven as some other time and place to which a select faithful few will escape the trials and tribulations of these age and world. Rather, redemption is God’s way with and in the world. It is God’s continued choice to reconcile creation with God.

redemption is not dependent upon human experience or knowledge or sight. As Barth says, “It does not even need to be seen by us.”³³ That it can be witnessed and experienced is pure grace, but the deeper reality of redemption is not dependent upon such experiential knowledge. Barth holds that redemption cannot be reduced to a possibility; it is not an experience, but a reality, because it is an event – the event of Jesus Christ.³⁴ “The truth of our existence is simply this – Jesus Christ has died and risen again for us.”³⁵ Insofar as the event of Christ’s life, death, and resurrection is an objective reality, so is redemption. Redemption lies within the “for us” of Jesus.³⁶

That this is so, however, is far from self-evident. There is a profound tension in the writings of the New Testament, in the history of theological reflection, and in the lived experiences of Christians, between the “now” and the “not yet” of redemption. That is, having been baptized into the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and having received the gift of the Holy Spirit, Christians rightly speak of salvation, of redemption, as an event which has already happened. However Christians continue – as does the rest of creation – to live in a world which is experienced as anything but redeemed. This experience of the not-yet of redemption is the labor pains of which St.

³³ Barth, *CD* IV/2, 296.

³⁴ Barth, *CD* IV/1, 547; III/2, 586; IV/3 1050. Barth understands this event of Jesus not in the sense of a past historical event like that assumed by the various atonement theories but as an ahistorical event. See Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, ed. E. C. Hoskyns (London: Oxford University Press, 1933).

³⁵ Barth, *CD* II/1, 167.

³⁶ The suggestion that redemption is an objective reality is *not* the suggestion that because God has acted there is nothing left to be done. It is rather the recognition that the fulfillment of God’s promise is contained within the promise itself. As I discuss more fully in chapter 3, Jesus *chooses* to work in the world through his body, the church. The church, therefore, plays a significant role in giving shape to redemption.

Paul speaks.³⁷ This tension of an inaugurated but not fully realized eschatology is one of proleptic anticipation.³⁸ The Christian claim is that an event that occurred in the past (the Resurrection) and will be completed in the future (the Parousia) governs the reality of the present. This tension is one that neither can, nor ought, be resolved this side of the Jesus' return.

An overly realized eschatology – the claim that the event of Christ's Resurrection has procured redemption and now must merely be lived into – is one in which there is no space for honest and faithful mourning of the experiences of sin and suffering. On the other hand, an overly futurist eschatology – one which downplays the reality of Christ's Resurrection – is one in which redemption is too easily sentimentalized or perhaps altogether abandoned. The church necessarily lives always in this time between the times, expectantly awaiting the fulfillment of the promise which has already been realized *in* the act of the promising because the one making the promise is God. This enactment, however, "is never such as to diminish the expectation of its future coming...Its presence, here and there, now and then, in occasional acts and encounters of Jesus, is understandable only as the first glimmers of the coming dawn."³⁹ In the meantime, the time between the times, the redemption of sin and suffering remains promised and

³⁷ "We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies." (Romans 8:22-23)

³⁸ For a comprehensive overview of theological approaches to eschatology and an argument for eschatology as proleptic anticipation, see Hans Schwarz, *Eschatology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000).

³⁹ Richard Bauckham, "Reading Scripture as a Coherent Story," in *The Art of Reading Scripture*, ed. Ellen F. Davis and Richard B. Hays (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), 162.

initiated, but only realized in part. Any conversation about redemption, therefore, must recognize this tension and the poignancy such tension entails.⁴⁰

That redemption is a reality, in and through the event of Jesus, necessitates the concomitant, and often overlooked, recognition of the sheer enormity of the scope of redemption. Insofar as redemption is God's continued way of being with and in the world it is a necessarily cosmic reality. Yet redemption cannot be abstracted "to the promise of a maximally positive experience for all one day."⁴¹ Redemption *is* experienced. It is embodied – this is the claim, after all, of the Incarnation – in Christ, God assumes humanity in all of its vulnerability to suffering for the sake of redemption. And this embodied redemption takes place in particular communities and very particular individual situations and lives. The scope of redemption is necessarily simultaneously cosmic, communal, and individual.

1.2.1.1 Cosmic

In the eighth chapter of the letter to the Romans, Paul speaks of the whole creation both being in bondage to sin and decay, and longing for redemption.⁴² In fact Paul seems to equate the longing for redemption of creation with the longing for

⁴⁰ I recognize that Barth's claim that redemption is an objective reality achieved in the event of Jesus has the potential to be interpreted as an overly realized eschatology – a claim that redemption now is merely the inevitable outworking of an eschatological reality. That this is possibly so does not, however, mean that it is necessarily so. If I am reading Barth correctly, the claim that redemption is an objective reality is a recognition of both God's sovereignty and good will. That redemption is *not* self-evident is a denial of an overly realized eschatology. Clearly the kingdom of God is not yet fully realized. My appropriation of Barth's understanding of redemption as objective reality is both a statement of faith and hope even (perhaps especially) in the midst of situations of profound suffering which seem to render such faith and hope naïve at best.

⁴¹ Rowan Williams, *Wrestling with Angels: Conversations in Modern Theology*, ed. Mike Higton (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007), 264.

⁴² Romans 8:19-23.

redemption experienced individually. Paul's writings reflect the reality that things are amiss in the world – in all of creation, not merely within the moral world of human activity – and further, Paul's writing witnesses to his understanding that the Gospel is the announcement of God's intention, in fact of God's action, of setting things right. Though Paul certainly recognizes the poignancy, the fatality, of human sin, he also suggests that the overwhelming damage of the fall is of a cosmic rather than merely individual scale. "The *root* problem lies not in our sins, but in the power called the present evil age, for the present evil age has the strength to enslave us, indeed to enslave us all...The salvific verb, then, is not 'forgive,' but rather 'snatch out of the grasp of.'"⁴³ The tragedy of human existence is not that we sin but that we are enslaved to the powers of the present evil age. That we sin is merely the human symptom of a cosmic problem.

Paul speaks of this divine intervention in apocalyptic terms. But to describe what he means by apocalypse Paul uses the verb *ercomai*, "to come on the scene."⁴⁴ This image is not of an unveiling of something that has been present but hidden all along, but is instead an image of an alien-type invasion. The apocalypse of Christ is not a revealing of the Jesus who had been waiting patiently in a closet for just the right moment before he opened the door and yelled, "Surprise!" Instead, it is a cataclysmic cosmic invasion of divine power that dramatically alters the state not only of humanity but of the entire cosmos. Redemption, then, can neither be merely a return to an Edenic state nor can it be

⁴³ J. Louis Martyn, "The Apocalyptic Gospel in Galatians" in *Interpretation* July (2000), 253-4.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

reduced to exclusively individual terms.⁴⁵ Instead, Paul shows that this apocalypse is nothing short of God bringing into existence a new creation. It is crucial to recognize that the new creation of redemption is *not* instantaneous, but is something that God *is doing* because of what God has done.⁴⁶ For Paul “the present evil age has not been simply followed by the new creation. Nor do the two exist in isolation or, let us say, at some distance from one another. On the contrary, the evil age and the new creation are dynamically interrelated... by the motif of invasion.”⁴⁷ Thus, we are now in the position of watching and waiting for the completion of the invasion we know and have experienced as having already begun. Apocalyptic redemption is, in effect, this rescue from the intractable cosmic bondage to sin which inevitably results in situations of suffering.

1.2.1.2 Communal

The cosmic condition of sin consequently reverberates through human communities. Humans are inherently relational creatures. Because human personhood is predicated upon relationship,⁴⁸ sin is “a violation, perversion and refusal of those relationships.”⁴⁹ Beings-in-relationship is a significant dimension of what being created

⁴⁵ That redemption cannot be reduced to individual terms does not, however, imply that redemption cannot be experienced on an individual level.

⁴⁶ Douglas Campbell similarly argues that the correct reading of Paul is apocalyptic. For Campbell the significance of such a reading is that it sees salvation primarily retrospectively. That is, salvation *has* happened. God *has* acted decisively in Jesus. The emphasis is on the saving work of Jesus as it has already occurred. Douglas Atchison Campbell, *The Deliverance of God: An Apocalyptic Rereading of Justification in Paul* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009).

⁴⁷ J. Louis Martyn, *Theological Issues in the Letters of Paul* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1997), 99.

⁴⁸ This claim is the basis of chapter 3.

⁴⁹ Matt Jenson, *The Gravity of Sin: Augustine, Luther and Barth on Homo Incurvatus in Se*. (New York: T & T Clark, 2006), 2. Jenson argues that the Augustinian/Lutheran understanding of sin as being the state of

imago dei means. But the condition of fallen humanity is such that our relationships are often not rightly-ordered. There is a deficiency in relationality, the *manner* in which humans interact with one another. This deficiency in relationality manifests itself both in the direct violence of profound suffering as well as in the more subtle forms of violence that tragically disorder our social world: sexism, prejudice, greed, to name but a few. That humans relate to one another violently is not merely a symptom of sin, but is sin itself. Sin is “participation through intent or act in unnecessary violence that contributes to the ill-being of any aspect of earth or its inhabitants.”⁵⁰

Insofar as the bondage, the source of much suffering, from which humanity needs redemption is relational, redemption is also relational.⁵¹ Redemption, in addition to being a cosmic overcoming of the power of sin, entails an overcoming of that which inhibits relationship. Though by no means limited to liberationist thinkers, and despite the wide diversity of concerns represented by liberationist thinkers, this understanding is most clearly evident in the work of some feminists and liberation theologians.⁵² The

being curved in on oneself is rightly cast in primarily relational terms. An inward focus ruptures relationships regardless of whether that inward focus is one of self-aggrandizement or self-denigration.

⁵⁰ Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki, *The Fall to Violence: Original Sin in Relational Theology* (New York: Continuum, 2004), 12.

Though the focus of this project is on the suffering of human violence towards other humans, the relational rupture of sin is likewise manifest in violence against all of creation.

⁵¹ That a relational ontology is at the heart of the doctrine of redemption is the primary claim of Adam Kotsko, *The Politics of Redemption: The Social Logic of Salvation*, Social Logic of Salvation (New York: T&T Clark, 2010).

⁵² For more on the redemptive nature of liberation from the bondage of social class, see, for example, Jon Sobrino, *Christology at the Crossroads: A Latin American Approach* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1978), Jon Sobrino, *Jesus the Liberator: A Historical-Theological Reading of Jesus of Nazareth* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993), and Leonardo Boff, *Jesus Christ Liberator: A Critical Christology for Our Time* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1978). For more on the connection between redemption and liberation from oppressive patriarch structures, see, for example, *Christianity, Patriarchy, and Abuse: A Feminist Critique*, ed. Carole R. Bohn and Joanne Carlson Brown (New York: Pilgrim Press, 1989) and *Freeing Theology: The Essentials of Theology in Feminist Perspective*, ed. Catherine Mowry LaCugna (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1993).

significance of the work of these theologians is that it gives voice to the particularity of redemption on a socio-political level. A relational understanding of redemption refuses any notion of redemption in the abstract. The redemption of God is necessarily experienced as a communal liberation from relationships of oppression and exploited vulnerability.

1.2.1.3 Individual

Theological conversation about individual redemption is often subsumed in conversation about the doctrine of justification as articulated by Martin Luther.⁵³ Luther understands the human condition to be one of bondage to “sin, death, and the devil.” Drawing on Augustine he describes the bondage of the human condition as being *incurvatus in se*, “because of the viciousness of original sin.”⁵⁴ This state of being curved in upon oneself “is not only a lack of a certain quality in the will...It is a propensity toward evil. It is a nausea toward the good, a loathing of light and wisdom, and a delight in error and darkness, a flight from and an abomination of all good works, a pursuit of evil.”⁵⁵ Insofar as sin is, though not merely a sinful act, but a “propensity toward evil,”

⁵³ It is important to note, however, that the doctrine of justification by faith through grace is not an exclusively Lutheran doctrine. Many others, including John Wesley and John Calvin, incorporated Luther’s basic assumptions into their own thinking, resulting in a much more complex development of the doctrine which has continued to be the primary lens through which much of the Protestant church has understood redemption. For more on the history of the doctrine of justification see, Stephen Westerholm, *Perspectives Old and New on Paul: The "Lutheran" Paul and His Critics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004) and David A. Brondos, *Paul on the Cross: Reconstructing the Apostle's Story of Redemption* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006).

⁵⁴ Martin Luther, “Lecture on Romans 1515-1516” in Martin Luther, *Works of Martin Luther: With Introductions and Notes*, ed. Henry Eyster Jacobs and Adolph Spaeth (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1943), 25:291.

⁵⁵ *Ibid*, 25:299.

which results in many sinful acts causing harm and rupturing relations, redemption necessarily entails individual forgiveness of sin.

That redemption is necessarily individual does not, however, necessitate equating redemption with forgiveness of sin. Rather, it necessitates that forgiveness of sin be a part of whatever redemption of the individual means. However, in situations of profound suffering, redemption, while still including forgiveness, must mean something more, something different. The redemption of profound suffering at the individual level – individual situations of violence against particular individuals – is the primary focus of this project. Such redemption, however, can never be isolated from the understanding of redemption as an objective reality, a reality which is taking place simultaneously on a cosmic, communal and individual level.

The claim that redemption is an objective reality occurring simultaneously at three levels is potentially misleading as it may appear to imply that there are separate spheres of existence called cosmic, communal, and individual. Whereas what I am suggesting is rather exactly the opposite; what I am saying is that the cosmic, the communal, and the individual *cannot* be separated. They are distinct levels of existence – the individual cannot merely be subsumed into the cosmic or communal – but they are inseparable, inextricably intertwined with one another.⁵⁶ As chapter 3 will show, there is no individual apart from the community. Similarly, there are no communities apart from the larger creation. The experience of redemption is one of mutuality – there can be no individual redemption outside of the community and there can be no redemption of the

⁵⁶ In his famous *Letter from Birmingham Jail*, Martin Luther King, Jr. wrote, “We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied to a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly.” (16 April 1963) Though King was speaking of the injustice of racial inequality, his recognition of the interconnectedness of humanity gets at the heart of the image of redemption I am painting.

cosmos that does not, in fact, involve the redemption of very particular individual persons and situations.

1.2.2 Redemption as Particular

The redemption of individual communities and individual persons makes it clear that redemption as an objective reality does not mean that redemption looks the same to all people of all times and all places. The claim of redemption's objectivity in the event of Jesus cannot render it abstract but, necessarily means that redemption is always particular. That is, "what 'redemption' concretely means... is relative to the concrete particularities of the situations and events that cry out for redemption."⁵⁷ There is no single meaning of redemption; there is a particularity to redemption because there is a particularity to the situations in need of redemption. What redemption looks like is therefore necessarily context-dependent.⁵⁸ Redemption must be seen in its particularity because the situations in need of redemption vary so greatly. The redemption necessary when one has sinned grievously against another is drastically different from the redemption necessary when one has been sinned against, and both of these differ from situations in which one has suffered the effects of severe storms or serious illness. Though the specifics of any individual situation may differ greatly, the need for redemption is common to all.

⁵⁷ David H. Kelsey, *Imagining Redemption* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 2.

⁵⁸ Mark Powell similarly suggests that the content of salvation is "determined in each instance by the needs of the person or persons involved." Mark Allan Powell, "Salvation in Luke-Acts" in *Word & World* 12 (1992), 5.

In considering the redemption of situations of profound suffering, in situations where one has suffered at the hands of a violent other, questions of redemption can be particularly acute because the damage of such suffering penetrates to the very core of a person's identity. "Our bodies are soft and supple, able to absorb blows and possessed of great recuperative powers. It's our identities that are fragile and difficult to repair. They don't simply break; they shatter."⁵⁹ The injuries to the body are often much easier to treat and heal than the damage done to the heart and soul of one who has suffered violence. In this project I am concerned with the redemption of the person shattered by violence, and with the shatteredness which perdures long after the wounds have healed.

The Sermon on the Mount is arguably not intended primarily as an ethical imperative, but is instead primarily descriptive.⁶⁰ Jesus, in other words, is saying "When you see these things – those who mourn being comforted or when you see mercy or peacemaking..., then you know you are in the presence of the kingdom of God." I want to suggest that, likewise, though there is no definitive checklist for determining where and when a shattered life is redeemed, where new life begins, there are, however, ways of describing what the new life of redemption looks like. Redemption can be reduced neither to a checklist nor to a series of therapeutic stages or steps. Redemption cannot be proven. It can, however, be witnessed to and described. In this project I suggest three dimensions of redemption which can be described and which bear witness to God's redeeming work in this world: narration, incorporation, vocation.

⁵⁹ Jamie Kalven, *Working with Available Light: A Family's World after Violence* (New York: Norton, 1999), 278.

⁶⁰ See Richard Lischer, "The Sermon on the Mount as Radical Pastoral Care" in *The Theological Interpretation of Scripture*, ed. Stephen Fowl (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1997), 294-304.

1.2.2.1 Narration

Narration is the act of telling a coherent story. That is, narration cannot simply consist of the stringing together of random, disconnected events. Rather, narration is the arrangement of events in such a way that they tell a story that both has, and offers, meaning. As such, the ability to tell the story of one's life in a more or less coherent narrative is integral to personal identity.⁶¹ Narration gives meaning to the story of one's life by placing the individual experiences and memories of a life into the context of a larger whole. It is this placement within that is meaning-making. This narrative continuity is necessarily a constitutive element of identity whether the identity be individual or communal.⁶²

Redemption is itself an identity-claim. It offers a re-narration of a life story. This re-narration, in which the story of suffering remains recognizable – the identity of the sufferer is not obliterated – also overrides the identity claims of the previous story(ies) of suffering. Not only is redemption the story of the Christ event which transforms one state (sin and suffering) into another (salvation),⁶³ redemption entails the weaving of individual human narratives with the narrative of God's continued activity in the world.

⁶¹ As Alasdair MacIntyre observes, humans are inherently story-telling creatures. Alasdair C. MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (Notre Dame, IN : University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 216. For more on narrative and identity see Paul Ricœur, *Time and Narrative* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984) and for more on the significance of narrative theology see *Why Narrative?: Readings in Narrative Theology*, ed. Stanley Hauerwas and L. Gregory Jones (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 1997).

⁶² It is the unique ways in which a particular narrative interacts with other narratives creating unique but interrelated identities that leads Michael Root to speak of narrative as a “preserver of individuality and contingency.” Michael Root, “The Narrative Structure of Soteriology,” in *Why Narrative? Readings in Narrative Theology*, ed. Stanley Hauerwas and L. Gregory Jones (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1997), 273.

⁶³ This is the criterion for narrative suggested by Root which is drawn from Arthur Coleman Danto, *Narration and Knowledge (Including the Integral Text of Analytical Philosophy of History)*, ed. Arthur Coleman Danto, Columbia Classics in Philosophy (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 233ff.

Narration as a dimension of redemption includes both the ability – perhaps necessarily in a retrospective fashion – to narrate the suffering of the past while simultaneously locating this narration in the larger story of God’s redemptive activity – perhaps in a way that is both tentative and anticipatory.

Narration necessarily entails interpretation. That is, for a narrative to be meaningful, to provide meaning, requires interpretation. And the narration of a story is directly impacted by the interpretation of said story. To interpret the story anew is to embody a new narrative, one altered by the interpretation. The narrative dimension of redemption depends upon the interplay of the redemptive event of Jesus as it is interpreted again and again within the context of narratives in need of redemption such that the narrative of redemption – by virtue of its overpowering beauty and love – claims the individual narratives of suffering. In such a way the story of suffering and the story of redemption become intertwined, and through the continual act of re-interpretation and re-narration the story of suffering becomes, in fact, a narrative of redemption.

1.2.2.2 Incorporation

Incorporation is the act of being made into a body. Redemptive incorporation consists of two parts: individual and communal. Because human beings are created as ensouled bodies, the body can never be incidental to identity, or consequently to the redemption, of the person. The suggestion that individual incorporation is necessary for redemption may appear to be something of a tautology. However, the redemptive dimension of incorporation goes beyond the recognition of the fact that human beings do not merely *have* bodies but rather *are* bodies. Incorporation includes an at-homeness

with one's body, a state of being comfortable in one's own skin, even a recognition of the created goodness of the body.

The second aspect of redemptive incorporation is the incorporation into a larger body. There is no such thing as an independent human being with an identity unformed by relationship with others. Humans are creatures who exist in relation. Individual identity is always a complex admixture of the unique ways in which any given person interacts with the various social groups of which he or she is a part. Redemptive incorporation, then, involves the incorporation of the individual body into the body of a people whose story is being re-narrated through participation in the story of Jesus. This incorporation into the body of Christ subverts the ruptured community of sin and suffering. The vulnerability of the body is both the formal and the efficient cause of human suffering, and yet through incorporation God makes the body both the material and the final cause of redemption.⁶⁴

Incorporation necessarily entails a story; it is the story of becoming a body, a body with a history as well as with a trajectory. Incorporation and narration, then, are comingled – they are inseparable but distinct dimensions of the work God is doing in the world.⁶⁵ Like with narration, in incorporation there is a continuity between the old body

⁶⁴ Insofar as God takes the vulnerability of the body and uses this very vulnerability as a constitutive part of redemption, such incorporation is an example of what Samuel Wells refers to as overaccepting. See Samuel Wells, *Improvisation: The Drama of Christian Ethics* (Grand Rapids, MI : Brazos Press, 2004), chapter 9.

⁶⁵ Samuel Wells speaks of reincorporation as the way in which God weaves seemingly forgotten or discarded elements of the past into the narrative of the present and of the future. This image of reincorporation points towards the incorporation I have in mind. However, *reincorporation* presumes one was already incorporated into a particular body/story. One of the problems of profound suffering that I discuss further is a loss of narrative (chapter 2) into which the past can be reincorporated as well as the loss of relationship necessary to be in community with others (chapter 3). Similarly, reincorporation *could* imply simply a return to a previous state (though this is not what Wells either says or intends). Yet, in the aftermath of profound suffering there is no possibility of such a return, nor would such be genuinely

and the new. That is, the old is recognizable in the new but the new far exceeds anything that could have been predicted based on the old.

1.2.2.3 Vocation

Though by no means absolute, there is an element of temporality to the dimensions of redemption I am suggesting. This temporality is less one of tense and more one of orientation. Narration tends to address the past, incorporation the present, and vocation the future. Vocation is a calling; it entails both a trajectory and a telos for one's life. In the same way that narration attempts to make sense of the past, and incorporation anchors the body securely in the present, vocation attempts to find meaning in the future, a meaning which is directly connected to both the narration of the past and the incorporation of the present. What I intend by vocation as a dimension of redemption is the surprisingly wonderful ways in which God's work in the world can take past elements of one's narrative – elements that may have been forgotten or may have been so horrible as to wish they were forgotten – and use these very elements in the creation of a calling, of a way of making something beautiful.⁶⁶

The dimension of vocation is necessarily other-directed. That is, narration necessarily concerns itself with one's own story, one's own suffering. It is the beginning of the healing of a past of suffering. And incorporation entails the joining of one's own

redemptive. What is redemptive is incorporation into a *new* story and a *new* community in a *new* way. What is redemptive is new life. See Wells, *Improvisation*, chapter 10.

⁶⁶ Abraham Verghese offers a remarkably eloquent fictional, albeit not explicitly theological, account of the redemptive vocation that can come from the seemingly discarded bits of a troubling past in his recent novel. A. Verghese, *Cutting for Stone: A Novel* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2009). In the novel Sr. Mary Joseph Praise “believed that her job was to make her life something beautiful for God” (33). And though the book begins with her death, in many ways the entire novel is arguably the story of the beautiful something Sr. Mary Joseph Praise made for God.

life to that of others in a way which includes reciprocity, but communal bodies can, without a sense of vocation, remain inward focused. Vocation, however, focuses one on the ways in which one's own past experiences of suffering and one's ability to re-narrate that suffering within the new body in which one has been incorporated offers the opportunity for using the pain and suffering of the past in a positive and constructive manner.⁶⁷

Though I do not see these dimensions of redemption as hierarchical, nor do I see them as stages which must be followed in order; they are inter-related and there is a sense in which they build upon one another. The dimension of vocation presupposes both the dimension of narration and incorporation. That is, a future trajectory, the ability to find ways to incorporate the past into a future that is life-giving builds upon the redemptive narration of the past and incorporation of the present. And yet because these are not stages or phases to be passed through, but as the on-going work of God are dynamic, any movement in one dimension has a ripple effect through the other dimensions.

1.3 How Does the Church Narrate Suffering and Redemption?

In this final section, I explore the role of church practices in addressing the profound suffering of the world. I suggest that in addition to having much to say in the face of suffering, the practices of the church bear witness to the redemptive activity of God in the world. I begin by discussing the epistemology of redemption, suggesting that

⁶⁷ Think, for instance, of the extraordinary work done by organizations such as Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD) where mothers who have lost children in car accidents involving an intoxicated driver work hard both to educate the wider community to the dangers of drunk driving as well as to give a face to the pain such accidents cause.

the knowledge of redemption is a particular sort of knowledge which must be received in faith. I further suggest that the reception of such knowledge both presupposes and creates the conditions for a particular sort of imagination, an imagination that is able to see that which is beyond the self-evident. I conclude with the working definition of practices and its four essential elements as well as a brief note on my choice of practices throughout the project.

Even in situations of seemingly intractable, profound suffering (and perhaps especially in such situations) *that* redemption is happening does not make redemption self-evident. The ability to recognize redemption requires a certain vision – eyes to see – a vision that can be developed in and through participation in the practices of the church.⁶⁸ That the ability to see redemption is aided by learned imaginative habits suggests an epistemology of redemption.⁶⁹ Such knowledge, however, is not a knowledge that brings about salvation, but is instead a transformational knowledge that makes possible the recognition of redemption. In his work on the community of Acts, Kavin Rowe claims that the redemptive knowledge of the early Christian community was knowledge that could not be willfully acquired but must, instead, be received. It is “a way of knowing that arises out of the belief in Christ as the apocalypse of the God of Israel to the gentiles. This way of knowing, however was not analyzed as a formal

⁶⁸ The following section is, in part, indebted to Rowan Williams’ refutation of the suggestion that the only way to heal the most profound suffering is through an unmediated experience of God’s power. This project is an exercise in seeking to see the ways in which the Holy Spirit is at work in the world through the practices of the church. See Rowan Williams, *Wrestling with Angels* (Grand Rapids: MI, Eerdmans, 2007), chapter 13 and Rowan Williams, *On Christian Theology* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2000), chapter 15.

⁶⁹ Stanley Hauerwas reminds us that such “‘revelation’ is not a qualifier of the epistemic status of a kind of knowledge, but rather points to the content of a certain kind of knowledge.” Stanley Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom: A Primer in Christian Ethics* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), 66.

feature of the intellect per se but rather seen as a distinctive form of practical knowledge.”⁷⁰ Rowe holds that this practical knowledge is revealed, seen only within the context of the confession of Jesus’ Lordship within the missional assembly of the church whose identity is transformed (turned upside down) by Jesus.

Redemption, the transformation of a world turned upside down, is the new creation of which St. Paul speaks. It is neither a return to an (imagined) prelapsarian state in which sin and suffering do not exist, nor is it the destruction of all that has been tainted by sin and suffering. Moreover, the promised new creation is not a renewal of, or improvement upon, the present creation which would suggest an inert utopian potential within the present creation. Rather, new creation is possible only in and through the transcendent power of God made manifest in Christ Jesus. “Retrospectively it will be possible to see that this was the future for which it was always destined by God, the appropriate completion of its history, but equally this future will entail a radical transformation of the world’s mode of existence, which we can understand only as transposition into participation in the life of God.”⁷¹ This transformed new creation is solely dependent upon the power of God’s imaginative act of redemption.

Samuel Taylor Coleridge similarly speaks of the power of the poetic imagination to create something new. Coleridge refers to this as “esemplastic imagination.”⁷² Esemplastic is a term Coleridge coined to describe the imagination’s ability to take

⁷⁰ Christopher Kavin Rowe, *World Upside Down: Reading Acts in the Graeco-Roman Age* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 156.

⁷¹ Richard Bauckham, *Hope against Hope: Christian Eschatology at the Turn of the Millennium*, ed. Trevor A. Hart (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 130.

⁷² Samuel Taylor Jackson H. J. Coleridge, *Samuel Taylor Coleridge: The Major Works*, Oxford World’s Classics (New York: Oxford, 2008), chapter 10.

seemingly disparate ideas and weave them together in such a way as to convey a new idea. This esemplastic imagination is not merely the sum of the parts as the new creation is greater than its parts. Perhaps this idea of esemplastic imagination is a helpful way of thinking about the role of ecclesial practices. I am not suggesting that any particular ecclesial practice, or constellation of practices, guarantees redemption. This is not an instrumentalization of ecclesial practices – the practices are not a means to an end (the redemption of suffering), but are an inherent part of the end of worship.⁷³ That they make visible God’s healing and redeeming presence in the world is a gift of grace which cannot be fabricated but only received.⁷⁴ What I am suggesting is that God works in and through the practices of the church, shaping the imagination of the body of Christ in such a way that glimpses of the redemption that God is always already about may become visible.⁷⁵

⁷³ See MacIntyre on practices - “By a ‘practice’ I am going to mean any coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realized in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to, and partially definitive of, that form of activity, with the result that human power to achieve excellence, and human conceptions of the ends and goods involved, are systematically extended.” MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 187.

That redemption is made manifest in and through the practices of the worshipping body of Christ is reflective of what MacIntyre refers to as internal goods. The recognition that the end of all ecclesial practices is right worship is crucial.

⁷⁴ “What distinguishes Christians from non-Christians is not their ontic but their noetic situation.” George Hunsinger, *How to Read Karl Barth: The Shape of His Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 134.

⁷⁵ That such a vision is an act of the imagination in no way implies that such vision is false or imaginary. Rather, what I am suggesting is that the practices of the church enable Christians first to see the world as it actually is and second to be conformed to this right vision. For this understanding of vision I am indebted to the essay, “The Significance of Vision: Toward an Aesthetic Ethic” in Stanley Hauerwas, *Vision and Virtue: Essays in Christian Ethical Reflection* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981).

The claim of this project is that the practices of the church are sufficient to make redemption visible.⁷⁶ Profound suffering, however, offers what may well be the greatest challenge to this claim. Hence this project focuses on the intersection of church practices and suffering as icons into the very present redemption of God. My claim is that participation in the practices of the church enable those whose bodies, minds, and souls have been shattered by the profound violence of others to experience the ultimate reality of redemption penultimately, and to consequently bear witness of this redemption to the world. In speaking of practices I rely on the definition developed by Dorothy Bass and Craig Dykstra: practices are the “things Christian people do together over time to address fundamental human needs in response to and in the light of God’s active presence for the life of the world.”⁷⁷

There are four essential elements of this definition. The first is that the practices are mutually interdependent. That is, though I speak of practices individually and even isolate various elements of particular sacramental practices, none of the practices of the church stand on their own. All are a part of a complex constellation of practices in such a way that the whole is far greater than the sum of its parts. The second essential element of this definition is that it is an inherently communal definition. Not only are ecclesial practices not rightly separated from one another, they cannot be separated from the community in which they have developed. This does not mean that every practice must

⁷⁶ This reflects Samuel Wells’ claim that God has given the church all that it needs to live in right relationship with God. See Samuel Wells, *God’s Companions: Reimagining Christian Ethics* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2006).

⁷⁷ Bass and Dykstra build upon Alasdair MacIntyre’s definition of practices, locating them specifically within the traditioned community of the church. *Practicing Theology: Beliefs and Practices in Christian Life*, ed. Dorothy C. Bass and Miroslav Volf (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), 18. This definition reflects the authors’ prior work on practices in *Practicing Our Faith: A Way of Life for a Searching People*, ed. Dorothy C. Bass (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1997).

be engaged in within a group setting. It *does* mean that even when a practice (lament, for instance, or confession) is engaged in by an individual, the community is present with the individual *through* the practice itself. The third essential element is that the practices of the church are repeated, both diachronically in that they are a part of a traditioned community, and synchronically within the life of the individual community and even within the life of the individual. Practices must be attended to. They do not just happen, but are cultivated in such a way as to be formative of particular habits. Which directly points to the fourth essential element of practices, and that is that the practices of the church are the primary means by which Christians are invited to participate in the ongoing work of Christ in and for the world.

The Christian practices I have chosen to use in each chapter are by no means the only possible ones.⁷⁸ Rather than focusing on the primary sacramental practices of the church, I have made an effort to focus on practices that may be easily overlooked, taken for granted. I have presumed that the practices about which I do speak are situated within a community that is always already formed by the constitutive practices of Baptism and Eucharist. My claim throughout this project is that ecclesial practices – as a constellation of practices – are both proclamatory and performative. That is, they first of all proclaim the truth of the mystery of God’s redemptive activity in the world. But they also, in ways that remain always a mystery, make manifest the very truth which they proclaim.

⁷⁸ There has been a recent surge in interest in, and recognition of, the importance of practices in the life of the church. For examples of the significance of a number of other ecclesial practices see Craig R. Dykstra, *Growing in the Life of Faith: Education and Christian Practices* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005) and *From Nomads to Pilgrims: Stories from Practicing Congregations*, ed. Diana Butler Bass and Joseph Stewart-Sicking (Herndon, VA: Alban Institute, 2006).

2. Narration: Re-Inscribing Memories

“Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt,
and the LORD your God redeemed you.”

Deuteronomy 15:15

“Any sorrow may be borne, as long as it is part of a story.”

Nikolai Gogol¹

In Pat Conroy's *The Prince of Tides*, Tom Wingo bears the burden of the “freight of memory” for a family traumatized by violence.² Tom's father, Henry, is a ruthlessly violent man, terrorizing his wife and children with his frequent outbursts of rage, outbursts which cannot be stopped, only spent. In one episode, which is representative of the depth of Henry's violence, the family is having a picnic when Savannah, Tom's twin sister, begins to pick at Tom. Henry tries to provoke Tom into fighting with Savannah, finally commanding him to hit her. But five-year-old Tom refuses. Henry slaps Tom across the face, knocking him to the ground. Lila, Tom's mother, steps in to protect Tom, and Henry grabs and begins violently shaking her. Seven-year old Luke picks up a knife and demands that Henry let go of Lila. Henry pushes Lila down, lunges for Luke, and twists his arm, making him drop the knife. He then takes off his belt, and beats Luke, stopping only when he is overcome by exhaustion. Luke's pants are stained with

¹ Nikolai Gogol, http://www.tinfo.fi/site/?lan=3&page_id=&mode=tiedotteet&laji=1&tiedote_id=74. Accessed 12/22/11.

² Pat Conroy, *The Prince of Tides* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1986), 77. Subsequent citations are referenced parenthetically in the text.

blood, and Tom remembers Luke being unable to walk for a week after this episode. (119-120)

It is over this background of routine violence that the story of the family secret unfolds. One night when the children are all teenagers, a night when neither Henry nor Luke is home, three men break into the house. One of the men has attempted to break into their house – presumably to attack Lila – in the past. This time he does indeed rape Lila, while one of the men rapes Savannah, and the other Tom. In the midst of the attack, Luke returns home, and releases the family’s pet Bengal tiger. Within a few minutes the Wingos kill all three attackers. Afraid of Henry’s reaction, they bury the men and clean the house so that there will be no trace of the violence for Henry to see. Lila tells the children, “This didn’t happen. Do you understand? Do you all understand? This did not happen.” (496)

But the memory of such an event is not as easily discarded and buried as are the bodies of their attackers. Years later Tom recalls, “Rape is a crime against sleep and memory; its afterimage imprints itself like an irreversible negative from the camera obscura of dreams... Though our bodies would heal, our souls had sustained a damage beyond compensation. Violence sends deep roots into the heart: it has no seasons; it is always ripe, evergreen.” (495) Each of the Wingo children deals with the trauma of their childhood violence differently. Luke’s response is a detached stoicism, which he masters early, as even in the midst of the beating at the family picnic Luke endures his father’s wrath by focusing his attention on a faraway time and place. Savannah has repressed the memories of

most of her childhood, but pays dearly for this repression with an on-going battle with mental illness, and with bouts of depression that lead to numerous suicide attempts.

Tom tries to forget his childhood, to pretend it never was. “I’ve pretended for so long that my childhood did not happen. I had to keep it tight, up near my chest...It’s an act of the will to have a memory or not, and I chose not to have one. Because I needed to love my mother and father in all their flawed, outrageous humanity. I could not afford to address them directly about the felonies committed against all of us.” (8) However, he begins to realize that not only is his memory beyond his choosing, but that such pretending has done more damage than good. “We’ve pretended too much in our family...and hidden far too much. I think we’re all going to pay a high price for our inability to face the truth.” (51) Much of the story centers on Tom’s role as Savannah’s memory, as they struggle to face the truth of that memory. For Savannah repression “effaced the past and replaced it with the white baffled noise of forgetfulness.” (648) This loss of memory threatened Savannah with a complete loss of self. The only way to maintain (or regain) some semblance of sanity was for her to remember and to reclaim the story of her self. “I [Tom] had somehow become the repository of memory in a family where memory had entered a fatal concubinage with suffering. I was the only witness available to explain why my sister’s madness was only a natural response to an indiscriminate curriculum of ruin.” (193)

The Prince of Tides powerfully narrates the complicated role memory plays in the lives of those who have suffered profound violence. Conroy refers to such memory as “regent and keepsake of nightmare.”³ The characters in this novel illustrate the stranglehold the memory of suffering can have on the psyche. In this chapter I explore why this is so, and suggest that even the most horrendous of such memories are not beyond God’s redemptive reach. I begin by showing the integral connection between memory and identity. This is necessary insofar as my claim is that if the whole suffering person is to be redeemed, all that necessarily constitutes the person must be redeemed. I then look at the unique ways profound suffering is remembered, and show how this, in turn, embeds suffering within the identity of the person. Next, I explore the prevalent therapeutic models of the healing of memory and suggest that while there is a good and proper place for such therapeutic models, what they offer at their best is coping skills, not redemption. And finally, I turn to the transformation of memory made possible by the redemptive work of God, and argue that the practices of lament and repentance play a key role in this transformation – a transformation that allows for the memory of profound suffering to be grace-fully re-narrated.

2.1 Memory and Identity

Memory is often thought of in terms of simple recall - the ability to remember something concrete, like a chunk of information. Those who can recall things like telephone numbers, multiplication facts, and the answers to all manner of trivia questions in an immediate and seemingly automatic manner are often credited with having a “good

³ Ibid, 55.

memory.” This sort of memory envisions the brain as a set of storage bins, each of which contains discreet bits of information. A good memory is the ability to identify and open the right container at the right time so that the contents, which remain preserved and untouched while in storage, can be accessed as needed. And, of course, the re-call of such concrete bits of information which have been stored in one’s memory banks does constitute a type of remembering.⁴

Memory is also often thought of as the ability to call to mind experiences of the past – Do you remember the time we went hiking and saw that momma bear and her cubs? Or as the ability to perform some task – I can remember how to ride a bicycle or execute an Eskimo roll even though these are tasks I have not performed in a number of years, because the necessary techniques have been stored in my memory. There are also less cognitive ways of remembering – the way in which certain sounds, shades of color, slants of light, or scents conjure up emotive responses that seem to have little relation to the present, and which point to a memory just beyond the threshold of cognitive recognition. I begin this section with an overview of the neurological and psychological study of memory and suggest that, though there are a number of taxonomies of memory, memory is either narrativial or non-narrativial. I do this in order to demonstrate the fundamental significance of both types of memory for individual identity. Finally, I consider the importance of narrative for memory and identity and suggest that while memory is constantly shaping identity, individuals are not passive receptors of memory but actively respond to and shape memories in formative ways.

⁴ Though the idea that memories are objectively preserved, something akin to family photographs, in pristine condition is complex and problematic – a topic to which I return in relation to questions of memory and suffering.

In order to distinguish between different modes of memory, neurologists and psychologists have created taxonomies of memory. Though there are a variety of nuanced distinctions, in general these taxonomies include long-term memory, short term memory, and working memory.⁵ Within each of these categories memory can be further divided. For example, the sort of re-call of information involved in the memory of phone numbers or internet account passwords is often referred to as semantic memory. Such memory is essentially unrelated to personal experience as it has more to do with the ability to accumulate facts without regard for how the information is accumulated. Episodic memory is the ability to remember significant events from explicit personal experiences. Semantic memory is necessary to function as an independent adult in a culture that relies heavily on numbers and codes, and in which a broad range of disparate knowledge is assumed. Whereas episodic memory is necessary for the development of interpersonal relationships; the memory of shared experiences is an important element of human bonding. Therefore episodic memory is more crucial for the development of personal identity, of a sense of selfhood whose being extends in time and space, though the functional identity of one who lacks semantic memory would be significantly diminished.

⁵ For more on taxonomies of memory see: V. Elving Anderson, "A Genetic View of Human Nature," in *Whatever Happened to the Soul?: Scientific and Theological Portraits of Human Nature*, ed. Nancey Murphy, Warren S. Brown, and H. Newton Malony (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998). For more on how memory relates to our experiences of God, see David Hogue, *Remembering the Future, Imagining the Past: Story, Ritual, and the Human Brain* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2003). For an overview of the anatomy and physiology of the brain written for a scientific lay audience see David J. Linden, *The Accidental Mind* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007). For more on the vulnerabilities of memory see Daniel L. Schacter, *The Seven Sins of Memory: How the Mind Forgets and Remembers* (Boston : Houghton Mifflin, 2001.) And for an overview of recent research in neuropsychology see Daniel L. Schacter, *Searching for Memory: The Brain, the Mind, and the Past* (New York: BasicBooks, 1996).

While using the language of semantic and episodic memory, psychologists also speak more broadly of explicit and implicit memories. Explicit memories include the recall of facts as well as the memory of particular events; both semantic and episodic memory are facets of explicit memory. Implicit memories include motor skills (learning to eat with a fork or ride a bike) as well as operant-conditioned (coming to a complete stop at a red light) and emotive responses to stimuli (startling in response to sudden noises).⁶ Implicit memories, though not memories that can be consciously recalled, “manifest as a specific change in behavior.”⁷ So whereas explicit memory (what I will call narrational memory as it is, generally speaking, the sort of memory that can be narrated) plays a larger role in conscious identity, implicit memory (what I will refer to as non-narrational memory) impacts identity in subtle ways which generally remain unrecognized. Studies show that amnesiacs with little or no ability to retain explicit memory do not suffer an equal loss of implicit memory as even one with no cognizant short or long term explicit memory often remembers motor skills – how to dress or ride a bike – as well as retaining operant-conditioned learning – they respond appropriately to emotional cues – for example by demonstrating fear responses to the same stimuli they responded to prior to the onset of amnesia.⁸ It is the interplay of explicit and implicit

⁶ The distinction between operant-conditioned and emotive responses to stimuli is primarily one of voluntariness. E.g. when you buckle your seatbelt upon getting into your car because you have learned to do so automatically in order to avoid hearing the dingy reminder sound the car makes this is operant conditioning. Buckling your seatbelt, though it may in fact become an automatic response, is a willed choice. On the other hand, emotive responses to stimuli – e.g. blinking in response to bright lights or startling in response to sudden loud noises – are involuntary.

⁷ Linden, 112.

⁸ Ibid, chapter 5.

memory, specifically the interplay of episodic memory and emotion, which form the psychological core of identity.⁹

Explicit or Narratival Memory	Implicit or Non-Narratival Memory
semantic memory (facts)	motor skills (dressing, eating, playing a musical instrument)
episodic memory (personal experiences)	operant-conditioned memory (wearing a seatbelt)
	emotive memory (responses to intense emotions such as fear or anger)

Mnemonic Taxonomy

The self cannot exist independent of memory; memory is a constitutive part of what it means to *be* a self.¹⁰ The suggestion that the self occurs at the intersection of explicit memory (what is most often thought of as re-call) and emotion begs the question of why re-call alone is an insufficient descriptor for memory. Memory is, of course, the ability to recall facts or events, perhaps especially the events that seem most formative. But memory must provide coherence, a sense of narrative. Memory understood as nothing more than the rote recall of seemingly disconnected facts is not a sufficient understanding of memory.¹¹ Such a notion of memory “falls short of a serviceable

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ This statement necessarily raises the question of identity and Alzheimer’s patients, a question which is well outside the boundaries of this project. For a theologically astute and pastorally sensitive discussion of identity and memory in those who suffer from Alzheimer’s disease see David Keck, *Forgetting Whose We Are: Alzheimer’s Disease and the Love of God* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996).

¹¹ Some forms of autism are characterized, in part, by an impressive degree of recall of disconnected facts while lacking the coherence of a narrative that allows one’s own story to be linked with that of others. Think, for instance, of Dustin Hoffman’s character in the movie *Rain Man*. [Barry Levinson, “Rain Man,” (1988)] and the more recent novel by Mark Haddon, *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* (New York: Doubleday, 2003). This is, of course, not to suggest that someone with autism lacks identity. In fact both the movie and the novel are in large part about the main character’s struggle with identity. Rather, it is to suggest that the struggles faced by those with autism (and perhaps even more acutely the struggles faced by their families) in terms of identity and relationship illustrate the critical nature of the interplay between the explicit and implicit memory.

paradigm of selfhood. Simply to have the totality of our experience available to memory is not to have before us an *intelligible* representation of ourselves. More likely it is to have before us a blooming, buzzing confusion.”¹² Rather than understanding memory as the accumulation of disjointed facts, I suggest that memory, and its two component (narrative and non-narrative) forms, is what provides the narrative continuity necessary for selfhood to exist.

Narrative memory is the story we are able to tell of ourselves. Alasdair MacIntyre claims that a self is one “whose unity resides in the unity of a narrative which links birth to life to death as narrative beginning to middle to end.”¹³ It is the unity of narrative memory that provides a sense of coherence to one’s life. In short, it is narrative that can make memories make sense by providing a context, embedding them in the midst of something larger than any individual memory. Narrative memory makes sense of who we were in the past and therefore of how we became who we are today. Rowan Williams says, “The self *is* – one might say – what the past is doing now...It is continuity; and so it is necessarily memory – continuity seen as the shape of a unique story, *my* story, which I now own, acknowledge as mine. To be a self is to own such a

A fascinating, albeit contested, area of new autism research suggests that autism – or at least the social isolation common to autistic persons – may, in part, be caused by a lack of mimicry ability called mirroring. This is an ability required for certain sorts of memory. For an overview of the importance of mirroring see, Marco Iacoboni, *Mirroring People: The New Science of How We Connect with Others* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2008).

¹² James Wetzel, *Augustine and the Limits of Virtue* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 39.

¹³ Alasdair C. MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007). MacIntyre suggests that the telling of stories is a crucial aspect of what it means to be human. Humans are inherently story-telling creatures - “Deprive children of stories and you leave them unscripted, anxious stutterers in their actions as in their words” (216).

story: to act as a self is to act out of the awareness of this resource of a particular past.”¹⁴
The way in which the story of the self is known and reinforced is memory.

For memory to be a primary source of personal identity – for the self to be “what the past is doing now” – has to mean that memory is more than mere re-call. Knowledge of the multiplication tables or the capitals of all fifty states – though not a completely insignificant factor in the creation of personal identity – certainly cannot provide an adequate account of who one is or how one becomes who one is.¹⁵ Narratival memory is a helpful way to think of memory in relation to identity formation because unlike recall of seemingly unrelated and trivial facts, narrative memory locates memories in a coherent story. And a story necessarily has a goal towards which it tends. Stories, no matter how seemingly circular or meandering, lead somewhere.¹⁶ Similarly, narratival memory has a goal, a telos. Stories of family memories as well as stories of the collective memory of entire nations (think, for instance, of the significance of George Washington’s fabled inability to tell a lie) form the psyche of those who share them. Such stories connect us to the larger narratives that constitute our lives.¹⁷

The formation of identity, then, is contingent upon memory and upon the ways in which individual narratives interact with the potentially endless combination of formative narratives. Who we are as human beings is always necessarily in large part determined

¹⁴ Rowan Williams, *Resurrection: Interpreting the Easter Gospel* (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 2002), 23.

¹⁵ When such facts can be located in the memory through the narrative of how such information was acquired, such facts do become more significantly a part of narratival memory, and are therefore more significant elements of individual identity.

¹⁶ The theatre of the absurd being the exception that proves the rule.

¹⁷ Though the focus of this project is the narrative of the Christian Gospel, we participate in any number of narratives (family, community, schools, civic organization, work, sports teams, performance groups, nation), each of which plays a role in the formation of identity, and some of which may offer competing narratives.

by not only these narratives, but by the people whose lives intersect ours within, and tangentially to, these narratives, as well as by the narrational memory of these significant others. Another way to say this is that there is no self outside of relationship with others – humans are socially and narratively constituted. Again, MacIntyre says, “I am forever whatever I have been at any time for others – and I may at any time be called upon to answer for it – no matter how changed I may be now. There is no way of *founding* my identity – or lack of it – on the psychological continuity or discontinuity of the self. The self inhabits a character whose unity is given as the unity of a character.”¹⁸ Character, selfhood, is dependent upon our memories of our experiences within these broader narratives, but the very notion of memories – how experiences are perceived and therefore encoded in the memory – are contingent upon any number of factors particular to these narratives. And, of course, individuals are not merely passive recipients of identity formation at the whim of others’ narratives, but are actively involved in the processes of shaping and forming the identities of the others with whom they interact. Similarly, individuals are not merely passive experiencers of memory. There is a level of reciprocity between selves and memories. Each individual actively responds to, and consequently shapes, memories while being ever shaped by those very memories.¹⁹

¹⁸ MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 217.

¹⁹ Miroslav Volf makes the same essential point. See Miroslav Volf, *The End of Memory: Remembering Rightly in a Violent World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006), 25.

2.2 Theological Account of Memory

If the above account of memory is correct, memory expresses itself primarily in the form of narrative, and these narratives are constitutive of human identity.²⁰ But a narrative is not an ethereal, untethered concept. Rather, a narrative, by definition, requires a telos.²¹ In order for time to be ordered so that it can be remembered and attended to, it needs a goal towards which it tends.²² Without this goal the narrative of memory is open-ended in such a way as potentially to render the story meaningless. A theological account of memory situates the narrative of individual memory within the larger framework of God's memory.²³ God is both the foundation and the telos of the narrative of memory. Rather than allowing the narrative to be restricted to *my* story of *my* life and *my* suffering, a theological account of memory incorporates the small

²⁰ This claim of the significance of narrative is not uncontested. Crispin Sartwell, for example, argues that the contemporary academic focus on narrative is misguided for two primary reasons. The first is that all narratives break down at some point, and the second is, without dismissing the liberative possibility of narrative, narratives are potential vehicles of oppression. In lieu of narratives Sartwell wants to celebrate what he sees as the inevitable collapse into incoherence of all narratives, something of a metaphysical entropy. Crispin Sartwell, *End of Story: Toward an Annihilation of Language and History* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000).

²¹ This claim is, likewise, not uncontested. Per MacIntyre's understanding of the narrative nature of life, narrative necessarily has a telos. *After Virtue*, 217. Ricoeur, likewise, understands narrative necessarily to have a telos, however for Ricoeur the telos is not necessarily known, nor is it stagnant. That is, it can be changed by the narrative itself. I will consider Ricoeur's account of narrative more fully in chapter 4. Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, 3 Vols (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984-1988). And, of course, some postmodern thinkers reject the validity of the concept of narrative altogether. See Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, Theory and History of Literature; V. 10 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).

²² Wetzel, 36. This is actually the corollary of what Wetzel claims. He actually says, "Remembered time can be attended to, measured, ordered." However, it seems equally right to suggest that disordered time cannot be rightly remembered. Time that is disordered, disoriented, cannot be remembered rightly. One of the problems of the memory of suffering, as we will see later in the chapter, is that because of its disordered nature, though suffering is not forgotten, it is not remembered rightly.

²³ What I am referring to as a theological account of memory is similar to what Samuel Wells refers to as overaccepting, a topic to which I will return later in the chapter. Samuel Wells, *Improvisation: The Drama of Christian Ethics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2004), 131ff.

narratives of particular lives into the grand narrative of God's continued presence in the world. Thus, a theological rendering of memory both requires, and allows for, hope for the future. In order to develop a theological account of memory I look, first, at David Steinmetz's suggestion that biblical exegesis is a matter of providing a second narrative of the biblical narrative. I then consider the relationship between memory and truth and suggest that a theological account of memory is not one that is concerned with a correspondence notion of truth but is one that tells the truth behind the story – the truth of God's loving and redeeming activity in the world.

To suggest that memory is largely a matter of narrative does not, de facto, place memory within the larger framework of God's narrative. David Steinmetz offers a helpful analogy. He suggests that the work of the historical-critical biblical exegete is somewhat analogous to the work of a detective in a mystery novel.²⁴ The key to the satisfactory conclusion of a mystery novel is the explanation the detective is able to offer at the end of the story that not only solves the crime, but makes sense of the many clues and mis-steps along the way. Steinmetz refers to this explanation as the second narrative. The primary narrative is the story that is told along the way and is evident to everyone – a murder, a theft, a weapon – but the second narrative is the one that cannot be told until the end, until all the missing parts are accounted for – Colonel Mustard in the billiard room with a candlestick. It is this story that makes all the seemingly disparate facts make sense. The key difference between the detective and the historian is that historians read the clues of the past already knowing how these past events turn out, or at

²⁴ David C. Steinmetz, "Uncovering a Second Narrative: Detective Fiction and the Construction of Historical Method," in *The Art of Reading Scripture*, ed. Ellen F. Davis and Richard B. Hays (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003).

least with a good sense of what happens next. The historian can read into the past through a wider lens than is available to the present. Thus, a historian may be more analogous to the reader of a detective novel who peeked at the ending before reading the story than to the detective. And this makes all the difference as knowing how the story ends “makes a difference for the beginning and the middle of the story as well as for its conclusion.”²⁵

A theological account of memory is one in which remembering is analogous to Steinmetz’ impatient reader of detective fiction who sneaks a peek at the final few pages. The memory of the past can be viewed through the lens of what the story-teller already knows about the rest of the story. The theological account of the past, then, is necessarily selective. The details of the past are attended to in a way that is significantly re-ordered and re-prioritized by an understanding of the more comprehensive narrative. The import of the narrative is not found in a verbatim re-creation of the primary narrative – removing pristine memories from the storage bin of the past, as if such were possible – but is in the production of a second narrative that makes sense of the past in light of the already revealed future.²⁶ The objective of a theological account of memory is *not* necessarily to make sure that not a single jot or tittle is out of place, but to make the story make sense in view of a bigger picture.²⁷

²⁵ Ibid, 54.

²⁶ Ibid, 61.

²⁷ Another way to envision this is through art. The Salvador Dali painting “Gala Contemplating the Mediterranean Sea which at 20 Meters becomes a Portrait of Abraham Lincoln” (1976) is a portrait of a woman looking out a window over the sea. Or at least that is what the painting appears to be from close up. However, when you step back, allowing some distance between yourself and the painting it is a portrait of Abraham Lincoln. Once you have seen the bigger picture, however, it is always possible to see both. Though it is initially difficult to find Lincoln in the painting as the woman appears so prominent and obvious, a wider perspective makes obvious the oversight of the initial, narrower perspective.

This claim necessarily raises the question of truth.²⁸ Gerard Genette offers what is perhaps a helpful literary distinction between narrative and story.²⁹ His claim is that a story is concerned with describing an event as fully as possible, in chronological order, and in something of a direct correspondence manner such that events that happen only once are told only once, and events of a repeated nature are told in a repeated fashion. There is a one-to-one correspondence between the event itself and the telling, and there is an attempt neither to compress nor to expand time in the telling. A literary narrative, on the other hand, arranges the order of the telling of events and highlights particular aspects of the story, compressing and expanding time as needed, in order to emphasize that which is most significant for the point the writer is making.³⁰ Narrative, therefore, has an element of discernment, of moral judgment. A narrative is not an attempt at conveying a Sergeant Joe Friday “just the facts, ma’am” story, but is instead focused on conveying the greater truth behind the individual events that make up the narrative. Though I am unconvinced of the necessity of distinguishing semantically between story and narrative in this fashion, I find Genette’s claim about narrative not only persuasive but a helpful way of thinking of the theological narrative of memory. The point of a theological

²⁸ Miroslav Volf focuses on the importance of telling the story of the past truthfully because of what he understands to be the nature of the relationship between truth-telling and justice. For Volf, to remember inaccurately, perhaps especially when it comes to painful memories, is not merely to fail to do justice to the memory and the circumstances surrounding it but is, in fact, a miscarriage of justice. Moreover, Volf suggests that memory, by definition, must be truthful – otherwise it is fabrication. For Volf, to remember inaccurately is, in fact, not to remember. However, Volf’s formal correspondence understanding of truth seems to miss the truth embedded in the narrative nature of memory. See Volf, *The End of Memory*, especially p 49ff.

²⁹ Gerard Loughlin, *Telling God’s Story: Bible, Church, and Narrative Theology* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 52-63. In this section Loughlin describes the narrative theory of Gerard Genette.

³⁰ The four Gospels are an example of this distinction. Each is a narrative, carefully crafted by its author to convey what the author understands to be most critical for the intended audience.

account of memory is that what is true is what rightly locates the past within the narrative of God's redemptive activity.³¹ The details are not insignificant, but they are not privileged either. The rendering of past events that constitutes Steinmetz' second narrative, that which makes sense of all of the seemingly senseless elements of the past is also true. The details and the narrative are different dimensions of the *truth* of memory.

Unlike historians, detectives participate in the stories they are working to tell. The detective is an integral part of the detective novel in the way that, by virtue of temporality, a historian simply cannot be. Of course this means that historians have the advantage of a future vantage point because they are, by definition, chronologically outside of the events. The Christian account of memory is told from within the story, with a perspective much like that of the detective, and yet also with the knowledge of the end of the story, granting a perspective similar to that of the historian. There is a complex interplay between the memories and the telling of the story such that telling the story is, itself, a part of the story as is the storyteller.³² Consequently not only does the story itself (the memory) shape the identity of the story-teller, the story-teller shapes the story, *and* the storyteller is shaped by the act of telling the story. Not only does the knowledge of the end of the story affect the telling of the story, the telling of the story impacts the story itself because the telling of the story is an integral part of the story. In this sense, a theological account of memory is both bounded by the knowledge of what

³¹ Whereas I find Genette's definition of narrative to be helpful, I find the semantic distinction between story and narrative to be cumbersome and somewhat artificial. Therefore I will continue to use the words "story" and "narrative" interchangeably, using both with the intended meaning Genette reserves for narrative.

³² Richard Bauckham, "Reading Scripture as a Coherent Story," in *The Art of Reading Scripture*, ed. Ellen F. Davis and Richard B. Hays (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), 42.

God has done, is doing, and promises yet to do and is at the same time open to the continued presence and movement of God within that story.³³

2.3 Suffering and Memory

Suffering, as defined in chapter one, refers to *intense and enduring pain of a physical, psychic, or social nature, resulting from the violent actions of another human being, the memory of which is disorienting or disintegrating of personal identity, destructive of social bonds, and crippling of the individual's capacity to imagine a future unbounded by the suffering of the past*. Such profound suffering is perhaps the greatest threat to a coherent narrative of memory because such suffering is generally experienced as an unintelligible disruption to what is, or would be, an otherwise coherent narrative. And this is perhaps most poignantly so in the case of theological memory. How does one rightly locate profound suffering in the narrative of a healing God? How is suffering, or more to the point, the memory of past profound suffering, experienced and remembered as redeemed? I begin this section by exploring questions of reliability of memory, particularly in the case of the memory of trauma. The work of neuropsychologists suggests, somewhat counter-intuitively, that intense emotions increase the reliability of memory. That suffering is remembered does not, however, render suffering narratable. In order to consider why this is so I look at the logic of suffering itself, and suggest that suffering poses a number of problems for narration – and thus for identity. I suggest that because suffering is to some extent unnarratable, the

³³ Stephen Fowl suggests reading and interpreting Scripture in this way, an approach he refers to as underdetermined. Stephen E. Fowl, *Engaging Scripture: A Model for Theological Interpretation* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1998), chapter 2.

memory of suffering is stored not only in the narrational memory but in non-narrational memory as well. I then consider the habits that such non-narrational memory of suffering develops, habits through which the suffering is inadvertently perpetuated.

If suffering itself is particular and largely depends upon perception, the *memory* of suffering is even more so, and any discussion of memory necessarily requires asking questions of reliability. To what extent can memories in general be trusted, let alone memories of perceived intense suffering from times past, perhaps long past? Insofar as memories are generally conceived in predominantly cognitive terms, a matter of rationality, and suffering is largely a matter of emotive response to that event, conventional wisdom would seem to suggest that any increase in emotional content would necessarily result in a correlative decrease in reliability of factual recall. The more terrifying or infuriating an event, the more the experience of that event is presumed to be distorted in the memory. It is not so much that the (presumptively rational) memory itself cannot be trusted, but that the (presumptively irrational) emotion cannot be trusted.

However, according to research in the field of neuroscience, intense emotions actually increase the likelihood that an event will not only be stored in the memory, but will be stored accurately. “We need a signal to say, ‘This is an important memory. Write this down and underline it.’ That signal is emotion. When you have feelings of fear or joy or love or anger or sadness, these mark your experiences as being particularly meaningful. These are the memories you most need to store and keep safe. These are the ones that are most likely to be relevant in future situations.”³⁴ Because emotions impact

³⁴ Linden, 108. See also, Schacter, *The Seven Sins of Memory* in which he explains that the more active the amygdala (which registers strong emotions such as fear and anger) the guiltier the memory will be of the “sin of persistence.” That is, more emotionally-fraught memories will not only be more deeply embedded in the memory, they will be more likely to continue to recur at in an unwanted manner. Such intrusive

the perception of an experience, strong emotions – particularly feelings of intense fear, horror or helplessness – increase the brain’s ability to store an event in memory, indelibly etching the experience in the psyche.

A second contributing factor to the reliability of the memory of suffering is a temporal one. The longer the duration of suffering, the more embedded the suffering is in the memory and psyche. The catch-22 of suffering that extends over a long period of time is that events that are commonplace tend to be rendered generic.³⁵ Though aspects of the everyday over an extended period of time are remembered, they are not necessarily remembered in their particularity. Long-term torture victims, for example, will acutely remember being tortured, but they may struggle to separate one incident of torture from another. The routine nature of the suffering both greatly increases the likelihood that the suffering will be remembered but also that the particular instances of suffering will blend together in such a way that distinguishing one day’s violence from another becomes nearly impossible. The more commonplace, that is frequently repeated, an event is, the more the distinct incidents blur together and become conflated into one seemingly ceaseless memory. Due to the heightened emotional response to a particular situation of suffering, the ability to clearly distinguish one episode from another may be lost when repeatedly faced with situations which evoke an intense emotional response such that for a particular episode to stand out requires an even greater level of intensity or horror.³⁶

memories seem to be less prone to distortion than less emotively-stored memories. Contrary to folk wisdom, such memories are most likely to be preserved in something akin to a storage container than are memories less embedded by strong emotion.

³⁵ Linden, 122.

³⁶ The question of reliability of memory necessarily brings up the question of false memories. A number of studies suggest that there is a key distinction between recurrent memories (such as the flashbacks and nightmares common in those who suffer from PTSD) and the therapeutic or hypnotic retrieval of

The damage done by suffering perdures in the memory and the soul often long after the actual event(s) have passed and any physical injuries may have healed.³⁷ The greatest challenge suffering presents to the memory is one of incorporation into a coherent life story. Suffering, by virtue of its own internal logic, is to some extent un-narratable; it refuses to become a part of a coherent narrative. The inability of the individual to make narrative sense of suffering poses the greatest challenge to the memory of suffering. How does one tell the story of one's life when one's life is peppered with a memory of suffering which seems to render significant portions of one's

suppressed traumatic memories. Though this is in no way to suggest that retrieved memories are necessarily false – there are undoubtedly a significant number of people for whom the retrieved memory is of genuinely horrendous suffering – studies suggest that recurring, invasive memories are considerably more reliable than retrieved memories. Such flashback-type memories tend to be of a telescoping nature. That is, they are rarely a complete memory, but are often just a snippet of a very intense memory. They bring into focus one very particular segment of a larger event but often occur in such a way that the rememberer has little context in which to situate the memory. The limited scope of the memory is partially responsible for its accuracy. Rather than retaining an entire narrative, the brain has taken something of a Polaroid of an emotionally overwhelming moment, and preserved it. The lack of context explains both the disruptive nature of such memories as well as their reliability.

In *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, ed. Cathy Caruth (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995) Cathy Caruth explores the ways in which the nature of unintegrated memories of trauma are unaltered by virtue of the fact that they have not been integrated into one's narrative memory. (153ff) And in *The Accidental Mind* Linden describes studies of suggestibility in preschool-aged children which show that whereas preschool aged children are very susceptible to "remembering" events that have been re-interpreted through adult intervention and are therefore no longer true accounts, even a very young child's spontaneous recall of an event is highly reliable. (126) Schacter, in *The Seven Sins of Memory*, discusses some of the same studies and comes to the same conclusion in his discussion of the "sin of suggestibility." (chapter 5).

It is important to note that these studies compare the facticity of recurring invasive memories with therapeutically retrieved memories *not* with memories that have remained intact from the time of the event. And none of these studies suggest that accurate memories cannot be retrieved by therapeutic means. Rather, the point seems to be that recurring invasive memories, by their very nature, have an extremely high degree of reliability. The problem of assigning a primacy of reliability to recurring, invasive memories is *not* in suggesting that such memories are reliable, but in the implication that the healing of such invasive attacks of memory would, to some extent, render them less reliable. Recurring invasive memories are a living nightmare for those who experience them, and the lessening of their occurrence is considered one of the criterion for recovery from PTSD. Yet the analysis of these studies – particularly that done by Caruth et al – suggests that once a memory is narrated by the conscious mind rather than the sub-conscious, it becomes more prone to errors of memory. Healing means forgetting. Or at least not remembering correctly anymore. Not only is this counter-intuitive, it is logically misguided and, I think, theologically untenable.

³⁷ This is not, in any way, to suggest that there may not be physical reminders of suffering as well; it is, rather, to say that the non-physical memory of suffering is as problematic and as in need for redemption as is physical suffering.

story – perhaps even the whole story – meaningless? And what is it about the memory of past suffering that refuses to remain in the past and continues to hold sway over both the present and the future?

Jonathan Tran claims that suffering is un-narratable because it is endlessly narratable.³⁸ Because suffering is so particular and so overwhelming, there cannot be one right way to tell the story of suffering, and so it needs to be retold again and again in an attempt to get at the truth behind the memory. And there is something absolutely right, it seems to me, about Tran's insight. Behind this insight is the recognition that the experience of suffering, to borrow from Paul, is simply too deep for words. Suffering is an experience of overwhelming. No matter how accurately one is able to narrate the events of suffering, the nature of the suffering itself remains, at best, only partially unearthed. However, the reason for suffering's unnarratability seems more deeply embedded in the logic of suffering itself than Tran's suggestion of a multiplicity of interpretations can adequately explain. I want to suggest that what makes suffering un-narratable is that suffering inherently involves a loss of language and of time – both of which are necessary elements of narration.

The experience of pain, particularly physical pain, has the ability to reduce one to a pre-linguistic state in which guttural cries and sounds are all one is capable of producing.³⁹ Physical pain undoes years of cognitive and linguistic development.

³⁸ Jonathan Tran, *The Vietnam War and Theologies of Memory: Time and Eternity in the Far Country* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 125. Tran's point, and one I agree with completely, is that communities of faith need to be places where suffering can, in fact, be endlessly narrated because suffering is so complex and overwhelming that the story can never be told absolutely, and to fail to continue to strive to tell the story of suffering is to give in to the despair of suffering.

³⁹ Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 4.

“Intense pain is world-destroying...in the most literal way possible, the created world of thought and feeling, all the psychological and mental content that constitutes both oneself and one’s world, and that gives rise to and is in turn made possible by language, ceases to exist.”⁴⁰ One of the constitutive elements of suffering is that it renders the sufferer powerless – or exposes the powerlessness of the one who suffers.⁴¹ If one could alleviate suffering one would; to suffer is to be at the mercy of the suffering.⁴² The loss of language connected to suffering needs to be understood as much as a loss of agency as it is a loss of vocabulary. It is because suffering involves a loss of agency, and language production requires agency, that profound suffering can render one mute. It is not necessarily that one cannot express suffering because words fail to convey adequately the depth of suffering (though this may indeed be true), but rather that the power of speech is a casualty of lost agency.⁴³ The production of language requires an agent, an acting subject. Suffering, however, renders the sufferer an object of someone (in the case of violence) or something (in the case of illness or natural disaster) else’s agency.⁴⁴

⁴⁰ Ibid, 29-30.

⁴¹ Dorothee Sölle, *Suffering* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), 11.

⁴² A significant distinction needs to be maintained between inexplicable suffering and the voluntary suffering of martyrdom.

⁴³ Perhaps this is most readily apparent in its inverse claim. The development of language skills does not merely coincide with the development of increased agency in a young toddler; it is a primary form the developing child’s agency takes.

⁴⁴ This lack of agency is often noted in child abuse victims who exhibit what is known as “frozen watchfulness.” This is a state of hyper-arousal in which the child is acutely aware of her surroundings and of the actions and moods of others (particularly those who may be perceived as a threat) while simultaneously exhibiting no signs of agency but appearing totally lethargic and passive. In this state of frozen watchfulness children remain not only motionless for unnaturally extended periods of time but are also often rendered mute.

In addition to a loss of language, profound suffering distorts the perception of time. In speaking of trauma, Shelley Rambo says, “The central problem of trauma is a temporal one. The past does not stay, so to speak, in the past.”⁴⁵ Rambo is referring primarily to recurring, invasive memories – flashbacks – of past traumatic events. And such recurrent, invasive memories are clearly one way in which suffering distorts chronology. However, suffering distorts time even when the distortion is not evidenced by invasive memories. Profound suffering itself results in a perceived loss of past and future. In the midst of suffering there is a diminution of space – both geographical and temporal. Suffering focuses one intently upon the immediate now.⁴⁶ Lost is any sense of time or place before the suffering began, as well as any hope that a time and place free of suffering will ever occur in the future. Time is frozen *in* the moment of most intense pain, and in that moment there are no others.⁴⁷ Pain demands one’s complete and total attention. This is most immediately and notably true of physical pain, but the same can be said of intense psychic pain. In the midst of suffering time is lost, both in the sense that the time of the suffering itself is lost, and in that the sense of time in the midst – and perhaps aftermath – of suffering is destroyed.

This combination of loss of language and loss of temporality is what renders suffering unnarratable. Narrative memory is an attempt to make sense of one’s life, to

⁴⁵ Shelly Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma: A Theology of Remaining* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), 19.

⁴⁶ Nancy Raines, for example, in describing the hours during which she was raped, says, “At that moment, time disappeared into a continuous present.” Nancy Venable Raine, *After Silence: Rape and My Journey Back* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 1998).

⁴⁷ In situations of predictable repeated events of suffering, time is often instead frozen in the moment immediately *preceding* the moment of most intense physical pain, as the anticipation of the pain one is helpless to prevent is often more terror-inducing than the actual infliction of pain.

see the chain of seemingly disjointed, discreet events as forming a coherent whole which makes sense of who one is. But in situations of profound suffering, “areas of the brain shut down...therefore stopping the system from passing along the experience to the prefrontal cortex, the part of the brain that assigns to an experience language and meaning.”⁴⁸ Narrative memory assumes a story, and profound suffering refuses to be a story. Because the nature of suffering is such that there is no past and no present, there can be no temporal ordering necessary for narration. With no sense of a future, time has no forward motion, and seems to spiral back on itself such that the suffering person is constantly re-awaking to the suffering of the past like a perverse rendition of Bill Murray’s character in *Groundhog Day*.⁴⁹

Despite the fact that suffering is largely un-narratable, the memory of suffering continues to play a formative role in the identity of the sufferer. Memory is a way of knowing; a way of knowing which cannot be un-known.⁵⁰ One can never un-know the suffering of the past.⁵¹ But rather than knowing that is simple recall of facts, the memory of suffering is a knowing that exceeds sheer cognition. Recall the distinction made at the beginning of the chapter between explicit and implicit memory. Explicit memory includes the ability to recall facts as well as the ability to narrate events - for my purposes, the events of one’s life. Explicit memory and its impact is more obvious because it is readily available to the conscious mind. Implicit memory, however, is

⁴⁸ Rambo, 21.

⁴⁹ Harold Ramis, “Groundhog Day.” (Columbia, 1993).

⁵⁰ Nancy Raines suggests that forgetting is actually “itself a kind of remembering, but a remembering that is both hopeless and destructive” (114).

⁵¹ Forgetting does not constitute unknowing, a topic I address below.

arguably even more powerful a formative force because it is largely unrecognized and yet it works to modify behavior.⁵² Because suffering becomes an integral part of memory, and memory is itself a type of knowing, the knowledge of suffering renders the sufferer acutely aware of the vulnerability of suffering;⁵³ and this awareness – whether available to the conscious mind or not – impacts interactions both with one’s own memory and with others. Insofar as knowledge creates a biochemical change, memory (and therefore the memory of suffering) is encoded in the DNA, almost literally, such that behavior is always being to some extent modified by experience.⁵⁴

The behavior-modification of implicit memory largely functions through the development of habit. Habit is a primary form of non-narrative memory. An easy way to see how habit is a form of memory is to think of simple tasks such as making a sandwich or riding a bike. As a young child, learning to do such tasks requires intense concentration. There are skills, both physical and cognitive, that have to be learned and remembered before they can be mastered. Once the skill is mastered it can become habit, a sort of second nature. Spreading peanut butter ceases to require any seeming cognitive engagement. The fact that it no longer needs to be re-called, however, hardly means it is forgotten. In fact, it is once a memory is so embedded as to no longer need to be re-

⁵² Linden, 112.

⁵³ This is true whether the cause of suffering is a weather-related disaster or a result of human sin. However, it would seem that suffering caused by another person (torture, assault, abuse) is inherently more destructive of trust and therefore has a more detrimental effect on human relationships and therefore, given the socially-constructed nature of the self, on one’s sense of self. This is a topic that I explore further in chapter 3.

⁵⁴ Raines notes, “My history had been ruptured – the woman who had not been raped could never return” (80). She suggests that because the brain’s neuro-chemistry is altered by traumatic experiences of overwhelming violence that one can never be the same after such an event because the brain is no longer the same brain.

called that the memory has the force of habit. Rather than requiring conscious effort a particular memory becomes an integral part of one's identity. This means there has to be some distinction made between memory and cognition. The same can be said of all sorts of activities – perhaps this is most evident in the playing of sports or musical instruments. In such activities clearly memory is at play, especially early on, but the more proficient one becomes the less cognition is involved in performing what are really extremely complex tasks.

The same can be said of habits of being and relating. But, how does this talk of mnemonic habits relate to the memory of suffering? I want to suggest that there are two primary habits of memory which can result from the implicit memory of suffering, each of which entails the prolongation of the loss of agency experienced in the event of suffering itself, and is, in its own way, a perversion or distortion of memory.⁵⁵ The first is that of over-identification with suffering, and the second is that of denial or repression of suffering.

Over-identification of suffering can take two forms. One mirrors Valerie Saiving Goldstein's critique of sin as pride; that one can so identify with suffering that one comes to see oneself as a sufferer by definition.⁵⁶ There is a self-identification with the memory of suffering which results in an embodiment of the shame of one's suffering. The flipside of over-identification with suffering is a glorification of victimization. Suffering becomes a badge of honor which is worn to garner sympathy. The resulting

⁵⁵ These are by no means the only habits of suffering. They are, rather, the primary habits related to memory. Other habits will be discussed in chapters 3 and 4.

⁵⁶ Goldstein speaks of the habit of hiding as something of a mirror opposite of sin traditionally understood as pride. Valerie Saiving Goldstein, "The Human Situation: A Feminine View," *The Journal of Religion* 40, no. 2 (April, 1960).

identification of oneself as vulnerable victim often leads to habitual self-protective behaviors such as avoidance of public places or particular groups of people. The identification of oneself as sufferer – whether as an embodiment of shame or as an object of sympathy – entails, among other things, a passive resignation of oneself to what is perceived as one's fate.

Similarly the denial or repression of the memory of suffering can take two forms. The first is an explicit denial of the suffering. This denial can be conscious or subconscious. It is a refusal to acknowledge, perhaps even to oneself, that one has suffered greatly, that one has been, in fact, a victim of an intensely painful experience. The second form this can take is to acknowledge the event of suffering but to deny its emotive power or impact on one's life. It is a stoic insistence that things were not as bad as they may have seemed, a way of claiming a level of invulnerability against the power of the suffering. Rather than self-protective behaviors, the refusal to acknowledge one's vulnerability to suffering often manifests itself in self-destructive behaviors, including excessive drug and alcohol use as well as repeatedly placing oneself in patently dangerous situations, greatly increasing the likelihood of repeat trauma.

Whether one responds to the memory of suffering by over-identifying with it or denying it, and whether this over-identification or denial of the memory of suffering is conscious or unconscious, though perhaps interesting, is really not the point. Rather, the point is that the non-narrative memory of suffering is, in fact, deeply embedded in the memory and therefore continues to play a formative role in habits of being and relating, whether consciously or not. This is so even, and perhaps especially, when the suffering is found to be unnarratable.

2.4 Therapeutic Healing of Memory

Trauma, as I discussed in chapter 1, is defined by the *DSM IV* as:

an event that involves actual or threatened death or serious injury, or other threat to one's physical integrity; or witnessing an event that involves death, injury, or a threat to the physical integrity of another person; or learning about unexpected or violent death, serious harm, or threat of death or injury experienced by a family member or other close associate. The person's response to the event must involve intense fear, helplessness, or horror (or in children, the response must involve disorganized or agitated behavior).⁵⁷

The healing of trauma, into which the healing of suffering is generally subsumed, and specifically of the memory of suffering, is popularly approached from a therapeutic perspective in which the primary objective is for the sufferer to regain an ability to function normally according to criteria based on pre-suffering function.⁵⁸ There is a sense, then, in which healing is considered in terms of undoing the damage of suffering, of returning to a (most likely idealized) pre-suffering state of relative innocence (including at the very least a freedom from the fear of suffering) and happiness. Though the means of getting from a state of intense suffering to a state of being over this suffering may vary (from talk therapy to drug therapy to institutionalization) the process of healing is generally broken down into a very similar set of steps or stages. In what follows I consider the standard account of therapeutic healing and suggest that therapeutic healing offers coping rather than offering redemption. In order to do this, I first look at the therapeutic stages of recovery from trauma. One of the stages of

⁵⁷ *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders: Dsm-Iv* ed. American Psychiatric Association. (Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Association, 1994-98), 309.81.

⁵⁸ Basing criteria for healing on pre-suffering functioning makes a certain level of sense for some instances of suffering – one-time physical or sexual assaults or military service induced PTSD, for instance. However, this notion of healing is rendered void in situations of long-term, childhood suffering (and perhaps long-term suffering of any nature) where there is no “before” to compare to an “after.”

recovery is the narration of trauma. I argue that the rationale for such narration is theologically problematic and pastorally insufficient because its telos is to allow the sufferer to make do in the aftermath of trauma rather than to live into the new creation of redemption.

The classic text in the recovery of trauma victims is Judith Lewis Herman's *Trauma and Recovery*. Herman describes healing from severe trauma in terms of meeting three distinct needs: the establishment of safety, coming to terms with memories, integration into community.⁵⁹ These stages need not be thought of in strictly linear fashion; there is, rather, a spiral nature to recovery in which any new insight or movement in one area necessarily alters one's location in terms of each phase. In this section I explore these three therapeutic aspects of healing in order to ask the question of what exactly therapeutic healing from suffering means in regards to memory.

The first criterion is that of establishing safety, removing oneself from the situation that is responsible for the suffering. Insofar as this project presumes the suffering is of a past nature, there is a presumption that the time of acute suffering has passed, that one is no longer in immediate danger of externally-imposed physical harm. However, because of the residual memory of danger, the need to establish safety goes well beyond the physical requirement that one is no longer in harm's way. There is also a vital need for emotional safety. This first phase of healing requires a place, a time, of sanctuary, of respite from the suffering in which one can begin to unlearn the habits of

⁵⁹ Judith Lewis Herman, *Trauma and Recovery* (New York: BasicBooks, 1997). Though this is perhaps an oversimplification of Herman's project, I think it is a fair summary of her approach. The first four of Kübler-Ross's five stages of grief (denial, anger, bargaining, depression) can all be ways of further addressing Herman's phase of coming to term with memories. Kübler-Ross's final stage, like Herman's, is acceptance. See Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, *On Death and Dying* (New York: Macmillan, 1969).

hyper-vigilance instilled by the experience of suffering. Additionally, because of the perceptual nature of suffering, its healing requires not only an objectively safe environment (a violent spouse is no longer living under the same roof and sleeping in the same bed), the perception of safety is as important as the reality of safety. Insofar as one does not perceive oneself to be safe, healing is rendered partial at best.

The very nature of the memory of profound suffering, however, makes this a much more complex criterion than it may appear to be on the surface. The perception of safety proves to be notoriously elusive. Because suffering is linked to memory as a way of knowing, one who remembers profound suffering cannot be unaware of the reality of suffering. If, by definition, what it means to suffer profoundly is to be helpless to prevent the suffering, then suffering cannot be reduced to a preventable occurrence in which taking certain steps offers a guarantee of future safety. If there was nothing one could do to prevent or end suffering in the past then it is impossible *not* to remain acutely aware of one's vulnerability to the same or similar suffering in the future.⁶⁰ And insofar as one is able to develop a sense of mastery, albeit illusory, over one's environment such that there is a sense of security that no such future suffering is possible, then one often begins to question whether or not one might have been able to prevent or end the previous suffering, resulting in a cycle of guilt and shame.⁶¹

⁶⁰ This acute awareness of one's vulnerability to future similar suffering is seen perhaps most acutely in victims of sexual violence. For more on this see Alice Sebold's autobiographical story of a violent rape and the further violence of the legal system faced by those who prosecute their attackers. Alice Sebold, *Lucky* (Boston: Back Bay Books, 1999). For more on the effects of childhood sexual violence, including but not limited to, a heightened awareness of the vulnerability of oneself and others, see Ellen Bass and Laura Davis, *The Courage to Heal: A Guide for Women Survivors of Child Sexual Abuse: Featuring "Honoring the Truth, a Response to the Backlash"* (New York: HarperPerennial, 1994).

⁶¹ This also is seen acutely in rape victims who struggle to come to terms with questions of complicity and guilt which are made more complicated by the cultural ambivalence towards victims of crime in general, let alone towards victims of sexual crimes.

The second phase or stage of healing of suffering is coming to terms with memories. This primarily means being able to tell the story of one's suffering in such a way that gradually, with subsequent retellings, the power of the story over one's life is decreased.⁶² "There is, in each survivor, an imperative need to *tell* and thus to come to *know* one's story, unimpeded by ghosts from the past against which one has to protect oneself. One has to know one's buried truth in order to be able to live one's life."⁶³ In the telling of the story, one can progress, theoretically anyway, through Kübler-Ross's stages, gaining an increasing degree of control over the memories of the suffering.

Because in the act of suffering agency is lost, suffering is often experienced as if one were an object of another's agency rather than an agent in one's own right, being able to narrate the suffering – often many times – enables some degree of restoration of agency. "In the case of complete recovery...the story can be told, the person can look back at what happened; he has given it a place in his life story, his autobiography, and thereby in the whole of his personality."⁶⁴ Ultimately the goal of telling the story is to be able to recall and narrate it in a way that is, though not necessarily detached, clearly free from the fear, anger, or sadness common to suffering.

Among those who strongly advocate the therapeutic re-telling of stories of suffering there are two common yet seemingly contradictory rationalizations, though they

⁶² The re-telling of one's story is understood to be an absolutely crucial step in recovery by the vast majority of therapists who work with trauma survivors. There are however, a small number of dissenting voices who are concerned that the re-telling of stories of suffering primarily serves to keep the wound fresh and alive rather than letting it die a quiet death. See, for example, Babette Rothschild, *8 Keys to Safe Trauma Recovery: Take-Charge Strategies to Empower Your Healing*. (New York: Norton, 2010).

⁶³ Cathy Caruth, *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 63.

⁶⁴ *Ibid*, 176.

have the same goal – and that is to tell the story in order to rob the story of its power.

The first, most common, rationale for telling the story of suffering is that in telling it one can come to forget it.⁶⁵ The theory is that initially recovery requires many tellings of the story, but that, in time, the story will lose its potency and therefore no longer need to be told. Given enough time, it may even recede entirely from one’s conscious memory.⁶⁶

In addition to forgetting, in cases where one’s suffering is the direct result of another person’s action, particularly when the action was of an intentionally malevolent nature, the goal of such retellings is not merely to forget, but to forget in order to make room for forgiveness.⁶⁷ This admonition to forgive and forget is not limited to Christians or even to religious persons more broadly. Secular therapists and contemporary cultural trends often urge those who have suffered to forgive. Such forgiveness, however, is a purely functional, therapeutic forgiveness in which the reasons for forgiving, and therefore forgetting, are solely concerned with feeling better.⁶⁸ Forgiveness – predicated

⁶⁵ Miroslav Volf offers what I find to be a helpful distinction between forgetting and non-remembering. Forgetting is the inability to recall an event, even when one makes an effort to do so. What Volf calls “the gift of non-remembering” is not forgetting, it is the gradual recession of a memory out of the foreground of one’s consciousness and into the background. The event can still be recalled if desired, but no longer presents itself without being intentionally recalled. Volf understands this as a gift because he sees the recession of painful memories as an important step in the healing of memories, particularly those he sees as irredeemable. However, his account of memory, though insightful, only considers memory as a cognitive event. See Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Nashville, TN : Abingdon Press, 1996).

⁶⁶ However, insofar as memory is an integral part of one’s identity as I have suggested it is, to forget, particularly to forget something as formative as past trauma, is to lose a significant dimension of one’s identity. In the aftermath of her brutal sexual assault Nancy Raines equates forgetting with the annihilation of her past. And she suggests that “the annihilation of my past would be a suicide” (112).

⁶⁷ For more on the problematic linkage of forgiveness with forgetting see L. Gregory Jones, “Behold, I Make All Things New” in *God and the Victim: Theological Reflections on Evil, Victimization, Justice, and Forgiveness*, ed. Michelle D. Shattuck (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999).

⁶⁸ This is by no means to suggest that forgiveness is not an integral part of the healing of suffering. It is, rather, to suggest that forgiveness can neither be instrumentalized nor predicated upon forgetting. Forgiveness as genuine restoration to/of community is addressed in chapter 4.

upon forgetting – becomes an instrumentalized way of progressing through the stages of grief towards recovery, diminishing its theological and moral content.⁶⁹

The second rationale for telling one's story of suffering is the opposite. Rather than telling the story to forget, the sufferer is urged to tell the story in order to remember. Remembering is generally urged in order to prevent the same sort of suffering from happening in the future.⁷⁰ This is, in fact, according to Linden, the evolutionary reason that memories which are embedded in conjunction with strong emotions tend to last. Remembering those things which have hurt or threatened us in the past makes us more prone to avoid similar settings, situations, or people in the future, increasing the statistical odds of longevity. This, however, loops us back to the critique of prevention raised above – by its very nature suffering is something outside of our control and beyond what might have been reasonably anticipated.

In addition to the professional therapeutic model for the healing of suffering there are at least three common responses to suffering within the popular self-help genre. One reason given for remembering suffering is to keep it in perspective. To remember that things could have been even worse. Alice Sebold wrote a memoir of her experience of rape, and the subsequent prosecution of her rapist, which she titled *Lucky*, because she was told by a police officer that, given the severity of her injuries, she was lucky to be

⁶⁹ For a theological perspective that challenges any such instrumentalization of forgiveness see L. Gregory Jones, *Embodying Forgiveness: A Theological Analysis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995). For an example of a therapeutic model of forgiveness see Lewis B. Smedes, *Forgive and Forget: Healing the Hurts We Don't Deserve* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1984).

⁷⁰ For an interesting focus on redemption and memory representative of this perspective see Flora A. Keshgegian, *Redeeming Memories: A Theology of Healing and Transformation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000).

alive.⁷¹ Such admonitions to recognize one's good fortune can be extremely disorienting for someone reeling from what is undoubtedly perceived as the most unfortunate experience in their memory or imagination.

Closely related to this is the admonition to remember because the suffering has made one a stronger, better, wiser person. In fact one popular self-help recovery book offers that suffering is an opportunity to "Make lemonade."⁷² Of course, this admonition places the impetus of healing from suffering squarely on the sufferer. The stated recovery goal is to "put you in the driver's seat." This is, once again, a problematic approach to suffering that is just a baby step away from blaming those who have not, in fact, been able to make lemonade with no attention given to the fact that perhaps the lemons they were given were unfit for this purpose.

The third more popular response is relatively unconcerned with memory, and presumes that suffering is something which a person should be able to quickly "get over" in order to "move on." That is, there is a popular sense that there is an appropriate amount of time during which it is acceptable to grieve for suffering, but there is an unspoken expectation that once this acceptable time has passed any continued recognition of suffering is seen as a form of self-pitying, a nursing of old wounds which is, at the very least selfish, and perhaps even a sign of emotional instability.⁷³

⁷¹ Sebold, 11.

⁷² Rothschild, 131. Chapter 2 of Rothschild's book opens with a quote from Nietzsche, "What does not destroy me makes me stronger" (27). Trauma research attests time and again to the lack of validity of such a claim. Suffering does not have to destroy a person in order to cause great harm. Claims such as Nietzsche's are problematic beyond the level of falsehood, however. The greater problem is the implicit justification for perhaps causing suffering and for, at the very least, *not* doing anything to alleviate the suffering which we may in fact have the power to do something about.

⁷³ This is not to deny that there is necessarily a significant element of social convention to practices of responding to suffering. Daoud Hari, for example, in his memoir *The Translator* speaks of the ritualized

No matter how justifiable the rationale for or against remembering, the question of whether to remember or forget is often moot. Though there are undoubtedly ways in which one can increase the chances of remembering something deliberately, the converse of this is not true. One is rarely, if ever, able to will oneself to forget anything. Repressed memories, insofar as they do occur, are not a matter of the will but are instead a sign of the incomprehensibility and profundity of suffering.⁷⁴ Memory more broadly, and especially the memory of suffering, is not something over which one necessarily exercises any great control. Memory cannot be reduced to a question of mind over matter. Or perhaps it is that memory *is* a matter of mind over matter, keeping in mind that the mind is not at the disposal of the will. The question, it seems, is less one of whether or not one ought to remember and rather more of what to do with the memories – those explicit and implicit memories which continue to shape identity whether they are recognized or not.

The goal of such healing is illustrated by the concluding words of William Earnest Henley's poem *Invictus*, "I am the master of my fate: I am the captain of my soul."⁷⁵ The goal of therapeutic healing is cast in terms of a recovery of control. It is to

practices the Zaghawa of Darfur have for addressing grief and suffering. Even before the genocide Hari tells of how the dead are remembered: "They recounted the deaths of each person: how it happened, what was happening to that family, and good things to remember about each person. It is good to remember the dead at such times, for soon, after the period of mourning, any photo and reminder of that person will be removed... The past is past. There is too much death in the land of no doctors for it to be any other way." Daoud Hari, *The Translator: A Tribesman's Memoir of Darfur* (New York: Random House, 2008), 49.

⁷⁴ This is not to suggest that all suffering will be remembered in all of its particularity for all time. There is an element of forgetfulness or of non-remembering which can occur in even cases of the most horrendous suffering. It is, rather, to say that such fading of the memory is not something one wills. The willful suppression of memories, insofar as it is possible, is repression not forgetting. The issue with admonitions either to remember or to forget is that they place yet another burden on the one who suffers.

⁷⁵ *The Oxford Book of English Verse, 1250-1918*, ed. Arthur Thomas Sir Quiller-Couch (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1961), 1019. This poem was credited, in the movie of the same name, with providing Nelson Mandela with the courage and tenacity to survive twenty-seven years of imprisonment on Robben Island.

become (again?) the captain of one's own unconquerable soul and the master of one's own fate – wounded maybe, but unafraid. The problem with such a goal is that ultimately to be the captain of one's soul is not freedom and healing, but is, in fact, bondage. In the case of extreme suffering, being the captain of one's soul is to be the captive of a wounded and suffering memory.

The ultimate purpose of therapeutic healing of suffering, particularly the goal of coming to terms with the memory of suffering, is to enable the sufferer to let it go, to move on. In both Herman's and Kübler-Ross's taxonomies, the end goal is acceptance, that suffering can be accepted as a fact of the past such that it is possible to move on, confidently facing the future despite the suffering. But, "acceptance is *putting up with* the past, not *redeeming* it."⁷⁶ That is, the telos of such healing is hardly one of redemption. It is, instead, an increased level of tolerance for the memory of one's past. Therapeutic approaches to suffering focus on making those who have suffered feel better about themselves and the suffering they have experienced, but do little or nothing to actually make better the past, present, or future of the person.

The difficulties with each of these stages begs the question of whether healing the memory of suffering is actually possible from a therapeutic perspective, or if those who suffer are left to do the best they can with little expectation of anything like wholeness. Rather, instead of healing it seems that the best one who has suffered profoundly can hope for is a life that moves on as if the suffering had never occurred. The schizophrenic

Interestingly, and perhaps disturbingly, this same poem was what Timothy McVeigh chose as his last words before his execution. Rita Cosby (2001-06-12). "Timothy McVeigh Put to Death for Oklahoma City Bombings." FOX News. Retrieved 5/31/11.

⁷⁶ Volf, 42.

necessity of living as if the very suffering which has left an indelible mark on the soul never occurred does not, however, sound like healing. Therapeutic healing sounds more like making do than making new.

2.5 Transformation of Memory

In this section I suggest that for those who have suffered, the beautiful new creation of God's redemption begins with the seemingly irredeemable memories of this suffering. David Stubbs argues that there is a necessary tension between a proper boldness that questions, challenges even, the unfair practices of a community, and a proper obedience that is willing to curtail individual desires and choices for the sake of the good of the community.⁷⁷ Though the controversy recounted in Numbers of which Stubbs speaks has to do with patrilineal inheritance of land rather than with remembered sin and suffering of violence, there is, I think, a corollary to be found. That corollary can be seen in a tension between lament and repentance which is both made possible by, and makes possible, proper boldness and proper obedience through which right relationship with God is learned. This right relationship with God – particularly in relation to the specific haunting memories of past suffering – is the beginning of the transformation of memory.

⁷⁷ David L. Stubbs, *Numbers*, Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2009), 248-9. The daughters of Zelophedad are introduced in Numbers 26:33 as little more than a genealogical note. The point is merely made that Zelophedad had no sons. In chapter 33, however, the significance of Zelophedad having no sons becomes a prominent concern in terms of inheritance practices, and the daughters are portrayed in an uncharacteristically assertive manner – one which Stubbs praises as simultaneously being both rightly bold and rightly obedient. The daughters of Zelophedad were bold in their willingness to challenge the unjust authority structures which would, in essence, leave them with no inheritance and no means of sustenance. And yet they were obedient to the commands of God and the authority of the community in their willingness to restrict their marriage prospects to descendants of Joseph, assuring that their inherited land remained in the tribe of Israel.

In order to explore this claim I first suggest that the practice of lament is an appropriate response to the not-yetness of God's kingdom. To learn to lament is to learn to respond to situations of sin and suffering faithfully. Next, I consider the practice of repentance and suggest that repentance is the appropriate faithful human posture before God. Lament and repentance are not an either/or. I am not suggesting that lament is appropriate to suffering and repentance to sin. Rather, both lament and repentance are an appropriate response to both sin and suffering. Lament is, in a sense, the proper boldness before God, the sorrow that demands redress. Repentance is the proper obedience, the re-aligning of the human will with God's. Both lament and repentance are communal practices to be learned in and through participation in ecclesial communities. The ecclesial practices of lament and repentance do not, themselves, redeem such memories. Rather, lament and repentance are tools by which the Holy Spirit works in and through the church to develop the imagination necessary to see the work of redemption which is always already in progress

I recognize the difficulty in suggesting that repentance is as appropriate a response to the victimization of violence as is lament. This is emphatically *not* a claim that tends towards the blaming of victims either for complicity in their victimization or for their vulnerability to victimization. It is, instead, a suggestion that repentance is as much a mode of remembering as is lament. Lament remembers in a way that looks at the damage of the past as being at odds with the promises of God, whereas repentance remembers the past by looking forwards, re-orienting the memory towards God's promises. Lament and repentance are postures *towards* – lament the proper posture

towards suffering and sin, and repentance the proper posture towards God. Lament and repentance are mutually interdependent, complementary modes of response to suffering.

After offering an account of lament and repentance I turn to Stanley Hauerwas' account of agency as the claiming for one's own the contingent, and often unpleasant, elements of the past. I consider this in the light of Samuel Wells' notion of overaccepting as the practice of learning to locate smaller narratives within the larger narrative of God's story of redemption, and suggest that it is through the practices of lament and repentance that mnemonic habits of memory, namely the loss of ability to narrate suffering and the loss of agency inherent in suffering, begin to be transformed, redeemed. Such a transformation is witnessed in, and experienced through, a new way of remembering. This new way of remembering, rather than being a mere therapeutic re-telling of the story of suffering, is a narration of redemption in which the memories of suffering are neither lost nor denied, but are re-inscribed within the larger context of God's creative and redeeming.

2.5.1 Lament

Lament is an expression of pain, grief, anguish. It is the inchoate giving voice – even in the form of pre-linguistic moans and cries – to what is experienced as inexpressible suffering. Lament can express either inconsolable weeping (Rachel, for example) or a railing in anger (some of the imprecatory Psalms). Or both. While most frequently associated with unjust suffering, lament can also be an expression of deep sorrow for sin committed.⁷⁸ Lament can express the sorrow and anguish over the

⁷⁸ Though not the primary focus of this project, to recognize one's own propensity towards sin and complicity in sin is, itself, a cause of suffering, something which might rightly be lamented.

haunting memories of powerlessness in the face of suffering, as well as for complicity in sin, and participation in systems of sin. Lament is an appropriate response to the very grammar of sin which creates the conditions for suffering. Lament refuses to accept the often well-intended platitudes that everything will be fine, that suffering will, in the end, prove to be a meaningful part of God's plan for one's life. It is a refusal of theodicy. Lament is a refusal to be reconciled to the suffering of sin which continues to rupture the creation God declares good and promises to restore. Lament is acutely aware of the not-yetness of God's kingdom.

Though by no means the only form of lament, the lament Psalms are, in many ways, the paradigmatic form of lament. One of the most notable aspects of these Psalms is that they begin with a personal address to God, which is to say, they are intended to be the beginning of a dialogue with God and, as such, they anticipate a response from God.⁷⁹ Lament, not unlike the cries of a young child, assume a hearer who has the power, the authority, and – most importantly – the will to *do* something about suffering. Lament is an honest opening of the self to God; it is both a refusal of false comfort and a plea for help.⁸⁰ It acknowledges deep disappointment, even despair, with God's seeming tolerance of suffering. Lament suggests that “unresolved despair is itself one legitimate, though tragic, aspect of our life with God.”⁸¹ Lament is perhaps the most faithful act possible in situations of profound suffering as to lament is to name with poignant honesty

⁷⁹ See Ellen F. Davis, *Getting Involved with God: Rediscovering the Old Testament* (Cambridge, MA: Cowley Publications, 2001), 17.

⁸⁰ In this sense lament is *not* theodicy. Whereas theodicy attempts to tidy up suffering by explaining it, making it make theological sense, lament holds seemingly incompatible truths (that God is both all-powerful and good and yet suffering happens) in a cognitive tension. Lament makes space for the rawness of suffering without diminishing its import by trying to explain it.

⁸¹ Davis, 21.

the pain and desolation of suffering before God in expectation that God should not only care about such suffering, but should be moved to act.

Because profound suffering often renders the sufferer mute, without a language to give voice to the experience of the inexpressible pain of suffering, those who have suffered often need to be given the tools to cry out in lament. The scriptural tradition of lament provides not only a form, but also a vocabulary for expressing what is experienced as inexpressible. As such, the lament tradition “is an indispensable vehicle to articulate the pain and outrage that would otherwise remain voiceless.”⁸² Lament, particularly the lament Psalms, can provide words to express both the rage and the sorrow of suffering “when we are too stunned by its enormity to find our own.”⁸³ Yet, there is nothing formulaic about lament; lament allows those who suffer a way to voice the particularity of their suffering in such a way that draws God into our suffering such that it is no longer borne alone, but is shared by God.⁸⁴

Lament, though a cry of helplessness, of powerlessness, in the face of profound suffering is not a passive resignation to suffering. It is, in fact, an active resistance against the evil of suffering. The act of lament is an act of proper boldness. Lament is a calling to account for suffering. It is the recognition of the dissonance between what is and what ought to be. Lament is the language – even as a language composed more of

⁸² Kathleen D. Migliore and Daniel L. Billman, *Rachel's Cry: Prayer of Lament and Rebirth of Hope* (Cleveland, OH: United Church Press, 1999), 107.

⁸³ Davis, 2001, 26. For more on the significant role of anger and its appropriate expression see Carroll Saussy, *The Gift of Anger: A Call to Faithful Action* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995). And for an exploration into the ways terror paralyzes, stripping victims even of the ability to cry out in fear, see Lenore Terr, *Too Scared to Cry: Psychic Trauma in Childhood* (New York: Harper & Row, 1990). Though this text specifically addresses the terror of childhood trauma, the power of terror to render one mute is unbounded by age.

⁸⁴ See, for example, Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Lament for a Son* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987), 81.

cries and sighs than of words - “of the painful incongruity between lived experience and the promises of God.”⁸⁵ In an essay on the lament tradition in Israel, Walter Brueggemann speaks of the ways in which lament serves the purpose of refusing to accept the agonizing experience of suffering as being normative or just. Brueggemann claims that lament arises when suffering becomes the status quo and those who suffer cry out in a refusal to accept such as normal. “To acknowledge ‘normalcy’ as hurt is a fundamental act of courage and of subversion, which in the moment of expression delegitimizes the claims of the empire and initiates the process of dismantling the empire.”⁸⁶ Though Brueggemann is speaking of the political situations in which Israel repeatedly found herself, the point that lament names the status quo as that of hurt and is therefore a refusal to grant suffering the status of “normal” is applicable more broadly. When those who have suffered – and, in and through memory, continue to suffer – recognize their own accommodation with suffering and cry out against this state of being, such is a moral judgment upon the suffering, and is a first step in a reclamation of agency. “The act of giving voice to hurt in ‘cry and groan’ is a bold act of self-assertion.”⁸⁷ The boldness of lament is in the presumption that suffering is not, in fact, just or right and that, therefore, one is in the right to complain against it, to demand its cessation.

⁸⁵ Billman, 107.

⁸⁶ Walter Brueggemann, “The Rhetoric of Hurt and Hope: Ethics Odd and Crucial,” *Annual of the Society of Christian Ethics* (1989), 74.

⁸⁷ Ibid. Dorothee Sölle similarly suggests that the act of lament is the first act of self-assertion in the midst of the loss of self brought about by suffering. See especially pp 70-74.

Insofar as lament, as addressed to God, “does not wallow in the experience of powerlessness but is already the beginning of renewed agency and the affirmation of self-worth in the presence of God,”⁸⁸ it is a reclamation of agency, a refusal of the powerlessness of suffering. Lament, in this way, has a destabilizing effect on the status quo of suffering. It does not undo the suffering of the past, or even the memory of the suffering. The suffering is not un-remembered. It does, however, challenge suffering’s claim to primacy and ultimacy. This reclamation of agency of lament is a step in the direction of redemption. It is an active stance towards the grief, the anger, and the fear of suffering, one which makes the first steps in claiming the story of suffering as merely one part of one’s own story. “I struggle indeed to go beyond merely owning my grief toward owning it *redemptively*. But I will not and cannot disown it...Lament is part of life.”⁸⁹

That lament is a personal address to God does not make lament an exclusively, or even primarily, private act. Liturgical expressions of lament both instruct a community in the ways of lament, as well as provide a structure through which lament is shared by the community so as not to become the burden of a single individual.⁹⁰ The liturgy of the church plays a crucial role in the teaching of lament. Though the anguished cries of lament are a natural, human response to inexplicable suffering, the channeling of lament towards God in expectation of a response is a practice to be learned, a habit to be taught.

⁸⁸ Billman, 17.

⁸⁹ Wolterstorff, 6.

⁹⁰ This is, at least, theoretically true. I suspect that few communities actually incorporate lament into the communal liturgy. Lament Psalms are rarely used in the lectionary, and are often elided when they are used as if to protect the people of God from the expression of unpleasant emotions in worship. Unfortunately, with the exception of the occasional use of lament hymnody such as that found in African-American spirituals, liturgical expressions of lament are generally cordoned off from wider ecclesial expression and reserved for the more private practices of confession and commendation for the dying, truncating the development of a faithful practice of lament.

Liturgical practices of lament provide a framework for expressing the pain, grief, fear, anger, and even rage that accompany experiences of sin and suffering. The liturgical practice of lament situates the suffering in a communal context which forms a “safe container for the chaos” of the emotions of suffering.⁹¹ The practice of praying the Psalter – including the Psalms of lament and even the imprecatory Psalms – is one way the liturgy can form a people capable of lamenting.⁹² “The Psalms are a kind of First Amendment for the faithful. They guarantee us complete freedom of speech before God, and then (something no secular constitution would ever do) they give us a detailed model of how to exercise that freedom, even up to its dangerous limits, to the very brink of rebellion.”⁹³ Learning to pray the Psalter can form a people able rightly and honestly to engage God through the entire range of human emotions, even (and perhaps especially) those emotions experienced as dangerously unholy and unworthy of bringing before God.

In addition to teaching those who suffer how to lament well, the liturgy teaches those who are not suffering to recognize the suffering of the marginalized and of the powerless. “Without the liturgy, the next generation might let the hurt go unnoticed and unvoiced, might let the world become settled, might reckon social hurt to be a normal,

⁹¹ Anderson, 50.

⁹² The Psalter is not, however, the only means the liturgy has for teaching lament. Scripture, particularly the Old Testament, offers a number of examples of lament. The Exodus passages are full of them, as, of course, is the book of Job. Rebekah Eklund, in her forthcoming dissertation (Duke Divinity School, 2012) “Lord, Teach Us How to Grieve: Jesus’ Laments and Christian Hope,” argues for the importance of lament in the New Testament as well, particularly in the prayers of Jesus. In addition to Scripture, lament is also practiced and taught through the hymnody of the church, something which is perhaps reflected best in African American spirituals. For more on lament and hymnody see Bert Polman, “The Role of Lament in American Musical Life: Concerto in Three Movements,” *Calvin Theological Journal* 36 (2001).

⁹³ Davis, 8-9.

acceptable cost for social tranquility.”⁹⁴ Lament is a vehicle for the doing of justice in the world by the refusal to accept injustice as normative.⁹⁵ If the voices of those who suffer are successfully silenced by those who cause suffering, if such a silencing is unchallenged, uninterrupted, the witness of the church that the powers of death and all who rely on death, or the implicit threat of death, for power, have been overcome in and through the resurrection of Jesus, is rendered suspect. The role of the church in solidarity with the marginalized voices, is not only providing space for lament, but is seeking out those who need help finding the voice to lament. Samuel Wells speaks of the need for the church to be with the poor, the excluded, and the marginalized because this is where the church meets Jesus; it is how the church prepares itself for the fullness of the kingdom of God.⁹⁶ Learning to lament boldly with those who suffer, learning to become poor in spirit with those who mourn can be a means of grace not only for those who suffer, but for those in positions of relative power and privilege as well.⁹⁷

2.5.2 Repentance

Repentance is perhaps primarily, if not exclusively, considered the appropriate response to complicity in sin – whether through intentional acts of commission or through unwitting participation in larger structures of sin. However, in this section I suggest that repentance is also an appropriate response to the memory of suffering.

⁹⁴ Brueggemann, 76.

⁹⁵ Micah 6:8

⁹⁶ See Wells, *Improvisation*, chapter 10.

⁹⁷ This is *not* to suggest that power or privilege prevent suffering. It is, however, to suggest that there is a correlation between vulnerability and suffering and those in positions of power and privilege who have not experienced profound suffering may be less able or inclined to identify with those who suffer than those who find themselves in more vulnerable positions.

Repentance in situations of the suffering of violence is *not* a question of relative guilt or innocence, but is first and foremost a renunciation of the logic of suffering. In situations of violence, even and perhaps especially when one is a victim of violence, repentance means denying the logic of the myth of redemptive violence, refusing to succumb either to victimization or to revenge. It is a refusal to grant suffering primacy in determining identity. Likewise, this renunciation is a refusal to grant the status of ultimacy to the powers of sin and death upon which suffering depends. Repentance is a way of remembering the past in which one is continually re-oriented – and consequently by which one re-orientes the memory of suffering – both by and towards Christ. As such, repentance is the way of discipleship; it is a practice of proper obedience.

To say this is necessarily to say that repentance is NOT primarily sorrow for wrongdoing. That is, it is not merely feeling sad for the commission of sins or for the implicit (or explicit) participation in structures of sin. “[T]o repent does not mean to be filled with guilt, sorrow or shame; rather, to repent is to completely rethink and reassess one’s life in light of Jesus and his message.”⁹⁸ That is not to suggest that sin will not cause sorrow, as it certainly both can and should. Nor is it to suggest that in repentance there can be no sorrow, as, again, there both can and should. But repentance, the rethinking of one’s life in light of Jesus, entails a change – both a turning from and a turning towards – and insofar as sorrow turns, its turn is inwards and unproductive. John

⁹⁸ Patricia Lamoureux and Paul J. Wadell, *The Christian Moral Life: Faithful Discipleship for a Global Society* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2010), 101. Though not taken directly from his work, Lamoureux and Wadell cite Peter Phan for this insight. See Peter C. Phan, *In Our Own Tongues: Perspectives from Asia on Mission and Inculturation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2003), 49.

Howard Yoder argues that “to repent is not to feel bad but to act differently.”⁹⁹ I would suggest that while Yoder is correct that repentance involves acting differently, I would add to this that to repent is to *think* and even to *remember* differently **and** it is to *feel* differently. To feel badly about wrongs committed, but to remain unchanged in behavior and thought is to be condemned to a perpetual cycle of sin and sorrow.¹⁰⁰ But this does not negate that a part of repentance is the re-alignment not merely of thought and act but of desire and emotion as well.

Likewise, repentance is NOT penance. Nor is penance a punishment for wrongdoing, though it often may be construed as such. Penance, understood merely as punishment for sin, runs the risk of actually avoiding repentance.¹⁰¹ That is, when penance is seen as a way of “making up” for sins, the logic too easily follows that once atoned for sin is over and done with and can be forgotten. Again, there is no cause for change, leading to a cycle of sin and punishment, albeit a self-inflicted punishment. Though there may well be an element of contrition involved in repentance, the obedience of repentance is not, itself, contrition or remorse, or even the act of “making up” for a particular sinful act.

⁹⁹ John Howard Yoder, *The Original Revolution: Essays on Christian Pacifism* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 2003), 31.

¹⁰⁰ The private sorrow I am speaking of here is distinguished from lament in large part by its lack of telos. Sorrow is internalized whereas lament cries out to God.

¹⁰¹ This is in no way meant to disparage the ecclesial practice of penance. The role of penance, rightly understood, is to restore right relationship with God and within the community. As such, penance cannot be separated from repentance. In this process the role of penance is not merely punitive, but is intended to be transformative. Penance is designed to allow for concrete practices that aid one in overcoming sinful habits. However, in the popular imagination (both Roman Catholic and Protestant), penance is often cheapened and reduced to a mere punishment, robbing it of its intended transformative nature. For more on the theology of the Roman Catholic practice of penance – more properly called the Sacrament of Reconciliation – see Sean Fagan, “Penitential Practices,” in *The New Dictionary of Sacramental Worship* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1990).

Repentance understood as renunciation and as reorientation focuses the energy of the memory towards God. It may seem counterintuitive, morally misguided even, to speak of repentance in regards to the memory of unjust, unprovoked suffering. However, the call to repentance is not exclusively for the overstepping of bounds, for the commission of acts of violence or injury, but also for accommodation to diminishment, for the placid acceptance of situations of violence, for acceptance of a loss of selfhood.¹⁰² Repentance for a diminished self is necessary in order to restore the harmony and communion intended by God for all creation with God – there is a direct correlation between the extent to which individuals are diminished and the extent to which all reciprocal relationships are likewise diminished.¹⁰³ This diminishment of relationship may, in fact, be a significant part of the lament of suffering, but it is also something for which active repentance, as an active turning towards the light of Christ, is appropriate.

So, what does it mean to remember suffering as an act of repentance?

Repentance requires recognition of one's own role in suffering. And this is the case for

¹⁰² Jones, *Embodying Forgiveness*, 169. Similarly Susan Dunfee suggests that this sin of diminishment is one which pertains particularly to women. In arguing against Niebuhr's conception of sin as primarily male pride Dunfee suggests that for women sin is often experienced in the form of hiding – hiding from one's freedom in Christ, from one's call to embrace selfhood. As such, Dunfee suggests the need to repent of the sin of having no self. See Susan Nelson Dunfee, "The Sin of Hiding: A Feminist Critique of Reinhold Niebuhr's Account of the Sin of Pride," *Soundings* 65, no. 3 (Fall 1982), 324. My suggestion in this project is that while Dunfee's claim that women are more often guilty of the sin of hiding than of pride, this sin of hiding is in no way limited to women but may be a direct result of the experience of violence. Given the high incidence of violence against women that women would be more often in need of repenting for diminishment than men may well be true, but the causative agent is not, it seems, one of gender necessarily, but of one's response to situations of violence.

¹⁰³ Jones, *Embodying Forgiveness*, 174. Though Rowan Williams rightly suggests that, due to the always already brokenness of the world into which we are born, "we begin 'diminished'" and therefore the need for repentance from diminishment is in no restricted to situations of suffering. Williams, *Resurrection*, 73.

both victims and perpetrators.¹⁰⁴ This is not to blame victims for their suffering, but to suggest that the experience of suffering does not negate human moral agency. It is the suggestion that in the aftermath of situations of profound suffering there is a needed renunciation of the suffering – a denouncement of all that allows for and perpetuates systems of power and vulnerability that make such suffering possible – including one’s tacit acquiescence to suffering. This includes even the way suffering has been internalized and remembered. It is a recognition that profound suffering is dehumanizing – for both perpetrator and victim. To repent of suffering is to remember suffering in the light of the story of Jesus; it is to remember suffering as something which is being redeemed. Such a way of remembering is nothing short of a radical conversion. “Our conversion comes about as we recognize that we can confront our past...because we are no longer in bondage to it.”¹⁰⁵ This conversion frees us from the memories of past suffering and enables us to re-member the suffering of the past in a more truth-filled light. To repent of situations of suffering is, in short, to re-claim agency, a topic to which I now turn.

¹⁰⁴ That this is true is in part a reflection of the reality that, with the exception of Jesus, there are no wholly innocent victims. (Though there are, of course, situations – child abuse, sexual assault, muggings, for example – in which the victim is innocent in the particular instance.) However, by suggesting that repentance is a necessary response to suffering I am primarily suggesting that repentance is the faithful posture of discipleship. All of the Christian life is a turning towards Christ. Situations of suffering simply cry out for this turning, for the renunciation of the grammar of sin which makes the logic of suffering possible, in a unique and poignant way.

¹⁰⁵ Jones, *Embodying Forgiveness*, 146-7. Jones refers to this re-framing of memory as “remembering well” by which he means coming to remember in such a way as to “envision and embody a future different from the past” (149). What I am suggesting in this chapter is that remembering well is a deliberate agential act, not something that just happens, and as such is a habit that can be acquired through specific practices such as lament and repentance.

2.5.3 Agency and Memory

Lament and repentance are both agential acts. Whereas suffering, particularly the suffering of violence, renders subjects objects, lament and repentance are necessarily the acts of moral subjects. Through the boldness of lament and through the obedience of repentance, memory of past suffering can be claimed, owned, in such a way as to restore the agency of the sufferer. In what follows I consider the account of agency suggested by Stanley Hauerwas and suggest that through such an understanding of agency the transformation of memory is made visible.¹⁰⁶ Hauerwas' account of agency is one which refuses to separate the individual from the historical contingencies of biography while simultaneously denying deterministic power to biography. Contra the contemporary conjoining of agency with power (a conjoining which definitionally renders those who suffer non-agents) Hauerwas argues that agency is discovered in the ability to own one's past, including both the acts committed and the experiences undergone.¹⁰⁷ For Hauerwas, then, agency is a choice that can be made *in spite of* situations in which one is powerless to act.¹⁰⁸ Rather than experiencing the memory of suffering as a passive recipient of violence, a suffering which may have been experienced as inexpressible, truthful

¹⁰⁶ Stanley Hauerwas, *Character and the Christian Life: A Study in Theological Ethics* (San Antonio: Trinity University Press, 1975), 18-33; Stanley Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom: A Primer in Christian Ethics* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983) chapter 3; and Samuel Wells, *Transforming Fate into Destiny: The Theological Ethics of Stanley Hauerwas* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2004), 20-31.

¹⁰⁷ Hauerwas understands agency and character to be interconnected. "Our character is not a shadow of some deeper but more hidden real self; it is the form of our agency acquired through our beliefs and actions." *Character and the Christian Life*, 21. This recognition that agency and character are of a piece suggests that the habits that shape character necessarily give shape to agency. A logical extension of this recognition is that habits of worship play an integral part to the development of a proper theological account of agency.

¹⁰⁸ "I am not an agent because I can 'cause' certain things to happen, but because certain things that happen, whether through the result of my decision or not, can be made mine through my power of attention and intention." Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom*, 42.

remembering of the past made possible by the reclamation of agency found in lament and repentance is transformative, redemptive, because its power lies in the story of suffering having been retold in the context of God's story to grant new life. This power to re-locate our lives, including stories of past sufferings, is what Hauerwas understands as the power of agency, a power that, through God's grace, no one lacks - "no one is so completely determined that he or she lacks all means to respond to the story of God and thus find some means to make his life his own."¹⁰⁹

This understanding of agency as taking ownership of one's past, in all of its messiness, and even in the midst of overwhelming suffering, does not, of course, in any way undo the memory of past suffering. Nor does the act of claiming the suffering of the past as one's own in any way condone the past. In fact, insofar as the claiming of the past suffering I am advocating hinges on lament and repentance, a condoning of suffering is precluded. However, if what I have suggested in this chapter is correct, that the greatest and most damaging power of the memory of suffering is its tendency to leave one voiceless, unable to narrate the past, and that this loss of voice coupled with the memory of suffering as having been a stripping of agency, then the reclamation of agency that comes from finding a voice and telling a truthful story – a story that remembers and laments the agony of suffering while repenting and renouncing the logic that makes such

¹⁰⁹ Ibid, 44. In *The Primacy of Love* Paul Wadell speaks similarly of agency, suggesting that identity is the result not merely of a contingent past but of our most enduring intentions. Though who we are and the experiences we remember may not be freely chosen, who we are is at least to some extent determined, not only by how we choose to respond to those contingencies, but even by how we *want* to respond. Paul J. Wadell, *The Primacy of Love: An Introduction to the Ethics of Thomas Aquinas* (New York: Paulist Press, 1992), 33.

suffering seem inevitable, and enables one then to claim one's life as one's own – is a glimmer, a foregleam, of the redemption yet to come.¹¹⁰

In chapter one I suggested that redemption is the process by which God takes the damaged bits of the past – whether past sin or past suffering – and creates something new and beautiful with, rather than despite, these bits. Such memories are redeemed, neither in being forgotten nor in being “gotten over,” but in the weaving of a new, larger narrative which neither denies the horribleness of the past nor grants it ultimacy. Samuel Wells speaks of this practice of locating an act within the larger narrative of God's story as overaccepting.¹¹¹ While Wells is not speaking of memories of past suffering but of present events, the concept of overaccepting is, it seems, a helpful way of imagining how agency may be employed over past situations of experienced violence and suffering. To overaccept the memory of the past, perhaps especially memories of past profound suffering, is to begin to imagine ways in which this memory may fit into a story that is much larger than the experience of suffering itself. To do this is not to deny the horror of haunting memories, but through practices of lament and repentance it is to begin to imagine ways in which God may use past experiences to shape a more beautiful story. Such a way of remembering, rather than denying the horror of past suffering, recognizes that the memories of suffering are neither ultimate nor defining. Overaccepting means

¹¹⁰ In a lecture at North Park Seminary in Chicago, IL (Nov 7, 2001), Stanley Grenz referred to the church as the “foregleam” of the re-created and redeemed humanity present both as an eschatological telos and a present reality. I am grateful to Rebekah Eklund for pointing this out to me.

¹¹¹ Wells, *Improvisation*, 131-142. Wells uses the term overaccepting to refer to the improvisational technique of not refusing whatever offers are received. Rather than simply accepting an offer at face value, however, overaccepting locates the offer within a context which is much greater than that which the offerer supposed. In theological terms, then, Wells suggests that overaccepting is the practice by which “Christians use their imaginations to see how the gifts of creation and culture fit into the story of the way God deals with the world” (133).

that the truthful story told through the practices of lament and repentance do not stop there but offer the promise of a future that is greater than the past could have imagined. Through practices of lament and repentance memories of past suffering may be overaccepted in such a way that the suffering of the past can indeed be claimed as one's own in a way that is opened up to God's continued redeeming and transformative work in the present and in the future because it is enabled to envision, to imagine, God's hand redeeming and transforming the past.

2.5.4 Re-Narrating a Life Shattered by Rape

In her book, *Rape – My Story*, Jill Saward offers a poignant illustration of both the reclamation of agency made possible by practices of lament and repentance as well as of the redemptive re-narration of horrible suffering as Jill becomes enabled to locate her experience within the larger framework of a greater story of love in a way that neither denies nor trivializes the suffering.¹¹² Jill was the young adult daughter of an Anglican priest. One afternoon three men forced their way into the rectory, violently beating Jill's father and boyfriend and sexually assaulting Jill. In what follows I offer a brief overview of the aftermath of Jill's attack, as she tells it, considering the ways in which repentance and lament are intertwined and the ways in which her story of an overwhelming loss of agency is gradually overshadowed by a story of redemption and love.

There is, however, no neat, straightforward trajectory to Jill's story; that is, she does not neatly progress through lament, repentance, agency, new story. Her experience of the aftermath of the attack is as chaotic and, at times, nearly as terrifying as the attack

¹¹² Jill Saward, *Rape: My Story* (London: Bloomsbury, 1990).

itself. There is no clear sense in which one step necessarily leads to another. There is, instead, Jill's raw response of anger, fear, pain, and shame intermingled with regret, determination, courage, and faith.

Jill laments throughout the story. She is acutely aware of the many present tense losses brought about by this assault: virginity, privacy, security. She also laments the loss of her ability to imagine any future intimate relationships, including marriage and children. Perhaps most acutely she laments the shattering of her innocent conceptions of both gender role expectations and intimate relationships. At times her lamenting expresses despair, leading her to the brink – literally – of suicide. “Why do I feel so dreadful now?...Why didn't you let me die, God? If I was dead I wouldn't have to cope with the memories. Death must be easier...I'm not much of a loss...It is back to trusting. There is nothing left of me. You will have to take over, God, and put me back together...I haven't even got the energy to walk over the edge of the cliff.”¹¹³ Jill offers no pious or sentimentalized rationale for not committing suicide. Rather, in the depths of her despair she finds she simply has not adequate agency even to kill herself.

However, despair is not the sum total of Jill's lament. She also describes her raw anger at the members of the press who are only interested in the most sensational sound bite, the legal system for its callousness to the vulnerability of a rape victim, and to the countless people she encounters who, in their obliviousness to the seriousness of the trauma of rape, make needlessly cruel comments. One of her colleagues even tells her, “I 'invite trouble'...Perhaps she's right. Is there some fatal flaw in my make-up?”¹¹⁴ Other

¹¹³ Ibid, 95.

¹¹⁴ Ibid, 101.

colleagues, most particularly her boss, make careless jokes and use sexually explicit language in ways that increase her anxiety and sense of vulnerability – comments and jokes she notes she had never noticed before, though surely they had been common all along, but which she now finds both terrifying and infuriating at the same time.

Over the weeks and months following the rape, Jill recognizes that she is not merely disappointed in her father and her boyfriend; she is horribly disappointed with, *and* angry at, them. In fact, despite recognizing the life-threatening seriousness of both of their injuries, she finds herself resenting both of them for their failure to protect her, for the failure to live up to her expectations of what they should have done and who they should have been as men. “Faced with weapons, the two who could have protected me had no more resources than I did.”¹¹⁵ This recognition leads her – albeit slowly – to begin to disentangle her idealized superhero images of these two men and begin to know and love them as the much more complex and vulnerable people they are. In recognizing their vulnerability she grows into a more mature understanding of the reciprocity and mutuality of adult relationships.

After the attack she also finds herself fighting off the assumption that all men are like the men who attacked her. This is hardly a one-time act of repentance, but a continually recurring recognition on her part. Jill experiences something of an attraction/repulsion to the men in her life. She finds herself both afraid that her rapists are the norm and determined to prove to herself that this is not the case. She slowly comes to recognize the importance of the handful of men who remain in her life throughout this time, despite her largely unconscious efforts to alienate them. Towards

¹¹⁵ Ibid, 113.

the end of her story, Jill notes, “Male friends have been important. I so much need to be able to talk with them, and be hugged by certain ones I can really trust. I probably want to reassure myself that they aren’t all monsters.”¹¹⁶

Shortly after the attack a police officer suggests to Jill that she contact a rape crisis center. A counselor there tells her that she has a choice – she can either choose to deal with what has happened face on so that in time it can be “buried dead;”¹¹⁷ or, she can deny the seriousness of what happened, deny the pain she is in, and she will bury it alive such that it continues to destroy her. Jill decides, “I am not going to let those men destroy me. I will bury it dead.”¹¹⁸ However, this decision is much less a proactive decision than it is a retroactive recognition that this is the decision she did in fact make in both her persistence in pursuing legal action against the rapists, and in her insistence on continuing to tell her story.

Jill found that it was in the continual re-telling of her story that she was able to see the story in a new light, as a part of a bigger story. Almost immediately her story and her willingness to share it allowed others to share their own pain with Jill. “People obviously see that I am vulnerable so they feel they can tell me about their own points of

¹¹⁶ Ibid, 119.

¹¹⁷ The idea that such an event can be buried – dead or alive – is one I reject, something I hope this chapter has made clear. What is significant in this exchange for Jill is not, however, the implication that trauma can be rightly forgotten rather than repressed but the determined shift in Jill’s recognition of her own agency even, and perhaps especially, in the aftermath of a trauma in which her agency was completely stripped from her.

¹¹⁸ Saward, 68.

weakness.”¹¹⁹ Jill comes to recognize a deep beauty in the honest sharing of sufferings that goes beyond the socially-accepted conventions for sharing of intimate details.

Additionally Jill finds herself much more aware of the fragility of life and of all humanity. She begins to replace her naïve superhero image of men with relationships with real, kind and gentle, albeit imperfect, men. And in doing so she also comes to recognize her own strength – a strength based not on anatomy but on character. “I no longer blame Dad and David for not living up to my ideal of men...I’ve come to realize that there are instances when I have more endurance and stamina than some men.”¹²⁰

Jill’s recognition of her own strength is made possible by her determined reclamation of agency.

By the end of the story, Jill finds that her relationships with her family – perhaps most especially with her father – as well as with friends and an intimate partner are more honest and open, raw even, but that they are also more complete, more full, and more loving. Jill never diminishes the horror of what happened; however she becomes acutely aware of, and grateful for, the love and the care that continues to overwhelm her with love. Her story ends with a profound recognition of her gratitude for God’s sustaining love as experienced through the help of many people in the aftermath of her attack. Seward even goes so far as to say: “However unlikely it might once have seemed, this rape has most definitely been a love story.”¹²¹

¹¹⁹ Ibid, 118.

¹²⁰ Ibid, 144.

¹²¹ Ibid, 153.

Though I find the equating of rape with a love story to be problematic on any number of levels,¹²² Saward's intention is not in any way to glorify the attack or her attackers. The love story of which she speaks is the new story Saward is able to tell of her life despite having been raped, not because she was raped. This is a critical point. God does not require horrible suffering in order to demonstrate God's redemptive power. What is significant about Saward's account is less her choice of vocabulary and more her re-narrated memory, her ability to re-situate a situation of horrible violence and suffering in such a way that she comes to see it as *one* part of the narrative of her life. The narrative dimension of redemption is inextricably related to a theological account of memory. There are two key elements to the theological account of memory I developed in the earlier part of this chapter. The first is analogous to Steinmetz' second narrative – it is the narrative that begins to make the disparate parts make sense. There is, of course, no way to make the violence of rape make sense. But Saward's account illustrates the ways in which she is able to see her life as a coherent story which makes sense - one which includes an event of horrible suffering, but one which is not shattered by this suffering because the larger narrative, of which rape is but one small part, regains and retains coherence through the theological narration of the suffering.

The second key element of a theological account of memory is that it rightly locates the past within the narrative of God's redemptive activity. This right location

¹²² Author Joyce Oates uses the same expression as a title of a novella in which she describes a horrific gang rape and the aftermath in which the victim is blamed for her attack because of the clothing she wore (a tank top) and the neighborhood through which she was walking at night. In Oates story there is a clear sense of irony in the title, and Oates' anger over the persistent attempts to blame rape victims is thinly veiled. Joyce Carol Oates, *Rape: A Love Story* (New York: Carroll & Graf, 2003). Both authors are clearly *not* speaking of the rape itself as a love story, nor of any relationship with their attackers. I suspect, however, that the irony of the title is lost on many readers, causing me concern that such a way of speaking about rape minimizes (if unintentionally) the suffering of victims of rape.

neither denies nor diminishes the horror of the suffering of the past, but it remembers in such a way that envisions and embodies “a future different from the past.”¹²³ The sign of redemption is not that Jill forgets what happened to her, but rather that she is able to situate this memory within a much larger framework of narratives created by a vast array of significant relationships which, over time, prove to be more constitutive of her identity than the narrative of the rape itself. Jill learns to narrate her story in light of the story she recognizes that God is continuing to write of her life. A story which can never not include the story of rape but which not only need no longer be dominated by that story but is in a significant way enhanced – *not* because she was raped, but because the story of her suffering has been re-inscribed in the narrative of God’s story of redemption. It is in incorporating the story of the suffering, in claiming this suffering in all of its particularity, that Jill is able to discover ways in which her suffering can actually become a source of strength, even of beauty. For Jill, owning the story of rape is a part of the redemption of this very story as it is in the owning of the story that she discovers the ways in which her suffering has become fertile soil for the growth of something beautiful.

¹²³ Jones, *Embodying Forgiveness*, 149.

3. Incorporation: Restoring Community

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ.

-- 1 Corinthians 12:12

Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people.

-- 1 Peter 2:10

Fifteen years after her imprisonment and torture, Paulina Salas' life continues to be dominated by the fear and humiliation of her suffering.¹ Paulina spent nearly two months in a political prison as a dissenter after being kidnapped by members of a totalitarian regime. During her imprisonment she was routinely raped and tortured by a number of men, including a physician – a man Paulina never saw, as she was always blindfolded, but whose voice and smell she can never forget. In the aftermath of her torture, Paulina lives a life of extreme isolation and seclusion. She and her husband, Gerardo, live in a rural beach house miles from the nearest town. They do not have a telephone, furthering their isolation. Despite her marriage to a gregarious and politically-minded man, Paulina avoids social interaction as much as possible and is afraid of visitors such that the sound of a car approaching her house causes her to reach for the pistol from her night table.

¹ Ariel Dorfman, *Death and the Maiden* (New York: Penguin Books, 1992). Dorfman deliberately leaves the setting a bit vague. "The time is the present and the place, a country that is probably Chile but could be any country that has given itself a democratic government just after a long period of dictatorship." (Introductory instructions.) Subsequent citations are referenced parenthetically in the text.

The isolation wrought by Paulina's experience is not, however, limited to her physical exclusion from the public but also extends to her relationship with her husband. Paulina and Gerardo have many secrets from one another, and neither trusts the other to tell the truth. Though Gerardo knows, in a sense, what Paulina endured, she has never told him the whole story. Gerardo is under the impression (whether because Paulina led him to believe this, or because it is what he wants to believe, is intentionally ambiguous) that Paulina cannot actually remember the details of her torture or even the number of times she was raped, but she tells him, "It's not true... That I didn't count. I always kept count. I know how many times." (35) In fact, she remembers the details of her torture in excruciating detail. However, not only has Paulina never told Gerardo the story of her suffering, she has never told a soul these things: "I've never told Gerardo, or my sister, certainly not my mother. She'd die if she knew." (29) No one knows because Paulina was, and continues to be, so terrified and humiliated by her torture she never spoke of it.

The story takes place shortly after the overthrow of the dictator and the establishment of a democratic government. Gerardo has been asked by the newly-elected President to head a truth commission in the aftermath of a dictatorship in which torture was a systematic practice for the maintenance of power and control. The commission would only deal with the worst of cases – those which were "beyond repair."² The Commission, however, is to have no juridical power; its sole purpose is fact-finding. The play opens with Gerardo's

² Ibid, 9. The question of whether or not the suffering of the nation in general, and of Paulina in particular, is beyond repair is continually revisited throughout the drama.

return home late on the evening of his appointment. He had a flat tire in a deserted area and waited forty-five minutes before anyone would stop to help him because, “we’ve forgotten what solidarity is in this country.” (7) The man who does finally stop to help Gerardo returns to their home about an hour after bringing Gerardo home as he realizes who Gerardo is, and says he wants to congratulate him in person.

Gerardo discovers that the man who remembered the meaning of solidarity and offered him a ride home, Dr. Miranda, lives nearly an hour away and, as it is already late, he insists the doctor stay the night. Gerardo also learns that the doctor is alone, with “not a soul” waiting for him at his lonely and isolated beach house. (17) Miranda accepts and when Gerardo says he doesn’t have a toothbrush to offer, Miranda responds, “Of the two things you never share, my friend, one is your toothbrush.” (18) The two men laugh as they head off to bed.

In the meantime, Paulina has been hiding where she can hear the conversation. She recognizes the doctor’s voice as that of her primary torturer. While her husband sleeps, Paulina awakens Miranda, and, at gunpoint, orders him into the kitchen where she binds him to the kitchen chair and gags him. The bulk of the drama is the “trial” Paulina decides to have for Miranda. Initially she thinks she wants to extract vengeance, to see the doctor raped and tortured as he raped and tortured her. She comes to realize, however, that what she wants instead is to be heard, to have the opportunity to tell her story. And she recognizes that her story will never be heard by the Commission, as they “only deal with the dead, with those who can’t speak. And I can speak – it’s been years

since I murmured even a word, I haven't opened my mouth to even whisper a breath of what I'm thinking, years living in terror of my own...but I'm not dead, I thought I was but I'm not and I can speak, damn it." (37)

Paulina's greatest desire and need is for Mirando to confess – she wants the truth to be spoken, attested to, and acknowledged – she wants an honest relationship with her country, her husband, and with herself. Gerardo, however, opposes her desire to extract a confession from Mirando. He resists such honesty as he is unsure whether the truth of such horrible events may not, in fact, destroy them. "We survived the dictatorship, we survived, and now we're going to do to each other what those bastards out there couldn't do to us?" (55-56) In the end, whether or not the truth of Paulina's experience of suffering was destructive is unclear. What is clear is that the memory (individually and collectively) of the experience of the systematic practice of rape and torture has severed the social and relational bonds of the nation, of individual families, and of individuals in ways that may, Dorfman implies, in fact, continue to be beyond repair.

Dorfman's play poignantly illustrates the contingency of both individual and communal identity. Paulina's identity – which serves as a metaphor for a nation's identity – is intertwined not only with her family and friends, but significantly with those who have been the cause of tremendous pain and suffering.

In this chapter, I suggest that any notion of an independent, non-contingent self is a myth. And a harmful one at that. To do this, I look first at the psycho-social field of identity theory which suggests that the nature of the self is necessarily one of communal

being. I do this to suggest that, insofar as it is true that individual selves only exist within a complex social web, the community is inextricably connected to any notion of redemption of the self. I then turn to a theological account of identity which is largely indebted to Alasdair MacIntyre's conception of communities as social bodies which are necessarily embedded in a tradition. I then suggest that it is the body of Christ towards which MacIntyre pushes, and which is rightly understood as the social body that is ultimately defining. I next return to the topic of suffering and suggest that the very logic of suffering ruptures communal relationships, and that insofar as suffering damages communal relationships it diminishes the very core of one's identity. Finally, I argue that whereas the individual body is the locus of suffering (and therefore suffers the resultant isolation of suffering) it is the body of Christ which is the locus of healing through the embodied and embedded practices of forgiveness and reconciliation.

3.1 Identity and Community

“Community” is a rather loose notion. That is, there is no one way in which the term is used. It is often defined, by popular usage, in primarily geographical terms; “community” that is, is often used interchangeably with “neighborhood”. The term is not, however limited to geography. Think, for instance, of the frequency of its usage in speaking broadly of the “gay community” or the “African-American community.” Such sweeping and varying uses of “community” render the term void of its intended content – that community is a group of people united in a meaningful communion with one another. “Community,” as it is often used, increasingly refers to a group of people with some perceived commonality, whether it be geographical or socio-political. There is little sense that those who make up this community have even a passing acquaintance

with one another. This understanding of community reduces the community to something which, though it in some way defines identity, has little or nothing to do with relationship and therefore has little impact on the actual formation of identity.

The concomitant understanding of identity is as the unseen essence hidden deep inside an individual. It is the sense that the “real me” is the core hidden underneath the trappings of social expectations, roles, and familial and political allegiances. And that the people in my neighborhood (or other social groups) are of little, if any, significance – in fact, are perhaps instead an encumbrance – to my selfhood. This popular image of identity as an unencumbered self is what some sociologists have referred to as the “black box” sense of selfhood.³

In this section I offer an overview of the psycho-social field of identity theory which suggests, contra this popular image of selfhood, that the self is necessarily a complex reflection of society and of one’s social relationships. Identity theory understands identity to be an on-going, interactive process made up of three distinct, but inextricably related elements – role identity, social identity, and personal identity. “Western persons are probably comfortable with the idea that the social world produces *part of* who they are, and indeed with the idea that who they are can and will change, this is often accompanied by a notion of a ‘true’ or ‘deep’ self, which is seen as somehow

³ Steph Lawler, *Identity: Sociological Perspectives* (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2008), 5. This desire to find the kernel or nugget of self is not restricted to individual identity. Stephen Fowl suggests that the same desire is often at the heart of biblical exegesis. Fowl suggests that a common mistake in Scripture reading is to assume there is one true meaning that is the same for all people in all times and places at the core of any passage of scripture, as if the Bible is a container filled with nuggets of wisdom just waiting to be mined. He offers a critique of this “container theory,” suggesting a more complex, fluid, and relational model of reading scripture in Stephen E. Fowl, *Engaging Scripture: A Model for Theological Interpretation* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1998).

outside all the social.”⁴ Identity theory, however, not only claims that the social world contributes to the development of selfhood, it denies any understanding of selfhood that is either prior to, or independent of, the social world. The claim of identity theory is that the self is, by definition, a reflection of the complex matrix of communities in which an individual participates.⁵ There is simply no such thing as a “black box” self separated from the communities by which it is constituted. At the same time, identity theory also suggests that individuals actively participate in the construction of the social groups which, in turn, continually act as formational forces on group members. The autobiographical narrative of an individual does not reflect the discovery of some pre-existent but hidden self; rather, it narrates the on-going creation of a self through the autobiographical circumstances particular to the individual.

Insofar as there is no self apart from a complex web of social relationships, and insofar as the contention of this project is that it is the whole self – not privileged parts of the self – that is redeemed in the new thing God is doing, it is also the contention of this project that any notion of redemption of the self is necessarily communal.⁶ In order to establish why this is so in what follows I explore the four key components of identity

⁴ Lawler, 5.

⁵ Michael A. Hogg, Deborah J. Terry, and Katherine M. White, “A Tale of Two Theories: A Critical Comparison of Identity Theory with Social Identity Theory,” in *Social Psychology Quarterly* 58, no. 4 (Dec, 1995), 256.

⁶ Though it is beyond the scope of this project it would interesting to consider how such communal notions of relationship interact with the account of memory developed in chapter 2. That is, it would be interesting to consider both the ways in which communities remember and on the ways in which communal relationships interact with memory. Paul Connerton’s work on this would provide an interesting starting point, but lacks a theological account of both memory and of community. See Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); *How Modernity Forgets* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); and *The Spirit of Mourning: History, Memory and the Body* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

theory. I look first at role identity, which suggests that identity is largely contingent upon the roles one is assigned (and ultimately accepts) by the communal groups of which one is a part. I then turn to the closely related understanding of social identity, which suggests that identity is largely derived from participation in particular social groups. I then look at the third strand of identity theory, person identity, which considers the particularity of the individual's synthesis of roles and social groups. It is the unique interaction of these three (role, social, and person identity) that shapes each individual's identity. However, there is nothing static about the interaction of these three, and identity is always shifting. Consequently there is an inevitable degree of multiple identities co-existing, in greater and lesser degrees of harmony, in each individual. So at the end of this section I turn to the concept of identity salience which offers an explanation of the privileging of one identity over all other identity claims.

3.1.1 Role identity

Role identity is the first component of identity formation. As recently as the 1980s sociologists understood role identity to be the primary, if not sole, source of individual identity.⁷ The principal claim of role identity is that individuals learn who they are, discover their "self," in relationship to others. And in learning who they are and playing the role(s) assigned to them, they become that person.⁸ Roles provide meaning and structure for the development of a sense of selfhood. This is perhaps most easily

⁷ Peter J. Burke, *Identity Theory*, ed. Jan E. Stets (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 113.

⁸ Susan Eastman, in "Philippians 2: Divine and Human Agency in Christ's Story," a paper presented at the Society of Biblical Literature in San Diego in 2007, explores the interplay between mimetic role-playing in which actors, in fact, become the characters they are playing in the theatre in first century Rome and the Christ hymn of Philippians 2.

seen in childhood where role-playing and imitation is more widely presumed to be normative.⁹ The family – and particularly the primary caregiver, usually the mother – is the earliest social group to which a child belongs and in which he/she learns to play a particular role.¹⁰ At its core, a role is a set of expectations. Roles are directly connected to one's particular social location and the learning of a role involves the internalization of the attitudes, thoughts, feelings, and patterns of behavior associated with, and appropriate to, a given role. A child, for example, first learns what it is to be a son or a daughter, a brother or a sister, and a grandson or a granddaughter within the social structure of the immediate family unit.¹¹

The child's social world gradually expands in something like concentric circles, expanding first to his or her wider kinship group and gradually to social groups tangentially connected to the kinship group, and eventually to groups beyond the kinship

⁹ Imitation is an integral part of role-playing. One of the primary ways a role is learned is through mirroring the behaviors and attitudes of others – initially parents and caregivers, later on teachers and mentors, and later still colleagues and bosses. An emerging field of neuropsychology involves the study of mirror neuron cells which are understood not only to play a role in the imitation of role-playing but in the learning of emotions and empathy. There is some research to suggest that autism may, in part, be the result of a mis-firing of the mirror neurons, preventing the development of key social skills involved in imitation. For an accessible overview of mirror neuron theory see Marco Iacoboni, *Mirroring People: The New Science of How We Connect with Others* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2008).

¹⁰ A closely related field of study that focuses on the formation of identity in infancy and early childhood is that of attachment theory. Attachment theory suggests that there is a causal link between the degree to which children are securely attached to a primary caregiver and the likelihood of the child to experience childhood trauma. The question is the direction of this causal link. Are children who are more securely attached less likely to be traumatized by childhood experiences of suffering or are those who are securely attached to a caregiver actually less likely to experience childhood trauma by virtue of the protection offered through relational ties? For more on attachment theory see Robert Karen, *Becoming Attached: Unfolding the Mystery of the Infant-Mother Bond and Its Impact on Later Life* (New York: Warner Books, 1994).

¹¹ There is a plethora of texts addressing the significance of family systems and roles. For a lay-accessible overview of family systems theory, see Roberta M. Gilbert, *The Eight Concepts of Bowen Theory: A New Way of Thinking About the Individual and the Group* (Falls Church, Va.: Leading Systems Press, 2004). And for an engaging and non-technical look at the significance of siblings and birth order in the formation of identity see Kevin Leman, *The Birth Order Book: Why You Are the Way You Are* (Old Tappan, NJ: F.H. Revell, 1985).

group and immediate community. It is through kinship relations that individuals are exposed to the larger communities in which the kinship group exists, and the roles internalized within the family continue to exert tremendous influence on identity as more and more roles are internalized. Pristine individuals do not go out into the wider social world unformed; rather, individuals enter into social communities with identities already both formed and forming through the roles they have learned in their kinship groups. So the child who has already learned, and is continuing to learn, the role of son or daughter – and all of the expectations and patterns of behavior that accompany that role – simultaneously begins to learn the role of playmate, classmate, teammate, and student – as well as how these roles fit together.

Role identity, however, is not limited to childhood. There is no point in time where the learning and playing of roles is outgrown.¹² And individual roles are neither stagnant nor entirely externally-imposed. Though clearly there is an element of external coercion in role-playing – think particularly of socially-imposed roles based on gender, race, social class, or the perception of handicap¹³ – the individual does not play a role in a strictly scripted way, but plays a particular role based on individual perceptions of the role expectations, as well as on the individual's relative degree of acceptance of the social expectations for the role. “[R]ole identity is the internalized meanings of a role that individuals apply to themselves...the meanings of role identities are derived partly from

¹² The classic study of identity-formation as a lifetime of movement through stages of growth is Erik H. Erikson, *Identity and the Life Cycle* (New York: Norton, 1980).

¹³ Though it is often argued that race, and especially gender, are biologically, rather than socially, imposed, sociologists suggest that both race and gender exist along a spectrum, with much less clearly defined divisions than popularly presumed. So, whereas some gender and race characteristics may be physically pre-determined (though which traits and to what extent is an ongoing source of debate), the meaning attached to such traits remains socially constructed.

culture and partly from individuals' distinctive interpretation of the role."¹⁴ The playing of each role is impacted in significant ways by the person playing the role. While the roles played are indeed meaning-making insofar as they contribute to an individual's identity, the roles also receive meaning from the identity of the individuals who accept them, whether the acceptance is explicit or implicit.

The unique spin each person puts on any role is, in part, understood to be related to the individual counterroles with whom they interact. A counterrole is closely related to, and in some sense definitive of, a role. The role of child, of son or daughter, makes no sense removed from the role of parent. Similarly, without the existence of the role of child there is no parent. Likewise with the roles of teacher and student. The existence of one role both pre-supposes, and makes a space for, the existence of the other. Roles are mutually dependent upon one another. This is the case regardless of the moral content of the role – criminals, for example, require/create victims, superheroes require supervillains, enemies require one another.¹⁵ Insofar as roles are reciprocal and dependent upon one another so are identities. Where there are counterroles, there are counteridentities.¹⁶ No identity exists in isolation; all identities are dependent upon, and

¹⁴ Burke, 114.

¹⁵ This understanding of roles and counterroles creating one another is the concept upon which much western epic literature is based. The mythological suggestion behind this is that it is necessary to keep such relationships in a state of constant tension. This is, in essence, the story of *Star Wars* (George Lucas, 1977-2005), J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings* (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1954-1955) and the more recent J.K. Rowling, *Harry Potter* (New York: Arthur A. Levine Books, 1999-2009) series, for example – equal but opposite forces, each depending on the other for its very existence. Until, that is, the force of good is shown to overthrow, and therefore obliterate, (but just barely) the force of evil.

¹⁶ Burke, 115. This relational role and counterrole identity is at the heart of the Trinity. The Father and the Son are eternally in a particular relationship with one another that is mutually dependent and sustaining. God the Son makes no sense without God the Father and vice versa. For more on the mutuality of the relational aspect of the Trinity see Mary Ann Fatula, *The Triune God of Christian Faith* (Collegetown, MN: Liturgical Press, 1990).

depended upon by, counteridentities. This mutual dependence is crucial to understanding identity theory.

Another key to understanding role identity is the realization that no one plays a single role.¹⁷ Every individual plays any number of roles – child, spouse, parent, sibling, teacher, pastor, friend – at the same time. And some roles remain constant over the span of many years, even a lifetime (sibling, for example), while some roles shift or even become obsolete over time. Each role has its own set of behavior expectations and contributes its own element of identity. “This is about more than combining multiple identities in an ‘additive’ way...identities impact on each other...Different forms of identity, then, should be seen as interactive and mutually constitutive, rather than ‘additive’. They should also be seen as dynamic.”¹⁸ This dynamism suggests that an individual is not a passive recipient of identity but an active agent. Part of the uniqueness, the individuality, of each person is the characteristic way in which the myriad roles are embedded in one another. There is an element of personal agency in the ways in which the roles are understood to interact (positively and negatively) with one another. This agency, however, cannot be understood to be absolute. Identity is not something one merely chooses, but remains contingent upon a number of biographical factors – chief among them, the roles one has learned to play and the social structures that continue to create the expectations for, and assign meaning to, each role.

¹⁷ Straddling the fence between popular psychology and self-help genres, Rita Carter’s *Multiplicity* is an engaging look at the complexity of the multiple roles any given person plays and the role of memory in forming a unique and coherent identity out of what are always diverse, and often seemingly contradictory, roles. Rita Carter, *Multiplicity: The New Science of Personality, Identity, and the Self* (New York: Little, Brown & Co., 2008).

¹⁸ Lawler, 3.

3.1.2 Social identity

Social identity is the second component in the formation of identity. Social identity has two primary elements – the first is the individual’s identification as a member of a particular group and with the ways in which certain social group roles, particularly nationalistic, familial, and/or religious commitments, are not merely descriptive in terms of identity-formation, but are prescriptive as well.¹⁹ There are both explicit and implicit expectations attached to every social group, and in exchange for adherence to these expectations there is a transference of identity and status. Social identity is thus integrally connected to role identity as there is no role that exists in isolation from the social group within which the role exists. As such, social groups are meaning-making. That is, the participation, the in-ness, of belonging to social groups, acts to organize behavior and provide a meaningful narrative for one’s life. This meaning-making role of social group participation reduces anxiety levels, providing answers to the questions of what is expected at any given time.²⁰

Social identity is also norming. The norming element of social groups is dependent upon an insistence on sameness. Social groups define themselves in large part on what it is that makes the members of the group the same – Americans, Catholics, soccer players, and so on. The norming of social identity is heavily dependent upon prototypes. “Prototypes follow the *metacontrast principle* in that their ‘profile’

¹⁹ Hogg, 260.

²⁰ Burke, 120. This function of social group identities brings to mind the play and subsequent film “Fiddler on the Roof.” In the introductory song for the musical, “Tradition,” the lead character, Tevye, tells the audience that “because of our traditions every one of us knows who he is and what God expects of him.” Disregarding the gendered language, Tevye’s point is that knowing who one is and what is expected are one and the same. Norman Jewison, “Fiddler on the Roof,” (MGM, 1971).

maximizes the similarities among members within a group as well as the differences between these group members and members in other groups.”²¹ It is significant that prototypes are not real – they are the imagined ideal of a group, the ideal which no individual member can ever achieve.²² Despite their ethereal nature, prototypes function as something of a social barometer, measuring one’s in-ness in any given group. The closer one comes to matching the standards of the prototype, the more normative, and more accepted and admired, even the more powerful, one becomes. So, while social identity serves to minimize the existential anxiety over the “Who am I?” question, it simultaneously creates anxiety over one’s failure (and perhaps more notably one’s perceived failure) to live up to the accepted standards of the group.

The second essential part of group identity is concerned with the ways in which social groups interact with other groups, and with the ways groups define both who is in and who is out (“This is who we are, this is what we do.”), and how members of a group, collectively, understand themselves in relationship to other groups. This component of social identity concretizes an “us” and “them” approach to social relations. The power of group identity is characterized by the hyper-identification of one’s sense of self – one’s value as a person – with one’s nationality, race, gender, or even with one’s favorite sports team. Membership in this particular group provides a sense of security and of belonging. In exchange for this security of selfhood, group members pledge –

²¹ Burke, 119.

²² Think, for example, of the power the fashion industry wields to distort conceptions of ideal body types through the use of unusually thin models as well as the increasingly widespread use of photo re-touching technology. Though not single-handedly responsible for eating disorders, the connection between the marketing of such prototypes and the occurrence of anorexia and bulimia are, I suspect, hardly coincidental. For more on the social construction of eating disorders see *Critical Feminist Approaches to Eating Dis-Orders*, ed. Maree Burns and Helen Malson (New York: Routledge, 2009).

sometimes explicitly, often only implicitly – a level of allegiance to this group above, and sometimes against, any other potentially competing group allegiance. Group membership becomes a quick way of categorizing people, including oneself. It is a form of human taxonomy, with an evaluative sense of ranking (not unlike what the biological sciences use to classify animal species into lower and higher orders), in which one’s own primary group is generally perceived as being both normative and inherently superior.²³

Role identity and social identity are integrally connected – roles are embedded in social groups, both in terms of what being in a particular group means by way of behavioral expectations within the group, and in terms of the ways in which one learns to perceive those from outside the group. Role identity and social identity are also reciprocal. Role identity only exists insofar as there is a social group within which the role makes sense. At the same time, the fulfillment of a role provides social identity because there is no role which exists outside of a socially-constituted group. The distinction between role identity and social identity is primarily analytical, not functional or empirical.²⁴ There is no way to separate the formational aspect of role identity and social identity – they are two sides of the same coin.

3.1.3 Person identity

The idea of person identity as a significant element of the formation of identity is a relative newcomer in the field of sociology. Specifically, person identity refers to “the

²³ Social identity theory’s understanding of the power of groups and group allegiance suggests a sociological explanation for the prevalence of prejudice, patriotism and die-hard sports fans.

²⁴ Burke, 122.

idiosyncratic personality attributes that are not shared with other people.”²⁵ This element of identity theory evidences the influence of the field of psychology on the work of sociologists. Person identity has to do with the way an individual perceives himself or herself as being unique and distinct from others. Person identity, however, is derived primarily from culturally-normed characteristics and includes traits such as perception of relative masculinity or femininity, of aggression or passivity, of competitiveness or cooperation. Such person identity characteristics do not exist on their own but are understood in relation to both role identity and social group identity. One perceives oneself as a caring person in one’s role as a parent or because one is a nurse. Similarly the perception of oneself as caring may be couched in relative language – I am caring, for a man, or I am caring, for a woman.²⁶ The inclusion of person identity in the work of identity theorists allows for a more complex understanding of the ways in which role identity and social identity interact to form an individual identity. The person identity is the unique spin a given person puts on the particular conglomeration of roles and social groups by which that person is formed. Person identity also makes a space for understanding the refusal to accept particular role identities deemed normative by social groups. Individuals can refuse both the limitations and the expectations presumed normative for particular roles, as has often been the case in regards to perceived gender- and/or race-appropriate roles. But even when a strict adherence to social roles is refused,

²⁵ Ibid, 124.

²⁶ This is perhaps more often seen in pejorative playground statements such as, “You throw like a girl.” or the thinly-veiled prejudice of some contemporary political discourse, “She is very articulate for an Asian woman.” That is, this sort of acknowledgement of the relativity of norms evidences that such traits are rarely commented on when perceived as being expected by those of a particular role. It is therefore offered with a relative qualifier when exhibited by those from whom it is not presumed to be normative.

person identity cannot be understood in an individualistic or isolated manner as the individual's perceptual norms – the very norms being refuted – are shaped by the roles and social groups within any given identity matrix. Rebellion against social norms and role identities is inherently dependent upon, and therefore acknowledges the reality and power of, the very norms and identities it rails against.

3.1.4 Identity Salience

Given the multiplicity of identities and the fact that identities are never operating in isolation but in interaction not only with other persons/identities in a multitude of situations and even with multiple identities within oneself, there is an exponential growth element to identity identification. The more roles an individual plays, the more complex the sense of self. In fact, William James suggested that “we have as many ‘selves’ as we have others with whom we interact.”²⁷ It is, in fact, possible to suggest that identity theory allows not merely for a complex sense of self but for a multiplicity of selves. Rather than envisioning the self as the true core of an individual, identity theory envisions a complex set of roles which an individual can comfortably play. The uniqueness of any individual self is not to be found by removing all of the external trappings of role-playing, but in the unique combination of roles and the relative degree of privilege the individual gives to each role. There is, therefore, something of a hierarchy of roles. This hierarchy is what identity theorists refer to as identity salience.

Identity salience represents one of the ways, and a theoretically most important way, that the identities making up the self can be organized. Identities, that is, are conceived as being organized into a salience hierarchy. This hierarchical

²⁷ Burke, 131.

organization of identities is defined by the probabilities of each of the various identities within it being brought into play in a given situation. Alternatively, it is defined by the probabilities each of the identities have of being invoked across a variety of situations. The location of an identity in this hierarchy is, by definition, its salience.²⁸

Identity salience considers the ways in which the multiple selves of an individual interact with one another, with how a given self is privileged in a specific interaction.²⁹

Salience is the likelihood that a particular identity will, in fact, be activated. For example, if one of my role identities is as a mother and another of my role identities is as an accountant and I come across a lost child in the grocery store, the salient identity to be activated will most likely be that of mother. Of course the reality is never that simple, as no one is ever only a mother or only an accountant, and many role and social identities are quite complementary. If I am, instead of an accountant, both a mother and a police officer both roles may be activated simultaneously by the sight of a lost child. There are countless variables in identity salience as there are countless combinations of role, social, and personal identities. However, generally speaking, the hierarchy of identity salience suggests that the larger the number of people impacted by any particular role, the higher the salience is for that role.³⁰ Similarly, the greater level of

²⁸ S. Stryker, and Serpe, "Commitment, Identity Salience, and Role Behavior: Theory and Research Example," in *Personality, Roles, and Social Behavior*, ed. W. Ickes & E.S. Knowles (New York: Springer-Verlag, 1982), 206. Emphasis is in the original.

²⁹ Carter claims that this multiplicity of selves is a necessary and good psychological adaptation to complex contemporary lives. She further argues that the line between a pathological development of multiple personalities and the necessary multiplicity is much vaguer than portrayed in such popular film and literature as *The Three Faces of Eve* (Nunnally Johnson, 1957) and *Sybil* (Daniel Petrie, 1976). Though her suggestion is more nuanced than this, the primary determinative factor between pathological and normal multiplicity is one of cognizance and communication. That is, in cases of pathological multiple personality disorders the divide between the various selves is absolute in a way that is not the case in normative multiplicity.

³⁰ Hogg, 258. This idea of identity salience assumes that it is the perception of the individual which determines which role(s) take priority and are therefore most determinative of one's identity. However,

commitment to a particular identity – in my own perception my identity as parent trumps my identity as a distance runner – the greater the identity salience of that identity.³¹

The issue of identity salience becomes particularly critical when competing identities within an individual come into conflict with one another. Peter Burke uses the example of an adolescent girl having a friend over at her house. With her friend the adolescent has a certain role, one in which she perceives the need to be seen as sophisticated. The necessary level of sophistication, however, directly conflicts with the girl's role as daughter to her parents. Though most people shift identities routinely through the course of daily interactions with others, choosing the identity appropriate to the situation and the counteridentities with whom they interact, such a transition is not possible when two non-complementary identities are called upon at the same moment. The identity system necessarily maintains a delicate balance. When an individual is in “an impossible situation in which one or both identity standards cannot be verified...the identity standards themselves must shift as people's identities change to remove the conflict.”³² Identity salience offers an explanation for the shifting of identities made necessary by the inevitable complications of social interaction.

Social identity theory highlights the complexity of human identity and suggests that any notion of self as autonomous is misguided at best. The dynamism of identity is

Hogg also points out that there are some characteristics – referred to as “master statuses” – which over-ride all other characteristics in the social definition of the self. These master statuses are neither choices nor based on one's perception of relative impact or importance. Hogg suggests that race and gender identity often function as such master statuses, suggesting that the socially-constructed nature of both race and gender are externally applied by the dominant group as a means of social control.

³¹ Burke, 133.

³² Ibid, 135.

integrally connected to the dynamic interactions within a complex web of social relationships. Each of these social relationships contributes to transference of personal identity within which identity (both individual and communal) is continually evolving. Social identity theory suggests that an individual's reliance upon this complex web of social relations is not only necessary for the formation of identity but for its sustenance. There simply is no human "being" outside of being with others in community.

3.2 Towards a Theological Account of Community

Identity theory attempts to explain the formation of individual identity as a complex, socially-constructed project based on participation in any number of social groups. Identity theory does not, however, consider the purpose of the social group *qua* social group, nor does it take into account the explicit or implicit purpose or truth claims of any particular group. Similarly, there is little sustained attention given to the telos of the group, or of how participation in social groups is significant in terms of the telos of the human being *qua* human being. *That* human identity is dependent upon social relationships is rightly made clear in identity theory. *Why* this is so, or whether the nature of the group matters, is not. There is no explicit theological dimension to identity theory. In fact, identity theory sees religion – and religious community – as just one of any number of social groups, the significance of which is presumed to be dependent upon the individual's relative perception. Identity theory entails a presumption of moral neutrality to group association. What is considered to be important is not the moral compass of any given group but the individual's perception of the claims of any given group upon the life of the individual. This is not to suggest that identity theory necessarily sees religious

communities as a freely chosen or voluntary associations – it acknowledges the complexity of any understanding of community as chosen – but it does tend to presume that religious community is inherently no more formative than any other group, nor does it presume that religious community *should* have a higher identity salience. In what follows I first consider Alasdair MacIntyre’s concept of a traditioned community through the lens of identity theory. I then suggest that MacIntyre’s conception of telos as both individual and communal is critical to any theological notion of community. I do this in order develop a theological account of the church which is, I suggest, the community towards which MacIntyre points. As such, I consider the formational nature of the church as the identity which claims master status, and should therefore have the highest degree of salience, for Christians.³³ Finally, I turn to a consideration of the nature of the telos of the church and suggest that it is in and through the church that human identity is rightly discovered.

3.2.1 Alasdair MacIntyre and Traditioned Communities

Insofar as MacIntyre offers a critique of the conception of an unencumbered and atomistic individual identity, MacIntyre’s project appears to be in line with sociology’s identity theory.³⁴ MacIntyre refuses the Enlightenment Project’s understanding of the individual as a discrete moral agent acting both rationally and independently. MacIntyre suggests that this liberal – largely Kantian – concept that the individual as a

³³ That this is ontologically true and should, therefore, be empirically the case, does not, however, translate into it empirically being the case. There are many Christians for whom baptism is empirically no more significant an identity claim – and is perhaps even less of an identity claim – than race, gender, national origin, sexual orientation, or even consumer preferences.

³⁴ The suggestion that MacIntyre seems, in some regards, to reinforce identity theory is not, in any way, to suggest that MacIntyre is influenced by the field of sociology. It is, rather, to suggest that the insights of sociology overlap with MacIntyre’s insights into the import of social relations in the construction of individual identity.

“democratized self which has no necessary social content and no necessary social identity can then be anything, can assume any role or take any point of view, because it *is* in and for itself nothing” is utterly mistaken.³⁵ And MacIntyre’s entire project is, in large part, a refutation of the possibility of a self that is a detached observer rather than a socially and narratively constituted moral agent.

While MacIntyre’s project overlaps with identity theory in a significant way, MacIntyre suggests that the socially complex pluralistic world of identity theory is mistaken. Rather than seeing contemporary culture as pluralistic, MacIntyre sees it as fragmented. Whereas identity theory suggests the complex nature of a pluralistic society results in an individual’s ability to adapt, facilely shifting identities as context demands through identity salience, MacIntyre suggests that the liberal self is severely diminished by the lack of telos of the social group which has resulted from, and is symptomatic of, the fragmentation of the contemporary moral world.³⁶ Identity salience attempts to

³⁵ Alasdair C. MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 32.

³⁶ Identity theory’s social group is a much looser concept than MacIntyre’s traditioned community. Social groups are broadly defined as any group to which one belongs and which is therefore, to varying degrees, formative. Examples include race, ethnicity, gender, social class but also things such as affinity for particular ball teams or participation in civic groups, such as the Lions Club or the Masons. And even more loosely, social groups include simply one’s circle of friends and acquaintances. But such groups are not stagnant or isolated and may overlap in any number of ways, such as mutual affiliations and friends. Some social groups are freely chosen and the association is rather loose whereas some are a biological given and the association is more or less absolute, though its influence may still be a bit loose, depending on a seemingly infinite number of variables. Of course some of these social groups - the church would be counted as a social group, for example - may also be traditioned communities in the MacIntyrean sense, but many would not. Social groups can be considerably broader than MacIntyre’s community – racial and ethnic groups, for example. On the other hand, social groups can likewise be considerably narrower than MacIntyre’s community – affiliation with a particular social clique, for example. And the distinction between the two is not absolute as there are some social groups, in addition to the church, which may also be traditioned communities – the military, for example. The important distinction is that the social group as understood in identity theory does not, *by definition*, have a telos. This does not, however, mean social groups *necessarily* lack a telos, only that a telos is not definitionally required for a social group to be formative of individual identity.

explain how a particular identity is privileged over any other personal identity based on a matrix of perceived import and influence; the concept of identity salience does not, however, take into consideration the existential truth claims of any given group. Social groups are presumed to be largely neutral and, if not rationally chosen at least to some extent given rational consent – the hierarchy is one of the individual’s perceptions of the relative import of the group, and is not based on a truth-claim.³⁷

Rather than seeing social groups as morally neutral, MacIntyre understands the human telos to be that of the development of virtue, and the community to be the locus of this development – a telos loaded with moral content. And virtue is neither neutral nor free-standing, but is instead embedded within the practices of the tradition to which the virtue belongs, and in which virtue is to be exemplified. Virtue manifests itself in a consistency of character, which is to say that virtue *qua* virtue is exhibited in the entirety of the virtuous person’s life. Virtue cannot be cordoned off into this or that arena of life. In the life of the patient person, for example, patience will be displayed in a myriad of settings, not simply as one aspect of one persona or social role the person chooses to play.³⁸ The patient person will be patient whether at work, at play, or at rest. Likewise with the wise person and the courageous person. Virtues are not roles that can be put on or off at will, nor can they be chosen through a moral calculus equivalent of identity salience. Herein lies one of the problems MacIntyre sees with the fragmented liberal

³⁷ Identity theory, however, fails to recognize the moral fragmentation which MacIntyre describes. In fact, as a formulation of one of the social sciences, identity theory presumes a moral neutrality which MacIntyre rejects. That is, identity theory is itself embedded within the tradition of the Enlightenment, a tradition which allows identity theorists to believe they are engaging in an exclusively descriptive, and therefore objective, task of naming the process by which identity is formed without recognizing the normative claim inherent in such an act.

³⁸ I suspect the same thing can be said about the vices, though there appears to be considerably less literature dedicated to the ways in which vice manifests itself in consistency of character.

understanding of selfhood. The stark division into social-setting appropriate roles, in addition to the division of life into discrete temporal (childhood, adolescence, adulthood, old age) and spatial (sacred or secular) realms, calls into question the unity of character necessary for selfhood as MacIntyre understands it. Is it, as social identity theory might suggest, indeed possible to be kind and compassionate in my role as friend while being shrewd and dishonest in my role as business person? Social identity theory not only makes a space for such a schizophrenic conception of selfhood, it *presumes* it as normative. MacIntyre, on the other hand, presumes that identity rightly formed manifests itself in a unity of character such that “I am forever whatever I have been at any time for others.”³⁹ This claim does not deny the possibility of change, but suggests that change only makes sense within the narrative of a given life, and given sufficient narration change demonstrates a continuity of character which is developed through time in movement towards its telos.⁴⁰

Narrative is what lends coherence of identity not only to an individual life, to an individual self, but to an entire community. MacIntyre denies the very possibility that identity is something objectively founded, and suggests that individual identity is both produced by, and expressed through, the narratives individuals tell to make sense of their lives. Though insofar as identity is constituted in and through the narratives we tell, and therefore over which we possess a modicum of control, there is an extent to which

³⁹ MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 217.

⁴⁰ Human character, however, is not always so consistent. Though it may well be a case of the exception proving the rule, there are any number of instances where, after the commitment of some heinous crime the immediate response of those who know the perpetrator is one of shock and disbelief, claiming how “out of character” this act was. This is to suggest that while there is, as a rule, a consistency of character human behavior is far too complex to be reduced to character. The psychological field of deviant behavior is not concerned merely with behavior that deviates from the cultural norm but also with behavior that deviates from the individual’s norms.

humans are self-interpreting. MacIntyre, however, understands us to be, at most, co-authors of our own lives.⁴¹ This is so in that these narratives are inextricably embedded in the contingent communities of which we are a part. “For the story of my life is always embedded in the story of those communities from which I derive my identity. I am born with a past; and to try to cut myself off from that past, in the individualistic mode, is to deform my present relationships.”⁴² An important element of MacIntyre’s claim is that a constitutive part of oneself actually pre-dates that very self. There is no self isolated from the history and character of the communities in which the self is born and formed. The history and character of the communities which constitute the self provide the necessary grammar with which individual narratives may be constructed. Who I am cannot be disconnected from the family, regional, and national history into which I am born.⁴³ This is true in terms of language, of ideas, of expectations, of goals. There is no means by which an individual can be separated from the communities which have given shape to the individual. This means that any individual narrative necessarily both includes, and is limited by, the larger narrative – the meta-narrative, even – of the primary formational community.

⁴¹ MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 213.

⁴² *Ibid*, 221.

⁴³ Malcolm Gladwell describes a study of the prevalence of feuds through the 19th century and of the continued relatively high level of aggression demonstrated by men from the Appalachian regions which suggests that the roots of the patterns of aggression displayed can be traced, via immigration patterns, to the culture that existed among the Scottish highland herders in which the defense of one’s honor – as well as of one’s property and possessions – was a cardinal virtue. Malcolm Gladwell, *Outliers: The Story of Success* (New York: Little, Brown and Co., 2008), chapter 6. Gladwell’s point is that cultural legacies do, in fact, matter. They shape, often in ways that are far from obvious, beliefs, behaviors, even emotions. Such a suggestion does not imply a cultural determinism, but it does suggest the complexity of identity-formation.

MacIntyre's understanding of embeddedness, however, extends beyond the embeddedness within a greater communal narrative to the understanding that any given narrative is likewise embedded in the narrative of other individuals who similarly participate in the larger communal narrative. Such mutual embeddedness is evidenced in a kind of accountability: "I am forever whatever I have been at any time for others – and I may at any time be called upon to answer for it – no matter how changed I may be now."⁴⁴ This accountability is bi-directional: "I am not only accountable, I am one who can always ask others for an account, who can put others to the question. I am part of their story, as they are part of mine."⁴⁵ Individual narratives are inextricably connected to – and therefore to a great extent formed by – the narratives of other individuals.⁴⁶ The narratives which construct individual lives are interlocked in an ever-increasingly complex web of relationships.⁴⁷ This interlocking or mutual embeddedness of narratives creates a rich set of narratives in which the whole is different from – and arguably greater than – the sum of its parts.⁴⁸ To be a self is necessarily to be a self in relation to others – others who determine, in significant ways, one's very selfhood.

Because MacIntyre understands the self to be not just socially constructed but socially *and* narratively constructed it is important to ask what is at stake in his focus on

⁴⁴ MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 217.

⁴⁵ *Ibid*, 218.

⁴⁶ Individual narratives are, of course, inextricably woven together with any number of narratives in such a way that is considerably richer and more complex than the reciprocity of roles suggested by social identity theory recognizes.

⁴⁷ This is something of a sociological super-strings theory.

⁴⁸ MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 214.

the social construction of narrative (or on the narrative construction of social being). In a manner quite similar to that of identity theory, MacIntyre understands role fulfillment to be a significant part of identity-formation.⁴⁹ Whereas identity theory understands roles to be learned primarily, if not solely, in response to counterroles, MacIntyre suggests that it is stories which are of primary significance in the learning of roles. The narratives a community tells about how people relate to one another, about who carries out what function within the group, about what desires and emotions are acceptable, are passed on with an educative purpose. MacIntyre suggests that deprived of such stories children (and adults as well!) are left as “anxious stutterers in their actions and in their words.”⁵⁰ Stories provide a paradigm for socially-expected behavior and as such are a crucial element of identity formation.⁵¹ The narrative of the community and of other individuals by and through whom identity is forged cannot be separated from the narrative of the individual.

3.2.2 Towards a Theological Account of Community

Narrative is not incidental to MacIntyre’s account but is integrally tied to his conception of telos. The point of the communal narrative is to narrate movement towards

⁴⁹ In chapter 3 of *After Virtue*, MacIntyre argues that there are three primary roles or stock characters that make up liberal democratic society. They are the rich aesthete, the bureaucratic manager, and the therapist. In the prologue to the third edition MacIntyre adds a fourth character – the conservative moralist. MacIntyre seems to suggest that these stock characters are something of a simplification and a parody of the complex social roles necessary for cultural narratives to be both coherent and formative.

⁵⁰ MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 216.

⁵¹ For more on the power of stories to form identity and influence patterns of thought and behavior see Wayne C. Booth, *The Company We Keep: An Ethics of Fiction* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988.) and Robert Coles, *The Call of Stories: Teaching and the Moral Imagination* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1989).

the telos, to narrate the development of virtues appropriate to the community's telos.⁵² In this way the narrative both shapes and describes identity. While MacIntyre acknowledges the importance of social identity,⁵³ rather than drawing a distinction between social groups and traditioned communities MacIntyre suggests that there is, in fact, no social group which can be completely removed from the traditions which gave rise to the group. Demonstrating his continued intellectual commitment to Aristotle, towards the end of *Dependent Rational Animals* MacIntyre suggests that the communal telos is best exemplified through participation in the life of the local geopolitical community.⁵⁴ He suggests that the nuclear family is too small and inward-focused and the modern nation-state too large to maintain a coherent notion of the common good. In this suggestion it seems to me that MacIntyre is mostly right. However, the problem with understanding the local geopolitical community as the locus of virtue and narrative identity is that such communities, even if they do develop a relatively thick understanding of the common good, often lack any sense of an eschatological telos.⁵⁵

MacIntyre's distinction between the social group of identity theory and the traditioned community pushes towards, but does not explicitly name, the church.⁵⁶ I

⁵² MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 216-217. Without a teleological understanding of human life, MacIntyre suggests that Nietzsche's subjective will-to-power becomes the inevitable, rational moral choice.

⁵³ *Ibid*, 220-21.

⁵⁴ Alasdair C. MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals: Why Human Beings Need the Virtues* (Chicago, IL: Open Court, 1999), chapter 11.

⁵⁵ That geographical communities often lack any sense of telos does not mean that they do so by definition. Amish and Hasidic communities may both represent communities in which the geopolitical and religious communities are, at least by intention, coterminous. Many immigrant communities may, likewise, be an exception to this tendency.

⁵⁶ This notion is by no means foreign to MacIntyre and in fact seems to be, in many ways, the obvious end towards which MacIntyre's quest for another St. Benedict points.

would suggest that the church, as the body of Christ, is not merely another social body among many bodies – a matter of consumer choice – but is *the* social body whose narrative is the narrative of ultimate, and therefore ultimately defining, reality. Rather than envisioning the local geopolitical community as the locus of identity, for those for whom the master status is Christian, the primary community is necessarily the church. Theologically, then, identity is grounded in relationship, much like it is in social identity theory. Unlike social identity theory, however, theologically the “with whom” of relationship becomes that which is defining. Insofar as identity is grounded in participation in the community which is the body of Christ, the primary relationship on which identity depends is that with God. Relationship with God, however, is necessarily mediated through others. The salience hierarchy of identity theory is primarily pragmatic. MacIntyre, however, recognizes identity as primarily teleological. Identity as defined by the community of the body of Christ is not merely teleological in a generic sense; it is to have one’s narrative embedded within the narrative of God’s story.⁵⁷

3.3 Suffering and Disembodiment

In the preceding section I have shown the crucial nature of social groups for individual identity as illustrated by social identity theory as well as by MacIntyre’s call to traditioned communities. I have also argued that the community which is most constitutive of identity is the church. Suffering, however, threatens the very nature of community as well as the individual’s relationship to the community. Profound

⁵⁷ Identity founded in the body of Christ does not, however, prevent suffering. Nor does it obviate the effects of suffering, which is why even when participation in the body of Christ has the highest degree of salience for an individual who has suffered, (re)incorporation, as I discuss in section 3.4, is a necessary dimension of redemption.

suffering, as defined in chapter one, refers to *intense and enduring pain of a physical, psychic, or social nature, resulting from the violent actions of another human being, the memory of which is disorienting or disintegrating of personal identity, destructive of social bonds, and which cripples the individual's capacity to imagine a future unbounded by the past*. In much the same way that profound suffering threatens the integrity of memory and consequently of personal identity, suffering also threatens the very relations with which personal identity is intertwined and upon which it is therefore dependent. Chapter two addresses suffering's unnarratability, the propensity of suffering to strip the sufferer of the language for expressing suffering. In addition to rendering the sufferer mute, suffering often damages the relationships which are necessary for the sharing of the experience of suffering. Suffering often ruptures the very community necessary for overcoming the effects of suffering, leading to a devastating state of self-perpetuating isolation. As a result of the sufferer's isolation the suffering of the past continues to manifest itself in the present.

The isolation of suffering, however, is not merely an accidental result of suffering, but is instead an inherent part of the logic of suffering itself.⁵⁸ Bodies are not incidental to suffering, but are the locus of suffering.⁵⁹ Because humans *are*, rather than merely having, bodies, suffering is, first and foremost, a result of the vulnerability of

⁵⁸ Isolation is a strategic dimension of suffering perfected in totalitarian states and abusive families alike. In his book, *Torture and Eucharist*, William Cavanaugh claims that isolation, the disruption of community, was the explicit intent of the Pinochet regime's practice of torture. The resultant state of fear and mistrust which separated neighbor from neighbor and often caused even immediate family members to withdraw from one another was not incidental to the practice of torture but was an integral part of its logic. Suffering, however, does not have to come in the form of state-sponsored torture in order to be disruptive of community. Suffering *qua* suffering is isolating. See Cavanaugh, chapter 1.

⁵⁹ This is not to deny the reality of psychic suffering. It is, rather, to reiterate the claim of chapter one that the profound experience of physical suffering inflicted by the violent actions of another human being necessarily includes psychic suffering.

embodiment. “The boundaries of my body are also the boundaries of my self. My skin surface shields me against the external world. If I am to have trust, I must feel on it only what I *want* to feel. At the first blow, however, this trust in the world breaks down.”⁶⁰ The vulnerability of embodiment is the case whether suffering is physical, mental, or psychic, but is most acute in the case of physical suffering.⁶¹ Because the body is the vehicle through which suffering is experienced, the isolation of suffering is also a bodily experience. In what follows I first suggest that such isolation is not incidental to suffering, but is an integral part of suffering. I then explore the ways in which suffering isolates the sufferer from his or her own bodily experiences before turning to a consideration of the isolation of the sufferer from the communal body in ways that are simultaneously self-induced and externally-imposed.

The body is necessarily the primary means through which profound suffering is experienced. The body’s sensitivity to touch is the vehicle for sensations both pleasant and painful. Elaine Scarry suggests, “Intense pain is world-destroying.”⁶² Pain has a way of drawing attention to itself at the exclusion of all else so much so that in the moment of pain “the name of one’s child, the memory of a friend’s face, are all absent.”⁶³

⁶⁰ Jean Amery, “Torture,” in *Art from the Ashes: A Holocaust Anthology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 126. In equating unwelcome physical sensations with suffering, Amery is referring specifically to the suffering of torture and not merely to a dispositional aversion to, for example, cold or warm temperatures.

⁶¹ Elaine Scarry points out that there is an important distinction to be made in terms of agency. Suffering that is willingly undergone – for example in the case of the martyrs or in the case of certain painful medical or dental procedures – does not necessarily have the same isolating impact as suffering which is imposed against one’s will and over which one has no power. The isolation is connected to the violation of bodily boundaries. Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 34.

⁶² *Ibid*, 29.

⁶³ *Ibid*, 30.

The outside world ceases to exist in the perception of the sufferer. This is not, however, an egoistic denial of others as it is impossible to deny something that refuses to exist. In situations of intense physical pain, particularly when the pain is recurrent or prolonged, the body itself, as the locus of pain, is experienced as an enemy, as a thing to be overcome, while simultaneously being experienced as all that is. “It is the intense pain that destroys a person’s self and world, a destruction experienced spatially as either the contraction of the universe down to the immediate vicinity of the body or as the body swelling to fill the entire universe.”⁶⁴ The claims of the body in profound pain nullify all external claims to reality. The world is effectively reduced to the location of suffering, and yet the suffering looms as large as the universe.

This reduction of the world to the site of pain and suffering often results in a withdrawal from the source of suffering, one’s own body.⁶⁵ The phenomenon of disassociation is not uncommon amongst those who have suffered acute or prolonged trauma – torture victims, abused children, and rape victims being among those most commonly experiencing (or reporting) it.⁶⁶ “Through dissociation the consciousness

⁶⁴ Ibid, 35.

⁶⁵ Nancy Raine describes this loss of embodiment in the midst of being raped. Though she was blindfolded and never saw the rapist she felt that she was somehow or other removed from the person being raped and was able, in a sense, to “see” the rapist as if hovering from a position somewhere above her bed. “Whatever part of me was ‘watching’ did not feel alive because it no longer seemed to possess a body.” Nancy Venable Raine, *After Silence: Rape & My Journey Back* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 1998).

⁶⁶ Though it is necessarily beyond the scope of this project, such disassociation is not limited to the one who suffers. In *Death and the Maiden*, Dorfman interestingly portrays a level of detachment or disassociation – likened to a form of possession – necessary for the psychic survival not only on the part of the one being tortured, but also of the torturers. Dr. Miranda confesses, “A kind of – brutalization took over my life, I began to really truly like what I was doing. It became a game. My curiosity partly morbid, partly scientific. How much can this woman take? More than the other one? ... She is entirely in your power, you can carry out all your fantasies, you can do what you want with her” (59).

seeks to withdraw, as it were, from this pain and shame, abandoning the body, its feelings, and especially its vulnerability to being affected by others.”⁶⁷ When the body experiences profound pain, the self is perceived as an object, an animate thing lacking in subjective agency. “To have been rendered powerless by one who wants only to hurt and humiliate you, to have suffered annihilation (all but the final loss of consciousness) by cruel hands is to carry deep within the terrible knowledge that you can be reduced, in Amery’s words, to nothing more than ‘a prey of death.’”⁶⁸ This awareness of extreme powerlessness, of a lack of agency, causes the self to be divided against itself and often renders the sufferer less able to experience his or her own embodiment. In extreme situations the disassociation results in a lack of physical sensation such that the sufferer experiences his or her body as a detached observer, as one who is aware of what is happening but with no more bodily or emotional feeling than as if watching a television show. The more prolonged or repeated the suffering, the longer-lasting the dissociative state. “It is a cruel irony of torture that the conversion of the body to an intense field of sentience leaves in its wake an inability to feel.”⁶⁹ This lack of feeling can, and often does, long outlast the time of suffering itself.⁷⁰

Turning such suffering into a mental game is a well-attested to survival technique among long-term torture and abuse victims. See, for example, Andrea Warren, *Surviving Hitler: A Boy in the Nazi Death Camps*, 1st ed. (New York: HarperCollinsPublishers, 2001).

⁶⁷ G. Simon Harak, “Child Abuse and Embodiment from a Thomistic Perspective,” in *Modern Theology* 11, no. 3 (July 1995), 323.

⁶⁸ Jamie Kalven, *Working with Available Light: A Family’s World after Violence* (New York: Norton, 1999) 261.

⁶⁹ Cavanaugh, 43.

⁷⁰ “It was living with Novocain in the heart, condemned to life on the glassy surface of the emotional horse latitudes. I felt cut off from everything...even from the memory of emotional life” (Raine, 61).

In addition to isolating the sufferer from his or her own embodiment, suffering isolates the individual from the communal body.⁷¹ Much, if not most, of the suffering which is intentionally perpetrated in interpersonal relationships is, first of all, experienced in isolation. There is no visible or tangible community present at the time of the assault. Or, if there are others present they are often either co-responsible for the suffering or are by-standers who are either, themselves, incapable of preventing the suffering or, worse, are insensitive to it. The absence of any physical community means that the experience of suffering is also an experience of isolation. Or, rather, it is experienced only in the company of the one inflicting the suffering, violating the very trust that makes any sense of community possible.⁷² Consequently, when these bonds are broken the embodied lesson is that one is both powerless and alone, and that it is the state of isolation, not the fleeting community, which is real and lasting.⁷³ Though I in no way intend to minimize the physical harm of violence, this loss of community, because the self is an inherently relational entity, is a loss of identity which goes considerably deeper than the surface of

Though there is not necessarily a direct causal link between suffering and perpetrating violence, there is often a connection. The inability to feel one's own physical pain can, in time, lead to a loss of – or lack of capacity for empathy – setting up the potential for the cycle of violence to continue.

⁷¹ Kai Erikson suggests that trauma actually has both a centripetal and a centrifugal force. That is, there is a way in which the isolation of suffering can become a link, a force that unites, insofar as in the presence of another who has suffered similarly there can be a sense of relief at not needing to explain one's suffering. However, she also notes that such community based on estrangement can, in the end, reinforce the isolation of suffering. Implied in her essay is that while there is a place for "survivor groups" in the healing of suffering, this is only the case if they are able to serve as a transition item. Solidarity in suffering is still a state of isolation from the wider community. Kai Erikson, "Notes on Trauma and Community," in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, ed. Cathy Caruth (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1995) 186.

⁷² "The mortar bonding human communities together is made up, at least in part, of trust and respect and decency – and, in moments of crisis, of charity and concern." Ibid, 193.

⁷³ The resulting sense of isolation from the violation of trust is largely impacted by the perceived strength of the bonds of trust which are broken. That is, the sense of isolation that follows in the wake of a violation of trust of a loved one or of a trusted caregiver is often considerably more profound and long-lasting than the violation of trust of a relative stranger.

the skin. Isolation strikes at the core of human identity as identities “are fragile and difficult to repair. They don’t simply break; they shatter.”⁷⁴

This violation of trust both initiates and exemplifies the state of isolation that is manifested in a ruptured relationship with the other who is responsible for the experience of suffering. However, this fissure often widens rather quickly, rupturing relationships on a much broader scale. Though Cavanaugh is speaking specifically of a state-sponsored campaign of torture, his insights into the destruction of relationship brought about by intense suffering are not restricted to cases of torture. He suggests that the result of such suffering is a literal destruction of the victim’s social world and a creation of isolated individuals.⁷⁵ His reference to individuals is not, however, to the ideal of the post-Enlightenment self-made person, but to a fragmented individual, bereft of the necessary links to a community. “A person’s self and a person’s world are constructed largely of interpersonal relationships – links to others, both significant and peripheral – which help define who one is. In torture’s shattering of self and world, those relationships are undone, and the victim is left isolated and alone, that is, without the resources to reconstitute a shared life, and therefore an integrated self.”⁷⁶ The isolation of suffering, the loss of community, is ironically a creation of atomistic individuals and simultaneously a loss of individual selves.

The experience of profound suffering, particularly at the hands of another, creates a situation not merely of physical isolation – though physical aloneness is a significant

⁷⁴ Kalven, 278.

⁷⁵ Cavanaugh, 38.

⁷⁶ Ibid, 43.

part of the isolation of suffering – but there is also a significant psychological isolation. This psychological isolation can be both self- and other-imposed and is usually a combination of both. The experience of suffering, particularly when that suffering is at the hands of another person, can destroy the sufferer’s belief that “one can *be oneself* in relation to others.”⁷⁷ This reflects the sense of objectification mentioned above. When the body has been treated as an object by another, rather than being honored as Buber’s “thou”, there can be an internalization of the self as object rather than as acting subject. Though this is especially the case in situations of child abuse or long-term suffering such as in cases of torture, it can likewise occur as a result of a one-time traumatic event. The objectification of the self can become something of a self-fulfilling prophecy, the internalized message being, “This is how other people treat me; this is all I am worth.”⁷⁸

The internalized objectification is often complicated by feelings of both shame and fear – feelings that often result in a conspiracy of silence. In chapter two I look at the ways in which suffering damages communicative ability, but even when one who has suffered does not experience a loss of vocabulary or communicative skill there is often a tacit cultural agreement that unpleasant events not be discussed in polite society.⁷⁹ Sölle says that the burden of suffering is “that folks don’t talk to one another.”⁸⁰ One of the primary motivators for this silence is the fear of social presumptions of guilt, as well as

⁷⁷ Judith Lewis Herman, *Trauma and Recovery* (New York: BasicBooks, 1997), 53.

⁷⁸ Karen, 205.

⁷⁹ Nancy Raine writes of the moment she first recognized the reluctance of public discourse on the issue of rape. When she first speaks publicly – at a gathering of writers – after publishing a piece related to her rape, she is told, “I thought your article was well written...But let’s face it, no one wants to hear about such terrible things” (118). Much of the impetus of Raine’s book is a refusal to stop speaking simply because the topic is unpleasant and therefore potentially offensive.

⁸⁰ Dorothee Sölle, *Suffering* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), 66.

the nagging sense of self-blame. It is perhaps the cruelest irony of the suffering of interpersonal violence that it is most often the victims, and not the perpetrators, who feel shame. The shame of suffering is directly connected to the self-doubt suffering initiates; in addition to the internalized message of a lack of worth there is the fear that if others know of what happened, they will discover that the story of violence is, in fact, the true story of one's identity.⁸¹

The shame and fear that often accompany suffering are directly connected to the stigma of suffering.⁸² The response to human suffering is often to distance oneself from it by rationalizing the suffering – either the one who suffered must have done something to deserve it, and is therefore not worthy of compassion. Or else the one who suffered, no matter how innocently, is thought to be contagious. Suffering is seen as something akin to a cultural leprosy. “Those not touched try to distance themselves from those touched, almost as if they are escaping something spoiled, something contaminated,

⁸¹ The prevalence of fear and shame in the aftermath of suffering is widely documented in both psychological literature as well as in anecdotal accounts. For a psychological approach see especially Herman and Caruth. For a poignant personal account see Alice Sebold, *Lucky* (Boston: Back Bay Books, 2002). For an interesting and compelling mixture of the two see Susan J. Brison, *Aftermath: Violence and the Remaking of a Self* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002). Brison is a philosophy professor who experienced a brutal sexual assault. In this book she not only recounts the assault and its aftermath but considers the effects of violence more generally. She suggests that an important distinction needs to be made between character self-blame and behavioral self-blame. Character self-blame is the internalization of the suffering in such a way that one assumes that there is a personality flaw which caused the suffering, that one in some way merited the suffering by virtue of one's character. Such self-blame is necessarily destructive. Behavioral self-blame can, however, in a limited way, prove to be helpful. Behavioral self-blame is directly connected to the loss of control, the loss of agency, of suffering. If there is some element, no matter how small, that one might have been able to control if only x, y, or z, then there can be a sense of control over preventing such future suffering. Brison insists, for example, that this sense of behavioral self-blame led her to enroll in a self-defense course which she found to be therapeutic. (73-77)

⁸² “The phenomenological experience of the person having shame is that of a wish to hide, disappear, or die... The physical action accompanying shame includes a shrinking of the body, as though to disappear from the eye of the self or the other.” Michael Lewis, *Shame: The Exposed Self* (New York: The Free Press, 1992), 75.

something polluted.”⁸³ In this case avoiding those who suffer speaks more of a collective fear of suffering than it does of the character of the one who suffers. But either way – whether those who have suffered are seen as meriting suffering or as unfortunate but contaminated – the end result is that those who suffer are often abandoned both in and to their isolation.

3.4 The Restoration of Community

Insofar as bodies are not incidental to suffering, bodies cannot be incidental to redemption. In fact, to the extent that the body is the locus of suffering the body must likewise be the locus of redemption. Any Christian theology which takes seriously the incarnation necessarily refuses an instrumentalized view of the body. The body and soul are inseparable – what happens to one affects the other. And insofar as the community of the church is also a body, the physicality of that Body cannot be ignored. That is, neither individual bodies nor the ecclesial Body is peripheral to community or to suffering, and therefore cannot be peripheral to redemption.

Bodies are integral to the formation of habit. As shown in chapter two, habit is a type of memory – an implicit or tacit memory – which is integral to identity because it is memory that has moved from the realm of intentional cognitive attention to the realm of automatic response. Habits both construct and alter identity.⁸⁴ One of the habits of

⁸³ Erikson, 189.

⁸⁴ Aquinas understands habit to be developed in and through the body but to manifest itself in the soul. That is, the body is the way Aquinas understands the formation of habit, but the soul is habituated by the body and what is significant for Aquinas is that body-formed habits shape the nature of the soul. (*ST I-II.50*).

physical suffering is a disconnection from body as the locus of suffering.⁸⁵ In the extreme, such a disconnection can manifest itself in an involuntary, sometimes pathological, dissociative state in which one who has suffered extreme violence seems to vacate the body. This disconnection is not merely a psychological response to trauma, but a physiological one as well. It is, in effect, the memory of the experience of violence “inscribed on the nervous system.”⁸⁶ For suffering to result in a disconnection from the body – a sort of disembodiment – does not, however, require a pathological dissociative state. That is, bodily habits of suffering can result in a less extreme disregard for, and lack of awareness of, the body’s legitimate physical needs and sensations. However, that bodies can be trained, habituated, in such a way as to inform identity also suggests that bodies can be re-trained, re-habituated, in ways that likewise alter identity. New habits can be learned. Bodies can, indeed, be re-formed.⁸⁷

In addition to the disembodiment from one’s own body, the suffering of violence also often results in a disconnection from the communal body.⁸⁸ Violence, by its very

⁸⁵ By disconnection I am including but not limiting the conversation to the problem of disassociation. Judith Herman suggests that involuntary pathological disassociation is an area in need of much more research. The phenomenon of disassociation is well documented while remaining little understood. See Herman, 238-239.

⁸⁶ Kalven, 244.

⁸⁷ I realize a focus on the human body as locus of suffering, and therefore of redemptive activity, may seem to reinforce the contemporary fixation on bodies which is itself a form of Gnostic disembodiment. This Gnostic obsession with the human body is, however, a focus on the body as an object, a thing one possesses rather than a part of who one is. And as a thing which continually requires improvement in a consumerist culture, it is, in effect, instrumentalized. What I am saying is precisely the opposite. That rather than seeing the body as a means to an end, that the body is integral to the end, the telos, which is an embodied redemption.

⁸⁸ In the 1970s Orthodox priest Fr. George Calciu was imprisoned, tortured, and held for long periods of time in isolation in Romania. He describes a friendship he develops with a cockroach – a relationship he remembers as redemptive. “He was amazing...Little by little I began to talk to him, and he actually came to visit me for weeks...I was saved in my ability to remember my language by this cockroach.” Fr. Calciu’s story is found in Frederica Mathewes-Green, *At the Corner of East and Now: A Modern Life in Ancient Christian Orthodoxy* (New York: Jeremy P. Tarcher/Putnam, 1999), 227.

nature, ruptures communion on every level – the individual, the interpersonal, as well as the communal. What happens to an individual body cannot be separated from what happens to the communal body. Insofar as the communal body of which I am speaking is the body of Christ, restored communion both with and within the body is a necessary part of what redemption of violence must mean. The place such communion is made manifest is in the practice of worship.

Contemporary worship is often domesticated in problematic ways. This domestication of worship seeks to control God, to limit the power of God to work in the world. Worship, however, cannot rightly be domesticated, but insofar as it is an engagement with the living God should be recognized as an inherently risky activity in which worshippers are changed, transformed, through the power of God.⁸⁹ The transformation of Christian worship, however, refuses the logic of power on which violence depends. For this reason, for one who has experienced violence, worship which proclaims God's no to violence may indeed be experienced as a good and safe place. Even the order of the liturgy – its predictable patterns – provides stability and a sense of security for those who have experienced the chaos and disorder of violence. That worship refuses to allow those who have suffered to remain unchanged in their suffering

⁸⁹ Annie Dillard asks, "Does anyone have the foggiest idea of what sort of power we so blithely invoke? The churches are children playing on the floor with their chemistry sets, mixing up a batch of TNT to kill a Sunday morning. It is madness to wear ladies' straw hats and velvet hats to church; we should all be wearing crash helmets. Ushers should issue life preservers and signal flares; they should lash us to our pews." Annie Dillard, *Teaching a Stone to Talk: Expeditions and Encounters* (New York: Harper & Row, 1982), 40. Similar claims are made in Robert Webber and Rodney Clapp, *People of the Truth: The Power of the Worshiping Community in the Modern World* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988) and Paul J. Wadell, *Becoming Friends: Worship, Justice, and the Practice of Christian Friendship* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2002).

is a promise; not changing is a much greater threat to those for whom violence has been formative.⁹⁰

Worship is often conceived as a primarily cognitive act – one from which we are to “get” something.⁹¹ Worship, however, is not primarily about what those who worship think, or believe, or think they believe. Rather, worship is about rightly shaping the desires – and thoughts – as well as the bodies of Christians. Whereas violence shapes bodies with an acute awareness of the pervasive power of pain, worship shapes bodies through a growing awareness of the healing power of the presence of the Holy Spirit. Worship cannot be reduced to its parts – the act of worship is indeed greater than the sum of its parts. Consequently, it is impossible to isolate a particular worship practice that enables those who have suffered to be re-embodied. Instead, embodying worship is the result of a constellation of practices. In what follows, I suggest, however, that there are two practices in particular – anointing and holy friendships that practice burden bearing – which help re-embody the individual and restore (or perhaps develop for the first time) a level of trust which enables relationship.⁹² I then consider the practice of the formation of intentional communities of friends as a way of re-membering both the bodies of those shattered by violence and the ecclesial body of which shattered bodies are often a part.

⁹⁰ In line with this, Samuel Wells suggests that it is the losers in history who long for the eschaton whereas history’s winners are more apt to want “a bit of advance notice so as to enjoy their present glory” before Jesus returns. Samuel Wells, *Improvisation: The Drama of Christian Ethics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2004), 144.

⁹¹ Hauerwas, however, argues, “I am less interested in what people...‘think.’ I am much more interested in what is shaping our desires or, if you prefer, our bodies.” Stanley Hauerwas, *Sanctify Them in the Truth: Holiness Exemplified* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998), 158.

⁹² However in making this suggestion I am reminded that liturgy is transformative, not because it is a means to an end, but because “it is practice at conformity to a difficult, revealed reality.” Webber and Clapp, 69.

3.4.1 Anointing

Insofar as the body is the locus of the suffering of violence, it can also be the locus of healing, not in merely a metaphorical sense but in a literal, tactile sense. Because touch is the vehicle of violence and the efficient cause of the disassociation or disembodiment affiliated with the suffering of violence, touch is often the vehicle through which redemption may be experienced. That both violence and healing may involve touch, even personal, intimate touch, is incidental neither to the suffering nor to the healing. Both violence and healing entail a crossing of physical and social boundaries. The difference – and it is a crucial difference – is that violence violates boundaries against the will of the one being touched, whereas healing crosses those same boundaries with the consent of, perhaps at the request of, and always for the good of, one whose bodily boundaries have been violated.

That the place of violation may also be the place of healing is beautifully illustrated in the story of Maggy Barenkitse.⁹³ Maggy, a Tutsi born in Burundi who adopted seven children, four Hutus and three Tutsis, was working in the bishop's house in the village of Ruyigi in 1994 when a group of armed Tutsis entered the bishop's residence, stripped Maggy, and tied her to a chair from which she witnessed the slaughter of seventy-two villagers – many of them family and friends. After the massacre, Maggy found and saved twenty-five Hutu children in addition to her own seven children. Determined not to allow the events of that October morning to harden her heart, Maggy built an orphanage aptly named Maison Shalom. At the site of the massacre Maggy had a swimming pool installed for the children. The swimming pool is clearly and

⁹³ For Maggy's story see Emmanuel Katongole, *The Sacrifice of Africa: A Political Theology for Africa* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011), chapter 9.

intentionally a baptismal reminder. The pool's location at a site of profound violence and unspeakable suffering is healing because the pool provides the children (and the larger community) with the cleansing opportunity to learn a new story – one in which the violence they have witnessed and suffered is not the determinant story of their lives. The swimming pool allows new memories to be crafted, memories of swimming in the waters of grace. Such memories do not undo or erase the memories of violence and suffering, but in the writing of a new story they do refuse to allow the suffering to be the only story of Ruyigi.

The locus of the experience of interpersonal violence is the individual body – a body which may have suffered in isolation from the community.⁹⁴ As we saw in the preceding section such suffering often isolates the individual, not merely from the communal body, but from one's own body as well. The body, in its failure to ward off violence and prevent suffering, is not only the locus of suffering, it is the vehicle through which suffering is experienced. The irony of such violence is that the very thing which binds also isolates. "To be held in the grasp of a cruel, violent person is to know what it is to be isolated in your own body and yet to be bound to another, against your will, through your body."⁹⁵ In the same way that Maggy offers her children and village a new story in the healing waters of a swimming pool at the site of their deepest sorrow, I am suggesting

⁹⁴ That the individual body is the locus of suffering does not diminish the communal aspect of suffering. In situations of systematic widespread torture and genocide such as that experienced in Chile, Sudan, and Rwanda, the suffering of the individual body, though acutely particular, is also in many ways merely a microcosm of a much greater communal suffering. And for those baptized into the body of Christ such individual suffering can never be isolated from the suffering of the entire body for, as St. Paul writes, "If one member suffers, all together with it." (1 Corinthians 12:26) That this is not always recognized as being empirically true does not render it less ontologically true.

⁹⁵ Stephanie Paulsell, *Honoring the Body: Meditations on a Christian Practice* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2002), 23.

that the ecclesial practice of anointing can offer a new story to the body which has been the locus of violence because as an embodied act which is both particular and communal it binds the suffering body to the ecclesial body in a way that leads to communion rather than isolation.⁹⁶

In chapter two I considered the inexpressibility of suffering. However, despite the loss of temporality and agency which robs the sufferer of a vocabulary with which to express the suffering, the suffering body “is communicative. It cries out for companions, it issues a summons for the church to close the gap of isolation. Anointing cultivates an ecclesial disposition to listen for the voice that breaks through the imposed silences.”⁹⁷ Anointing is a fundamentally and intentionally embodied act, an act performed on a particular body, by particular bodies, on behalf of the very particular body of the church. On behalf of Jesus. It is this particularity and intentionality which makes anointing also a fundamentally re-embodiment act. In the act of anointing a body which has suffered violence the priest re-claims the site of deepest sorrow and of deepest pain and offers it a new story.⁹⁸

⁹⁶ Webber and Clapp claim, “To take a new story is to take a new life.” (75) I would further suggest that in situations of suffering a new story provides a new body. It is also important to note that this discussion of the practice of anointing presumes a community in which practices of baptism and Eucharist are normative formational practices. That is, anointing is not an isolated act but is one way to embody the life of a community formed and fed at font and table.

⁹⁷ John Kiess, “A Grammar of Touch: The Theo-Political Significance of the Sacrament of Anointing During Northern Ireland's Troubles,” (unpublished paper).

⁹⁸ Both Cavanaugh and Kiess speak of the body as the site where rival political claims are exercised. The suffering of interpersonal violence – due to the smaller scale on which it happens, the isolation in which most such violence happens, and the vulnerable status of those most frequently experiencing such violence – would not seem to be such a political act. I would suggest, however, that interpersonal violence, not unlike state violence, is primarily about the exertion of power – and its unjust exercise over a marginalized body – and as such is in fact a political act, in which the body is the site of conflict.

A significant element of the embodiment of anointing is that it is fundamentally an act of touch.⁹⁹ Touch of a particular suffering body. In the rite of anointing the particularity of the touch of violence is met with the particularity of the gentle touch of healing. Bodies which have been touched violently, however, often shrink from touch. This shrinking is both literal, in that the body may pull away, even unconsciously, from the touch of others, and it is metaphorical in that the person, particularly when physical withdrawal is not possible, may withdraw into the body such that the body's ability to sense touch is decreased. Insofar as violent touch, then, has been that which both binds and isolates, it is healing touch which can bind in communion.¹⁰⁰ I am aware of the risks of suggesting that touch is the route to re-embodiment and ultimately of healing for folks for whom touch has been traumatic.¹⁰¹ However, touch changes bodies: "In any experience of interaction with another, the body is physically changed in some way, in its posture, heart rate, skin conductance level, hormonal level, etc. Prolonged, habitual interactions can physically reconfigure the body."¹⁰² If violent touch changes bodies in harmful ways, the touch of anointing can change bodies in healing and redemptive ways.

⁹⁹ Though the ecclesial practice of anointing most traditionally includes the use of oil, my focus is on the practice of touch as a healing act. This may take the form of a liturgical healing service in which the individual is, indeed, anointed with oil, but the healing power of touch is in no way limited to such formalized practices of touch. For more on the theology of a liturgical practice of anointing see Peter E. Fink, *The New Dictionary of Sacramental Worship* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1990), 49-57.

¹⁰⁰ Kiess, likewise referring to anointing in terms of touch rather than in terms of strictly liturgical practices involving oil, suggests that healing is a language, and touch is its grammar.

¹⁰¹ Cristina Traina argues that touch is as necessary to life as food, that there is, in fact, a threshold of touch below which predictable harm, both physiological and psychological, occurs. Importantly, she notes that even children who have been sexually and physically abused, and are therefore more touch-averse than their non-abused peers "slept more and were more alert, social, and less depressed after a one-month course of fifteen minute daily massages." Cristina L. H. Traina, "Touch on Trial: Power and the Right to Physical Affection," *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics* 25, no. 1 (2005), 14.

¹⁰² Harak, 317.

All relationships are influenced by dynamics of power which have the potential to be or become exploitative, and ecclesial relationships are not immune to the potential for sin. However, because, as I explore more fully shortly, the only way to recover (or learn for the first time) trust that has been destroyed by violence, is through a vulnerability which is met with compassion, I am suggesting that violent touch is best responded to with the redemptive touch of love.¹⁰³

The practice of anointing “performs the imagination of the church.”¹⁰⁴ As such, anointing refuses the isolation of suffering – it is a communal act, an ecclesial act, whether performed within the liturgical space of worship or in the private space of the home. The priest performing the anointing not only represents, but embodies, the church – in and through the practice of anointing the whole body of Christ is with the one who suffers. This refusal of isolation is also a drawing in to relationship, an enfolding in the arms of Jesus. Insofar as the suffering of violence ruptures trust, the isolation of violence ruptures communion, even when the community remains unaware of the violence. The practice of anointing is both a proclamatory act which announces the redemptive and healing work of Jesus and a performative act which not only begins the healing of the

¹⁰³ Having said this, it is also possible for the rite of anointing to allow for a range of comfort with physical touch such that someone for whom touch is more threatening than healing, prayers of anointing may be offered without touch. Such a rite allows for the body to be positioned within the ecclesial body in ways which can also be healing. Though there is no calculus by which such can be determined, I would imagine that the rite of anointing may be repeated with a regularity and an intentionality such that, in time, anointing touch can indeed be a physical touch which allows the space of the body to be re-claimed and re-membered into the shalom of Christ.

¹⁰⁴ In addition to the rite of anointing of individual bodies, the church’s imagination may be ritually performed in the anointing of spaces. For example, if the violence suffered is the result of a home invasion the priest may anoint the home, re-claiming the space as a space of peace and of love rather than of anger and of violence.

individual wounds of the body of the one who suffered violence, but also of the wounds which violence inflicts on the body of Christ.

3.4.2 Holy Friendships

The isolation of suffering extends well beyond the isolation of disembodiment from one's own body and to a detachment from relationship with others.¹⁰⁵ The suffering of interpersonal violence cuts at the root of identity because, as the beginning of this chapter shows, relationship with others constitutes a necessary element of identity. Violence threatens to unravel the web of relations which constitute identity. "To be treated like an object wholly subject to another's will is to have the relations that constitute one nullified."¹⁰⁶ This nullification of relationships brings with it an awareness of the thin line between kindness and cruelty, as well as an acute sense of vulnerability to cruelty. Regardless of the private nature or degree of relative isolation in which an act (or acts) of violence may occur, such violence remains situated within a social context, and necessarily has social consequences. Even violence that takes place behind closed doors, shielded from the scrutiny of the community, is a communal event which damages that community. In the same way that I suggested above that the practice of anointing helps one who has suffered to re-member their body, in this section I suggest that within the body of Christ it is the practices of holy friendships – particularly the attentive caring

¹⁰⁵ While not considering social isolation from the standpoint of the experience of violence, John Cacioppo offers an interesting look at the prevalence and problems of loneliness in a culture where detachment from significant relationships seems to be becoming more and more pervasive. John T. Cacioppo, *Loneliness: Human Nature and the Need for Social Connection*, ed. William Patrick (New York: Norton, 2008).

¹⁰⁶ Kalven, 249.

and tending of one another, body and soul – which begins to re-member the communion ruptured by violence.¹⁰⁷

The love of friends is one of the primary means by which we are assured of God's love.¹⁰⁸ Consequently, care for one another, perhaps especially for one another's bodies, makes God's love manifest with-in the body. In his letter to the Galatians, Paul admonishes the church to bear one another's burdens.¹⁰⁹ This bearing of burdens is too easily spiritualized with suggestions that as Christians we are called to bear patiently with those we find burdensome, or that we are to bear burdens in the metaphorical sense of listening to another's problems with love and caring. And these are indeed right and salutary things for members of the body of Christ to do. Such an interpretation is not, however, sufficient. The bearing of another's burdens is necessarily as embodied a practice as the experience of bearing one's own burdens. This includes the burden of suffering. In this section I suggest that holy friendships, made possible by the formation

¹⁰⁷ "Holy friendships" is a term used by Jones and Armstrong to speak of the transformative nature of friendship in L. Gregory Jones and Kevin R. Armstrong, *Resurrecting Excellence: Shaping Faithful Christian Ministry* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006), 60-78. I am appropriating the term without assigning to it the same definition offered by Jones and Armstrong. I am using the term as a way of differentiating friendship based on communion with Christ from friendships based on perceived social equality and homogeneity. I do so in part to avoid using the term spiritual or soul friend as these imply the practice of spiritual direction which, though an important ecclesial practice, is not what I am referring to. For a beautiful meditation on friendship see Saint Aelred of Rievaulx, *Spiritual Friendship*, ed. Lawrence C. Braceland and Marsha L. Dutton, Cistercian Fathers Series; No. 5 (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2010) and for an excellent introduction to the practice of spiritual direction see Tilden Edwards, *Spiritual Friend* (New York: Paulist Press, 1980).

¹⁰⁸ Paul J. Wadell, *Friendship and the Moral Life* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1989), 117.

¹⁰⁹ Galatians 6:20. In their essay, "Memory, Community, and the Reasons for Living: Reflections on Suicide and Euthanasia," Stanley Hauerwas and Richard Bondi suggests that being a burden is a part of community living. That is, community means mutual interdependence such that ending one's life to prevent becoming a burden makes no sense because there is absolutely nothing wrong with being a burden. Stanley Hauerwas, *The Hauerwas Reader*, ed. John Berkman and Michael G. Cartwright (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001), 593.

of disciples through the practices of worship, train bodies that are able both to bear another's burdens and to allow oneself to be borne when burdened.

The classical understanding that friendship is first and foremost a relationship between equals hails from Aristotle.¹¹⁰ The legacy of such an understanding tends to reduce friendships to relationships between two members of very narrowly defined homogeneous groups. That is, friendships tend to be reserved for those with a common race, gender, ethnicity, and socio-economic level.¹¹¹ Christian friendship, however, is based on a common telos rather than on perceived social equality. What makes friendship possible in the Christian community is participation in the body of Christ. As such, friendship need not be restricted to a community of social equals, or even to those who seem to have much in common. Because such holy friendships are counter-cultural refusals of the status quo, as well as of the power dynamics which make space for, and attempt to make sense of, acts of violence, such "friendships are potentially subversive – acts of genuine protest and resistance – because they dare to break free from what is most corrupting and dehumanizing in a culture in order to begin something new."¹¹² The glue that binds ecclesial friendships is the unity that comes from mutual participation in the body of Christ. This solidarity is not, however, the solidarity in suffering found in therapeutic survivor groups. Though there is a place for survivor groups – and even a place for such groups in the church – what is most significant about the subversive

¹¹⁰ Aristotle, *Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics*, ed. Robert C. Bartlett and Susan D. Collins (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011).

¹¹¹ Jones and Armstrong tell a wonderful story of a holy friendship which develops in and through the church despite extreme socio-economic inequality. They point to the recognition that in the space of the church friends are not so much chosen as they are received as gifts from God. Jones and Armstrong, *Resurrecting Excellence*, 60-78.

¹¹² Wadell, *Becoming Friends*, 73.

friendships in the church is that they do not depend upon any solidarity beyond that of a common baptism.¹¹³ By its very nature friendship denies the validity of violence and in its application often defies culturally-accepted norms which would dictate who one can befriend.¹¹⁴ As such the church is a community of “socially disruptive possibilities”¹¹⁵ through which the logic of violence may be refused.

Though there are any number of markers of holy friendships, one is the willingness to bear one another’s burdens. Bearing another’s burdens requires compassion. “Compassion is the overwhelming that meets our suffering with full realism and enables an expansive movement of love and generosity.”¹¹⁶ To bear another’s burdens is not mere sympathy, nor is it a paternalistic impulse to “fix” whatever is wrong.¹¹⁷ It is, instead, to enter into the suffering of another in a way that honors the person and seeks to care for that person in their suffering. Jean Vanier suggests that Jesus’ act of washing the disciples’ feet is not primarily an act to be symbolically re-enacted, but is a call for us to care for the very real, very bodily needs of those who

¹¹³ Herman suggests that survivor groups are often an integral part to the healing/recovery process for victims of violence. However, she also notes that such groups are, at best, penultimate means of recovery. What is ultimately required for healing is integration into a wider social network in which one can learn to establish social bonds based on common humanity rather than common victimization, and in which one can learn to recognize and empathize with the suffering of others. *Trauma and Recovery*, chapter 11. What I am suggesting is *not* that the church be seen as a survivor group, but that the church as the body of Christ is a unique body in which redemption can be experienced in a way that goes beyond the psycho-social healing based on the recognition of common humanity.

¹¹⁴ By this I am thinking of both the insistence in some circles that outside of marriage same-gendered friendships are the only legitimate friendships as well as thinking of the friendships between people who society might have at odds with one another – think, for instance, of the increasing prevalence of Gay-Straight Alliances forming in public high schools or of the cultural disbelief that members of the Nickel Mines community have befriended the family of the shooter, Charles Roberts.

¹¹⁵ Wadell, *Becoming Friends*, 75.

¹¹⁶ David Ford, *The Shape of Living: Spiritual Directions for Modern Everyday Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1998), 169.

¹¹⁷ This is, after all, where Job’s friends go wrong.

suffer. Jesus shows us “the importance of meeting each other, touching each other, with simplicity, gentleness, and great respect, because each person is precious.”¹¹⁸

The compassionate bearing of another’s burdens is indeed an act of patience.¹¹⁹ This may be particularly true when the one who has suffered is unable to receive the kindness and compassion of friendship.¹²⁰ But compassion towards another can indeed be formative: “How I act toward others affects them not externally but internally, and that means I can render someone lovely, or I can bruise them deeply. How I relate to others to a large extent determines who they will be. I can touch the promise of their lives and lure it to fullness, or I can crush or destroy them – my agency has that awful, splendid power.”¹²¹ Friendship, like touch, changes – albeit sometimes slowly – the body.

A second marker of holy friendship is the openness to being borne, that is, to having another bear one’s burdens. Compassion and vulnerability are, in some respects, two sides of the same coin.¹²² For one who has suffered violence at the hands of another, particularly a trusted other, vulnerability can be a terrifying thing. A thing one may desire to avoid at all costs. The greater the violation of trust, the greater the resistance to

¹¹⁸ Jean Vanier, *The Scandal of Service: Jesus Washes Our Feet*, Arche Collection (New York: Continuum, 1998), 38.

¹¹⁹ Parker Palmer tells the story of a time when he was suffering from depression and one friend came by his house every day, sat with him, and rubbed his feet. Unlike the friends who tried to talk to him or cheer him up, this friend simply provided presence and physical contact. Palmer credits this friend with seeing him through his bout with depression. Though Palmer was suffering from depression rather than from a violent physical assault his recognition that his friend’s act of daily foot massage was an embodied act of burden-bearing. It was an act that honored the preciousness of Palmer’s body and therefore of Palmer himself. Parker J. Palmer, *Let Your Life Speak: Listening for the Voice of Vocation* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000), 60-61.

¹²⁰ For a heart-wrenching story of one teacher’s patient and persistent struggle to love a child whose extreme experiences of abuse rendered her resistant to any expressions of kindness or compassion, see Torey L. Hayden, *One Child* (New York: Putnam, 1980).

¹²¹ Wadell, *Friendship and the Moral Life*, 162.

¹²² That this is only partially true reflects the ability of compassion to outlast resistance.

future vulnerability is apt to be. “The wounds that most cruelly disfigure the heart are given and received...[in] any relationship where deep trust and loyalty create potentially tragic vulnerability.”¹²³ Such a recognition that vulnerability – something which is never easy – is made even riskier when past vulnerability has resulted in an experience of violence. Vulnerability, however, is a necessary element of the giving and receiving of friendship.¹²⁴

3.4.3 Restoration of Trust

One of the primary results of the experience of violence is a disintegration of trust. As I showed above, this loss of trust manifests itself both internally within the very body which was the locus of the suffering, and within communal bodies in which violence takes place. The practice of worship forms bodies that learn to trust themselves as places of healing, places which have experienced, and continue to experience, God’s presence. Through the practices of friendship, bodies begin to learn to entrust themselves to one another through mutual concern and care-giving. These two practices are not an either/or. Nor does one have temporal priority over the other. In practice, both worship and friendship occur concurrently, each shaping and forming the other. The deeper one enters into, and makes oneself open to, the formative power of worship the more deeply one will be drawn into friendship with other members of this same body. These two

¹²³ Ford, 45.

¹²⁴ In *Resident Aliens* Hauerwas and Willimon offer an example of such a willingness to be vulnerable in a holy friendship that seems, by cultural standards, to make little sense. They tell the story of a woman who is assaulted in her yard and is urged by her therapist to find someone outside of her family and aside from her pastor to whom she can tell her story. Much to the surprise of her pastor she chooses to talk to a man who is a recovering alcoholic. When asked why she answers, because he has been to hell and back, “I think he will know what it has felt like for me to go there. Perhaps he can tell me how he got back.” Stanley Hauerwas and William Willimon, *Resident Aliens: Life in the Christian Colony* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989), 110.

practices of worship and friendship, then, work together to reestablish (or perhaps establish for the first time) a degree of trust that was damaged or destroyed by the experience of violence. In the aftermath of violence, that which is most needed for the healing and redemption of violence “requires engaging the reality that one fears most, other people.”¹²⁵ This is so because it is almost a tautology to suggest that trust requires trust, making it quite difficult to repair once damaged. So, in this penultimate section of the chapter I want to further explore the notion of trust.

The notion of trust is often thought to be exemplified by the young child who yells “Daddy” a millisecond before leaping from some precipice into daddy’s arms, or by the young child who will willingly, even happily, go off hand-in-hand with anyone who offers a friendly smile. This notion of trust, however, has more to do with adults’ projection of trust onto the young who are simply too naïve to recognize their vulnerability. A more nuanced notion of trust necessarily takes into account a recognition of vulnerability, of risk – a recognition young children generally do not have.¹²⁶ Rather, what is often hailed as trust in the young child is more properly thought of as innocence, even ignorance. Children are often simply oblivious to their relative lack of power. And even when they recognize their lack of power they remain unaware

¹²⁵ Serene Jones, *Trauma and Grace: Theology in a Ruptured World* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), 18.

¹²⁶ Harak points out that in loving intimate relationships young children remain largely unaware of the power differential between themselves and their caregivers. (320) In time, of course, young children do become aware of their relative lack of power. However, for children in intimate relationships where their lack of power has not been used against them they tend to see adults as those with greater, even magical, powers to do all manner of good from fixing broken toys to healing scrapes and bruises.

of the vulnerability that comes with this lack of power. Adults, however, are acutely aware of the vulnerability of small children.¹²⁷

Trust properly understood is a conscious decision made not out of ignorance nor naivety, but recognizing one's vulnerability. Vulnerability is something contemporary culture is often afraid to acknowledge. There is almost a sense of shame in being vulnerable, perhaps most especially when that vulnerability has been exploited – think for instance, of the shame of victims of domestic violence or sexual assault. Perhaps this shame, psychologically has to do with the stigmatization of the particular sorts of violence, even so it seems that it is the vulnerability to particular forms of violence that is stigmatized. The absurdity of the shame of vulnerability is that we are all, of course, vulnerable. Even Superman has Kryptonite. Rather than seeing vulnerability as something to be denied or overcome, the Christian tradition sees vulnerability as not merely a necessary result of our fallen, sinful condition, but as the glue that holds a community together. “The last thing the church wants is a bunch of autonomous, free individuals. We want people who know how to express authentic need, because that creates community.”¹²⁸ Through intentional practices of vulnerability and compassion such as anointing and the development of holy friendships, the ecclesial community

¹²⁷ This is not in any way to deny the significance or importance of a child's openness to adults. This innocent stage of lack of awareness of vulnerability is crucial for the child to develop trust more properly understood. This may rightly be thought of as the foundation upon which trust can be built. But it is not itself trust. And if this stage of relative innocence is necessary for the development of trust, this implies that for those whose vulnerability is exploited at an early age, the future development of trust is rendered impossible, thus granting ultimacy to the power of sin rather than to the redeeming and transforming power of God.

¹²⁸ Stanley Hauerwas, “Abortion, Theologically Understood,” in *Hauerwas Reader*. Edited by John Berkman and Michael G. Cartwright (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001) 612.

provides a space for relationships of trust to flourish, allowing the isolation of suffering to give way to the communion for which all have been created.

3.4.4 Incorporating a Life Isolated by Trauma

Percy Talbott grew up in Akron, Ohio.¹²⁹ Her mother and stepfather (Mason) married when she was nine years old. Within weeks of their marriage Mason began molesting Percy. When Percy told her mother what was happening, “she was so afraid of losing Mason that she just slapped me and told me to ignore it.” At the age of sixteen, Percy became pregnant, “and though I hated what he’d done to me, I loved the life inside of me.” She promises herself, and God, that she will always protect the little one growing inside of her. Several months into her pregnancy Mason, who was drunk, “took to me with his fists so bad. The baby... I was in the hospital for better than two weeks and all I could think of was how I hadn’t kept my promise.”

Apparently afraid of the police, Mason takes Percy from the hospital before she is ready to be released and drives for days, with Percy in and out of consciousness in the backseat. One night in a motel room, Mason “had a bottle; he was into it real good” and he tells Percy that it was a good thing the baby died. Something in Percy snaps. She remembered seeing his straight razor in the bathroom. She kills Mason and spends the next five years in a Maine prison for manslaughter. *The Spitfire Grill* begins with Percy’s release from prison and tells the story of her incorporation into an intimate community in which the establishment of trust is possible. Throughout the story there is a reciprocity

¹²⁹ Lee David Zlotoff, “The Spitfire Grill,” (United States: Castle Rock Entertainment, 1996). All quotes are from the film.

between acts of friendship, moments of anointing (including one moving example of the healing power of physical touch), and the development of trust.

Percy decides to relocate in the rural community of Gilead, Maine – a quiet town unaccustomed to outsiders. With the help of the local sheriff Percy finds herself working for, and living with, Hannah, an elderly woman who is the owner of the local grill. The community in general (and Hannah’s nephew, Nahum, in particular) are very distrustful of Percy. The feeling is mutual. However, almost immediately after Percy’s arrival in Hannah’s house, Hannah falls and breaks her foot. As Hannah lives alone, she finds herself in need of Percy’s help in order to keep the grill running. Nahum’s wife, Shelby, also gets involved in helping, and the three women begin to form a close bond as they spend hours eating, drinking, talking, and eventually laughing and crying together. These friendships are not automatic, nor are they without tension, but as the women begin to grow closer to one another, as Percy is drawn into a circle of loving friendship, the ground is prepared for the redemption of her story.

Despite her growing friendship with Hannah and Shelby, Percy continues to be somewhat withdrawn, quick to pull away whenever someone asks anything intimate. Hannah and Shelby know of Percy’s prison record but Percy has not told them of her history. One day, in a fleeting moment of honesty, Percy asks Hannah, “Do you suppose if a wound is real deep, the healing of it can hurt almost as bad as what caused it?”

Hannah, the audience learns, has a deep wound of her own. Her son, Eli, returned from Vietnam with severe PTSD and lives as a hermit in the woods. Hannah leaves food out for him nightly, but has no direct contact with him. She does not tell Percy who she leaves the food for, but shortly after her injury she realizes she needs to entrust the

feeding of Eli to Percy. Percy is intrigued by the man and tries to befriend him, offering him fresh bread rather than just canned goods. One day Eli, while never coming face-to-face nor speaking with Percy, leads her into the woods to see his “home.” Percy is filled with compassion for this strange man and dubs him “Johnny B” – the name she had secretly given her baby – because “Johnny B never know what hit him, and I wouldn’t be surprised if something like that’s what happened to you.”

The interplay between the development of friendship and the growth in trust is very complex. Hannah continues to test Percy in ways that make it clear she does not completely trust her. And yet to do so she entrusts her with things she cares deeply about, such as feeding her son, as well as with things of monetary value. Percy’s trust, likewise, seems both to grow in accordance with her developing friendships, as well as to make the friendships possible. The trust, however, seems to lag a considerable way behind the growth in friendship. At least this is the case up until what is a climactic moment of anointing in the film.

Percy discovers the Indian River Gorge while trying to follow Johnny B through the woods. Early one morning she climbs the ridge to the gorge overlook and is overcome by the beauty of the view. She sits and begins singing, “There is a Balm in Gilead.” Johnny B hears her singing and quietly, slowly begins to walk towards her. She hears his footsteps and her voice wavers, but she continues singing. Very slowly Johnny B moves closer and closer to Percy. He stops directly behind her and gently places his huge hands on the top of her head. Though the two neither make eye contact nor speak it is a moment of intense – and healing – intimacy. An act of anointing that signals the

beginning of the redemption of both of their stories as it opens up the space both needed in order to trust.¹³⁰

That this is the story of Percy's redemption challenges the sentimental notion of happy endings. The story ends with Percy's death; she dies trying to save Johnny B. However, Percy's story is no longer a story of the isolation of trauma, but has become a story of a circle of compassionate friends, of tender embraces, and of remarkable trust as she is incorporated into a new community, a new family. During Percy's funeral Hannah closes the grill, placing a hand-made sign in the window: **Closed due to a death in the family.**

¹³⁰ As I stated in chapter 1, this division of redemption into temporal dimensions is primarily heuristic. The lived experience of redemption is not so clearly segmented; there is, rather, a reciprocity between the narrative and the incorporative dimensions of redemption. One does not necessarily precede the other temporally or ontologically. They may occur in a simultaneous manner or one may make the way possible for the other. For Percy it is incorporation into a compassionate community that makes the narration of her story possible. The narration of her story – first told to Shelby – however, deepens their friendship, strengthening her incorporation into a community.

4. Vocation: Witnessing Hope

For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the LORD,
plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope.
(Jeremiah 29:11)

Always be ready to make your defense
to anyone who demands from you an accounting
for the hope that is in you.
(1 Peter 3:15)

Elie (Eliezer) Wiesel's *Night* is a horrifying depiction of the hopelessness of profound suffering.¹ Though Wiesel makes no reference to the Psalm, his story is, in many ways, a narrative refutation of the Psalmist's claim, "Weeping may linger for the night, but joy comes with the morning." (Psalm 30:5) *Night* is the story of a young teenaged boy trapped in the midst of the horrors of profound suffering such that his life becomes an experience of eternal night – no hint of morning, and no hope of joy. "Never shall I forget that night...which has turned my life into one long night...Never shall I forget that nocturnal silence which deprived me, for all eternity, of the desire to live. Never shall I forget those moments which murdered my God and my soul and turned my dreams to dust. Never shall I forget these things, even if I am condemned to live as long as God Himself. Never." (32)

¹ Elie Wiesel, *Night* (New York: Bantam Books, 1986). Subsequent citations are referenced parenthetically in the text.

It is not without a degree of hesitation that I begin this chapter with a story from the Holocaust. To do so is potentially to invite questions of whether or not the Holocaust itself is redeemable. Such a question is beyond the scope of this project. I am *not* focusing on the event of the Holocaust per se in using this story, but on the very particular suffering of one young boy. The suffering of the Holocaust, not unlike the genocide in Darfur, or even the widespread reality of the suffering of child abuse, cannot rightly be reduced to a single story, but is always made up of many, many stories; each with their own particular memories of horror to be redeemed. To begin to imagine what redemption of such unimaginable horror looks like necessitates envisioning redemption one story at a time.

The loss of hope begins with the overwhelming realization that there is absolutely nothing that can be done, that a course of suffering has begun which cannot be stopped, but can only run its course. One man, Moche the Beadle, had previously been deported to a concentration camp, but escaped and returned to Eliezer's community and tried to warn them of what was happening. No one believed him, however, because no one wanted to face the possibility of deportation. When the community was loaded into cattle trains for deportation to Auschwitz, "Our eyes were opened, but too late... We were caught in a trap, right up to our necks." (21-22) This sense of being hopelessly trapped is magnified on the train when a woman begins having visions of enormous furnaces. Though the community still did not want to believe the nightmare was more than just that, and though some of the men in the community beat the woman to silence her, Wiesel says they then recognized the helplessness of their situation, "we felt an abyss was about to open beneath our bodies." (23) This sense of helplessness went beyond a sense of individual powerlessness and even beyond a sense of communal powerlessness. There is a loss of any sense that there is anyone in the world who can, or would, intervene on their behalf. "Humanity? Humanity is not concerned with us. Today anything is allowed. Anything is possible." (30) Entering Auschwitz is experienced as a death sentence, "Someone began to recite the Kaddish, the prayer for the dead. I do not know if it has ever happened before, in the long history of the Jews, that people have ever recited the prayer for the dead for themselves." (31)

Once in Auschwitz, Eliezer's suffering is unimaginable – starvation, forced labor under unthinkable conditions, severe beatings for any perceived, or even fabricated, infraction. He notes that such suffering limits the scope of his attention to food as food represents the only semblance of hope that he is not yet, in fact, condemned to death. “I now took little interest in anything except my daily plate of soup and my crust of stale bread. Bread, soup – these were my whole life. I was a body. Perhaps less than that even: a starved stomach. The stomach alone was aware of the passage of time.” (50) It does not take long for Eliezer to reach the point where death no longer seems something to be avoided; in fact, death begins to intrigue him, “Death wrapped itself around me till I was stifled. It stuck to me. I felt that I could touch it. The idea of dying, of no longer being, began to fascinate me. Not to exist any longer. Not to feel the horrible pains in my foot. Not to feel anything, neither weariness, nor cold, nor anything.” (82)

Eliezer realizes his acceptance of death has led to a sense of indifference. “Indifference deadened the spirit. Here or elsewhere – what difference did it make? To die today or tomorrow, or later? The night was long and never ending.” (93) For him, the test of his indifference – which in a sense becomes for Eliezer a test of his humanity – is his relationship with his father. The first time he witnesses his father struck by a guard he is horrified by his own lack of reaction. “What had happened to me? My father had just been struck, before my very eyes, and I had not flickered an eyelid. I had looked on and said nothing.” (37) Eliezer, recognizing that his very survival is somehow or other integrally

connected not only with his father's survival but with their relationship to one another, vows not to abandon his father. Shortly after this vow his father is beaten again, this time much more severely, with an iron rod. Wiesel says, "I had watched the whole scene without moving. I kept quiet. In fact I was thinking of how to get farther away so that I would not be hit myself... That is what concentration camp life had made of me." (52) He realizes he is angry, not at the man beating his father but at his father for not avoiding the man's wrath.

Later, as Wiesel's father is dying, Eliezer wavers between panic and anger. He gives his father as much of his own food rations as he is able to do without but is told by another prisoner that to do so is foolish. "Here, there are no fathers, no brothers, no friends. Everyone lives and dies for himself alone." (105) Shortly after this, as his father lies dying, he calls Eliezer, asking for water. But Eliezer is in bed and ignores his plea. "His last word was my name. A summons, to which I did not respond. I did not weep, and it pained me that I could not weep. But I had no more tears. And, in the depths of my being, in the recesses of my weakened conscience, could I have searched it, I might perhaps have found something like – free at last!" (106) Eliezer's freedom, however, is a release from what little hold he had maintained on any hope for the future. Shortly after his father's death, the camp is liberated. Looking into a mirror for the first time since his deportation, Eliezer sees no hope for the future, but only the suffering of the past: "From the depths of the mirror, a corpse gazed back at me. The look in his eyes, as they stared into mine, has never left me." (109)

My claim in this chapter is that hope for the future is a necessary element of healthy identity. Suffering, however, can render one unable to envision a future that is unbounded by the suffering of the past. This is so in part because of the distortions of memory (chapter 2) and ruptures in community (chapter 3) which suffering can cause; however, the damage to the sense of futurity wrought by suffering goes beyond that of memory and community into the very logic of suffering itself, a logic which denies the possibility of hope. Because loss of hope, of a sense of future, does violence to the identity of both individual persons and entire communities, the future is a necessary part of what is to be redeemed in God's making new of all things.

I address this in five parts. I begin by looking at contemporary philosophical discourse on the inter-relatedness of time, narrativity, and identity, in order to suggest that all modes of time (past, present, *and* future) are equally integral to the formation of identity. I then consider three contemporary secular models of approaching the uncertainty of the future, or the perceived loss of future, and suggest that, in the absence of a narrative teleological understanding of life, hope remains elusive, more coping-mechanism than promise. I then offer a theological account of hope which reflects the account of identity provided in the first section of the chapter. Then I turn to the question of suffering and consider the ways in which suffering challenges the very notion of hope and problematizes notions of redemption that fail to engage the future as readily as they do both the past and the present. Finally, I consider the practices of forgiveness and bearing witness, and suggest that both of these ecclesial practices make possible the reception of a vocation that honors the memory of suffering while bearing witness to, and participating in, its redemption.

4.1 Temporality and Identity

Human identity is contingent upon a complex constellation of factors; among these one is often overlooked: temporality. That is, human identity, in addition to existing *in* and *through* time, is also contingent upon the experience *of* time. As such, identity is not solely determined by past and present experiences (experiences with memory and community) but is also contingent upon perceptions of the future, that is, upon anticipated future experience. This element of futurity necessarily lends to identity a degree of openness, an openness that can be visualized as something akin to the poetic use of ellipsis.

In this section I suggest that human identity is rightly grounded in teleology. Who I am now is who I ultimately will be, which is who I am determined by God to be in and through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. In order to explore the claim that identity is grounded simultaneously in past and present, I suggest that human identity cannot be extracted from a sense of futurity and that, though the future is more nebulous and therefore necessarily more difficult to conceptualize than the past or the present, it is as integral a part of human identity as are the experiences of past and present. I begin by looking at Martin Heidegger's understanding of *Dasein* (a self-reflective being-in-time) and consider how such being necessarily holds past, present, and future in a creative tension. I then suggest that contemporary work on identity theory focuses on past and present at the expense of the future and suggest the necessity of futurity for a healthy sense of selfhood. After that I turn to Alasdair MacIntyre's account of telos and the narrative continuity that telos provides to the identity of individuals as well as to communities. I then look to Paul Ricoeur and suggest that his conception of emplotment

transforms Heidegger's notion of *Dasein* so as to allow for a fluid interpretation of the self which makes space for the future. Finally, I offer a theological anthropology in which I argue that not only is identity shaped by a perceived future, but that identity is actually dependent upon, not merely perceptions of the future, but an eschatological reality inaugurated in the resurrection of Jesus – though not fully realized until his return.

Time and identity are integrally connected such that Augustine suggests rather than speaking of past, present, and future, we might speak in terms of past present, present present, and future present.² Augustine's point is that all three modalities of time exist simultaneously within the soul of the individual at any given point in time, and therefore all three are equally accessible to the individual's experience. Slightly more than fifteen hundred years later, Martin Heidegger became one of the first philosophers to articulate a sustained discussion of temporal ontology.³ Heidegger suggests that being (by which he does not intend just human beings, but being itself) takes place in time. Because there is no being outside of time, there is therefore no identity outside of that which is experienced in time. Heidegger speaks of humanity's "thrownness" into time,⁴ an act which necessarily, then, means that identity is "caught" between the remembered and contingent past and the anticipated and open future.⁵ This necessarily means that

² Augustine, Bishop of Hippo, *Augustine: The Confessions*, trans., R.S. Pine-Coffin (New York: Penguin Books, 1961), Book XI.

³ For more on Heidegger's understanding of the temporal nature of identity see Martin Farin Ingo Heidegger, *The Concept of Time*, Athlone Contemporary European Thinkers (New York, 2011) and Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time* (New York: Harper, 1962).

⁴ By "thrownness" Heidegger refers to the contingency of history in which beings find themselves, contingencies which are always already existent, offering both possibilities for life as well as the inevitability of death.

⁵ Gadamer, a student of Heidegger, further emphasizes the importance of openness. In discussing the importance of history Gadamer argues for the necessity of an openness to the past which overcomes the

identity is not a stagnant phenomenon which can be observed or dissected in an impartial or detached manner but is always experienced as a relative state of flux (of becoming) as an individual is always simultaneously who one remembers oneself to have been in the past, who one experiences oneself to be in the present, as well as the possibilities one sees for oneself in the future.⁶

Though speaking of literary theory rather than of temporal ontology, Frank Kermode offers a helpful illustration of this connection between identity and temporality. He suggests that time be thought of in terms of the ticking of a clock. The experience of the present, he suggests, exists in the space between the tick (which is the remembered experience of the past) and the tock (the anticipated experience of the future).⁷ The self exists always in the tension, the pregnant pause, between the remembered past and the anticipated future, while attending to the experience of the present. Such an understanding of identity suggests that, despite the ethereal nature of the future, the future – and more precisely the expectations for the future – is as integral a part of the identity of any individual or communal body as the remembered past. Kermode's image is important for understanding identity (and consequently the impact of profound suffering on identity) in its recognition that the past not only pushes towards the future, but requires the future in order to be experienced as past.

admittedly wide temporal gap between past and present. Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (New York: Seabury Press, 1975). The same claim, it seems, needs to be made in relation to the future.

⁶ For Heidegger, it is this embracing of the possibility of the future – as opposed to being bound by the status quo – that is what it means to be authentic. And authenticity is his understanding of human telos.

⁷ Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), especially 44-46.

This understanding of the future as an integral part of identity is largely overlooked in contemporary therapeutic settings which, as a result of the overwhelming reliance on the analytical psychology of Freud, focus almost exclusively on the impact of the past, particularly the time period of early childhood, in thinking of the formation of identity. Such a focus on the past, however, ignores the need for “future stories,” which consist of the various images of the possible paths an individual’s future may take.⁸ Such future stories are, of course, largely dependent upon both past and present, but are not coterminous with them. The future stories that an individual imagines – the anticipation of what happens next, who I will be in another year, or of what life will be like five years from now – are a determinative part of present individual identity and are connected directly to the memories of the past insofar as the imagination is shaped by both the actual experiences of past and present and perhaps even more so by the perceived trajectory from the past and into the present. Moreover, an individual’s *interpretation* of the present, which cannot be isolated from the individual’s experience of the present, is at least as determined by the anticipated future as it is by the remembered past.

This understanding of the critical nature of future stories speaks to the essentially narrative nature of human identity. The self is the tension between the remembered experiences of the past as well as of the narrative presently being constructed, a narrative constructed largely in light of projections into the future. That identity is necessarily future-directed is itself a teleological claim, precisely insofar as it implies that identity is movement *towards*. Alasdair MacIntyre suggests that there is no present “which is not

⁸ Andrew D. Lester, *Hope in Pastoral Care and Counseling* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995). Though Lester speaks primarily of the pastoral situations of grief that arise at the loss of a loved one, whether through death, divorce, or serious illness, his insight that images of the future are a constitutive part of present identity, and that grief, insofar as it renders such future stories void, is aptly applied to situations of violence and suffering as well.

informed by some image of the future which always presents itself in the form of *telos* – or a variety of ends or goals – towards which we are either moving or failing to move in the present...our lives have a certain form which projects itself towards our future.”⁹ The teleological claim of identity as moving towards does not, however, mean that an individual is somehow or other less than fully formed at any given point in time, but that the whole of the self is only a self insofar as it exists *in* time.¹⁰ Identity is not restricted to the movement of a being through time, nor does it only exist where past and future meet. Identity is a complex matrix *of* time – past, present, and future – experienced simultaneously as well as in linear fashion. Identity is not an objective thing to be manipulated and studied, but an action; being is becoming, it is being in time. Movement towards, as a constitutive element of identity, is neither restricted nor defined by its linearity.¹¹

⁹ Alasdair C. MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 215-16. Insofar as Heidegger considers – and then rejects – a theological account of teleology his account of being in time is problematic. Whereas I think his insight that human identity is inherently temporal is critical, his rejection of a teleological basis for this connection between temporality and identity is lacking because it fails to account for the created nature of time. Though it is beyond the scope of this project a fuller consideration of the temporal nature of human identity would need to consider not only the fact that identity is experienced in and through time, and is made up of time, but would also need to take into account the created nature of time as a gift given for the sake of temporal beings. Though not applying it to the formation of identity, Jonathan Tran offers an interesting account of time as created gift in Jonathan Tran, *The Vietnam War and Theologies of Memory: Time and Eternity in the Far Country, Challenges in Contemporary Theology* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), chapter 3.

¹⁰ In fact, such an understanding of identity in and through time would counter any claims that children are somehow or other less fully human by virtue of their less-developed sense of selfhood.

¹¹ The simple act of brushing one’s teeth provides an apt analogy. Though there are any number of steps involved in tooth-brushing – grasping a toothbrush, applying toothpaste, scrubbing the teeth, rinsing, spitting, returning each item to its proper place in the medicine cabinet – there is no one step which stands alone and can, in and of itself, be identified as the act of tooth-brushing. The action is temporal and “has a unity of form through time, a form revealed only in the action as a whole.” That the action of brushing one’s teeth is only revealed as a whole does not, however, make any single step less fully a part of the action. To omit one step is no longer to brush one’s teeth, properly understood. Similarly, the claim that identity exists in time, in the act of movement towards the future does not suggest that at any moment in the past or present identity was somehow or other incomplete – nor does it imply that there will be a future point in time in which identity will become complete. Rather, it is to say that identity at any point in time

A narrative understanding of identity which takes into account the temporal nature of being in time allows for both the continuity of identity through time as well as for changes through time. Because identity thus understood is not stagnant, but is always an on-going activity, it is possible to see how the self changes in response not only to past and present experiences but also to expectations for the future. It is in openness to the future that the self is actualized. "Attempting to maintain my self unchanged, I impose the 'will' of this [past] self on the future. The unhappiness of that is not that I may fail, but that I may actually succeed. For then I will have locked myself into what is after all a construct recollected from the past."¹² Rather than locking oneself into the past, the temporality of being entails a receptive stance to the future. Because the self cannot be rightly understood only in relation to the past, the refusal to be open to the future is a refusal of one's very identity, a refusal of selfhood.

In terms of human identity, Paul Ricoeur's notion of emplotment is critical for envisioning how the seemingly disconnected events of past, present, and future all converge in the meaningful formation of an individual self that is continuous without being stagnant. Ricoeur understands time to exist in two modes: linear and phenomenological.¹³ Linear time is chronological time. It is one thing following another in linear succession. Kermode's example of the present filling the space between the tick

always already includes the perceived movement of the individual through past and present and into the future. See Stephen Crites, "The Narrative Quality of Experience," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 39 (September 1971), 292.

¹² Stephen Crites, "Storytime: Recollecting the Past and Projecting the Future," in *Narrative Psychology: The Storied Nature of Human Conduct*, ed. Theodore R. Sarbin (Santa Barbara: Praeger Publishers, 1986), 172.

¹³ For more on Ricoeur's understanding of time and narrative emplotment see Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984) and Paul Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

and the tock of past and present is an example of linear time. The one event necessarily precedes and makes space for the next. Phenomenological time, though not in opposition to linear time, is tensed without necessarily being linear. Phenomenological time is commonly used in storytelling where present chronological events reflect both past and future events in the telling.¹⁴ Narrative emplotment is the coming-together of linear and phenomenological time.

Narrative emplotment allows not merely a simple straight-forward chronological reading of a story but its continual re-reading in light of continually changing events. The past is continually re-read – and therefore re-interpreted – in light of the present and perceived future, and as such never remains stagnant in the past. Emplotment is what makes a narrative a narrative rather than merely a listing of disjointed events. Through emplotment seemingly unrelated elements are brought together in such a way as to be rendered meaningful. The individual is never merely a product of past memories, nor of present relationships, nor even of expectations for the future, but is always a complex mix of all of the above. Past memories, present relationships, and future expectations, however, are not stagnant, objective things, but are, themselves, always in a state of flux insofar as they are being re-read, re-membered, and re-interpreted by both the individual and the community.

That temporality is an integral dimension of identity allows for a fluid understanding of self in which there is no one event, no one time, that is privileged above all others. The self, though necessarily shaped by the remembered experiences of the past and the relationships of the present, is not bound by past and present, but is always

¹⁴ For example, with the use of flashbacks or foreshadowing.

open to new possibilities in the future. This promise of the future is not, however, merely the stuff of inspirational graduation speeches, but is the material towards which life narratives tend, and from which life narratives are formed. Identity as something which is continually being re-read allows for the possibility of a future in which the stories of the past can be retold from continually new perspectives.¹⁵ This continual re-telling of the past is neither a reductionistic nor revisionist romanticizing of the past, but is a reflection of lived experience in and through time. Such an understanding of identity might be thought of as an anticipatory ontology. Identity is shaped, to a large extent, by the anticipation of who one is becoming.

There is an important sense in which Heidegger, and those subsequently influenced by Heidegger, are absolutely correct to understand the impact of the perceived future on human identity. However, theologically there is also a distinct sense in which this focus on the *perception* of the future falls short. As significant as the perception of the future is in terms of an individual's understanding of identity, the reality of identity is dependent, not merely upon perception of identity, but upon the reality of an identity determined by Christ.¹⁶ Human identity and human teleology, what it means to be

¹⁵ This understanding of identity is perhaps analogous to Zeno's paradox of motion. The paradox of motion states that if, for example, one is to cross the room, the distance from one side of the room to the other must first be cut in half. Once half the distance has been traversed there is a new starting point, a new zero, so to speak. It is from this point that one now must again cut the distance in half. With each movement there is a new starting point, one in which the distance already traversed as well as the distance still to be traversed meet. The observation that with each step forward there is a new starting point, with both a different history and a different future, while still being the same person making the journey, is, perhaps a helpful image. The paradox is in the theoretical observation that such cutting in half of physical distance can continue ad infinitum, a concept known as asymptotic theory in statistics. Asymptotic theory is perhaps also a helpful way of envisioning the movement through time towards one's telos. It is theoretically possible to get closer and closer to who one actually is without ever – this side of the eschaton – fully realizing one's identity. Zeno's paradox is from Plato's "Parmenides" and is explained in a helpful way in John Lechte, *Key Contemporary Concepts: From Abjection to Zeno's Paradox* (London: SAGE, 2003).

¹⁶ This is an extension of the claim from chapter 3 that it is participation in the body of Christ, the church, which is ultimately determinative of identity.

human, is essentially eschatological. Who we now are does not determine who we will become; rather who we are becoming – who we already are in Christ – is what ultimately determines who we now are. This notion of identity might be thought of as retroactive ontology.¹⁷ It is this retroactive identity – an identity founded in the promise of resurrection and of redemption – that is the ground for Christian hope. This notion of retroactive identity is not, however, coterminous with the notion of retrospective identity. It does not mean that I can only fully give an accounting of myself, fully come to see myself in retrospect from the moment of my death – though there may be truth in this, too. This retroactive element of identity simultaneously reaches both further back and further forward in time than any individual human life span. It is to suggest that *identity is grounded in teleology*, that who I ultimately am is who I already have been determined by God to be, in and through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Insofar as identity is understood as determined by one's past and present experiences and one's imaginings of the future, the future remains bounded by the memories of the past.¹⁸ Identity understood retroactively suggests that the future is not merely a projection of the past and present self – just a bit older. Rather, retroactive identity sees the past and the present self as a reflection of the promised redeemed self of new creation.

I am suggesting that human identity is simultaneously retroactive and anticipatory. Such an understanding of identity is not a denial of the significance of past and present. Rather just the opposite, as both past and present shape the ability to

¹⁷ See, for example, Ted Peters, *Anticipating Omega Science, Faith, and Our Ultimate Future* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 2006).

¹⁸ This is so in that, as I discuss in chapter 2, the imagination is shaped primarily by and through habits of remembering.

anticipate the future. It is to say that identity is tensed – it is experienced *as* past, present, and future, as well as experienced *through* past, present, and future. Identity is not, however, limited to this linear temporality but also reflects Ricoeur’s phenomenological time. Insofar as identity is shaped by futurity, this futurity is both retroactive – reflecting a future event that has already come to pass – and anticipatory – projecting itself into the future that is already perceived. That identity is simultaneously retroactive and anticipatory as well as simultaneously tensed (past, present, and future) suggests that identity is extremely complex and cannot be reduced to any simple reflection on past experiences or present circumstances. My contention in this project is that it is the whole person – the whole cosmos, in fact – being made new in Christ’s redemptive work. This necessarily requires that all of the intertwined components of identity are themselves the locus of God’s re-creative activity.

4.2 Secular Hope?

The temporality of identity, the experience of being as past, present, and future, is both a teleological and an ontological claim. The influence of the community on the formation of identity (as discussed in chapter three) is not lessened by the added focus on futurity. In this section I explore the ways in which the notions of the future both shape and reflect concrete cultural practices as well as the cultural perceptions of its own past and present. Underwriting this section is MacIntyre’s notion that a community’s perception of its telos is expressed in and through its practices and habits.¹⁹ Insofar as this is correct, the telos is reflected in the practices by which a community expresses its

¹⁹ MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, especially chapters 14 and 15.

hopes and dreams for the future, even when that telos is neither explicitly stated nor broadly recognized. MacIntyre argues that post-Enlightenment Western civilization has lost its sense of telos, that the modern, or post-modern, Western world is fragmented, with little or no sense of direction or purpose. In this section I briefly look at what I see as the three primary ways in which contemporary Western culture attempts to approach the future in the absence of any cohesive teleological narrative, and suggest that each falls short of the eschatological promise of redemption and provides, at best, a rather pale reflection of hope.

4.2.1 Glorification of the Past

In the absence of any promise of a future redemption, hope for the future often depends upon human attempts to honor the past. In honoring the achievements of the past, the past is perceived as living on in the present, while simultaneously inspiring future greatness. National monuments, ostensibly designed to remember those who have sacrificed in some way in the past for the sake of the common good of the future of the nation, often take on something of a religious nature. Sites such as Boston's Freedom Trail or battlegrounds like Gettysburg have become secular pilgrimage sites. Some monuments, the Lincoln Memorial, for example, have signs posted requesting respectful silence be maintained while visiting the monument as a proclamation of the sanctity of the space. And the Vietnam Memorial shares a certain resonance with Jerusalem's Wailing Wall, with family and friends seeking out the names of lost loved ones and etching them on paper. Such memorials seek to fulfill a religious need by secular means.

But in the absence of an eschatological telos, the only promise such secular memorials can offer is to remember the past.²⁰

In addition to reflecting what is the next best thing to hope – a promise not to forget – the problem with such memorials is that this promised remembering takes a particular, and often rather selective, form. That is, memorials do not merely reflect history; they are, in fact, a form of history-writing. Communities memorialize not simply what happens, what they promise to remember, but *how* they remember. Memorials are a way a community bears witness to both its history and its values, and in so doing memorials have the power to create history.²¹ Memorials allow those in the present to determine how those in the future learn to remember the past.²²

Similarly, smaller communities, families, and even individuals construct countless memorials to remember more intimate, personal losses. The act of memorialization, seen in the enacted practices of placements of a tombstone, roadside crosses, and erected memorials, is a cultural expression of the promise: “you will not be forgotten.”²³ Such

²⁰ This is not to say that remembrances are themselves problematic. In chapter two I make explicit that not only is remembering inevitable, it is a good and right thing to do. The theological problem with the memory affiliated with such monuments is twofold. First it is problematic when remembering is an end in itself, when the memory of the past becomes a substitute for both present and future - as if by memorializing the past it can be frozen in time in all of its glory with no recognition of its shadow side. And a second, closely related, theological problem with such national monuments is that they do not simply offer a means for remembering the past, but they inculcate a particular story told of the past, a quasi-religious story which intentionally refuses, not only competing stories, but a recognition of its very limited place within a much larger narrative which has both a history and a future.

²¹ The power of memorials to create, rather than merely represent, history is evidenced, for example, by the proliferation of “Heritage not hate” bumper stickers throughout the South in a post-Civil Rights era. This is a way in which memorializing the past serves the purpose of re-writing and re-interpreting the past in light, not of the values of the past, but of the present.

²² Elaine Ramshaw suggests that in addition to the proliferation of memorials in contemporary society there is a sense in which the increasing tendency towards memorials which are both larger and more spontaneous (and, not insignificantly, less institutionalized) are emblematic of a fragmented culture. Elaine Ramshaw, “The Personalization of Postmodern Post-Mortem Rituals,” *Pastoral Psychology* 59, no. 2 (2010).

memorials, though often explicitly mourning a loss of the future (particularly in deaths of those who are young), implicitly mourn the loss of a sentimentalized and idealized perceived past innocence.

Memorials which attempt to glorify the past, which promise eternal life through memory, seem largely to be attempts to refuse powerlessness.²⁴ The loss of the past cannot be undone, but promises to remember, to honor the past, and to face the future with greater wisdom as a result of the past are a way of denying the past a power over the future. The problem with such memorials is not *that* they remember the past but that the telos of the remembering is disconnected from any hope for the future.

²³ This need to memorialize the past, and particularly those who have died whether tragically or heroically (or both), is also a means of coping with grief and loss. Erika Doss claims that the increasingly common spontaneous memorials that appear at the sight of crime scenes or accidents – memorials in which flowers, stuffed animals, notes, and other personal tokens of affection gather – are a communal way of dealing with grief that is overwhelming or appears to have no end in sight. Doss refers to a “material culture of grief” by which she means that in a culture that has given up any theologically-grounded hope, comfort must necessarily come from and be expressed by material goods. She suggests that the increase of such material displays of memorialization reflect what MacIntyre points to as the contemporary loss of telos. Erika Doss, “Spontaneous Memorials and Contemporary Modes of Mourning in America,” *Material Religion* 2, no. 3 (2006).

There are also those who argue that memorials are a way of pacifying the desire to honor important people and ideas in the past without actually paying heed to them. Cornel West makes just such a claim regarding the Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial in Washington, DC, suggesting that King “weeps from his grave” at the replacement of action with symbolism. http://www.nytimes.com/2011/08/26/opinion/martin-luther-king-jr-would-want-a-revolution-not-a-memorial.html?_r=2&ref=todayspaper.

²⁴ In an NPR interview discussing the tenth anniversary of 9/11 Dave Isay, founder of StoryCorps, remarked, “There is no closure; the best we can hope for is to remember.” (In an interview which aired on 5/23/2006.) His remark seems to reflect the predominant pathos of contemporary memorials. I am *not* arguing that the remembering is problematic. I am *not* suggesting that the memorials themselves are necessarily problematic. In fact, the Christian church has always remembered. The church remembers her saints and martyrs. And rightly so. The entire history of Israel can be seen as an act of remembrance. The liturgy of the Eucharist is a proleptic act of remembrance. Theologically the problem is not with remembering but *with the resignation that our hope is in remembrance*; the problem is the claim that remembering the past takes the place of hope for a new creation in which all manner of atrocities will be redeemed.

4.2.2 Transcendence in the Present

In situations where memorializing the past is impossible or insufficient, the attempt to transcend the present is another secular expression of hope. While not grounded in any historical, confessional faith, contemporary notions of transcendence tend to reflect the peculiarly North American trend towards a disembodied and transcendent spirituality which finds its roots most famously in the writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau.²⁵ Emerson and Thoreau popularized something of an intellectual nature-mysticism combined with a material asceticism through which, it was believed, one could transcend the mundane world and experience life more intensely, more fully.²⁶

Though admittedly less common in contemporary Western culture, interest (and perhaps belief) in reincarnation (a religio-philosophical concept historically associated with Hinduism) as a way of transcending the present appears to be expanding beyond the Hollywood world of Shirley MacLaine.²⁷ The growth of New Age spirituality has brought with it an interest in ancient non-Western beliefs, including reincarnation. In

²⁵ Harold Bloom suggests that this sort of Gnosticism is, in fact, the new American religion – a development Bloom views favorably. Harold Bloom, *The American Religion: The Emergence of the Post-Christian Nation* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1993).

²⁶ In a sense the disassociation of suffering discussed in chapter three is a psychological defense mechanism not dissimilar from the intellectual search for transcendence. It is interesting to note that whereas disassociation is recognized by psychiatrists as a pathological response to unbearable pain and suffering, in certain circles, this intellectualized attempt to transcend the everyday is praised as a higher form of consciousness.

²⁷ This sort of modern day Gnosticism is illustrated in Alice Sebold's novel, *The Lovely Bones*, in which fourteen-year-old Susie Salmon is brutally raped, murdered, and dismembered. The novel is the story of Susie's disembodied soul watching her family attempt to come to terms with what has happened and occasionally interacting with those whom she has left behind. Such books on life after death provide modern-day images of a sort of reincarnation that denies the finality of death while offering a moralistic or psychologized explanation for continued life. The characters live on after death in order to learn some important lesson or to ease the pain of death's finality. Alice Sebold, *The Lovely Bones* (Boston: Little, Brown, 2002).

addition to the popularity of books such as Irving Cooper's *Reincarnation, the Hope of the World* (a book which was re-printed in 2007),²⁸ the topic of reincarnation has worked its way into the popular children's card game Yu-Gi-Oh, and even into the work of some Christian writers.²⁹ Reincarnation is an extreme form of relying on another present in order to deal with the pain of the "present present." Such attempts to transcend the present, however, inevitably fall short of the hope of redemption because they are, by their very nature, a denial of suffering.

4.2.3 Progress towards the Future

A third secular approach to facing an uncertain future is through a studied belief in progress.³⁰ Though reliance on progress is by no means limited to the so-called "new atheists," the writings of the new atheists exemplify hope for the future through the power of reason and technology today.³¹ This understanding of science as salvation – the myth that humanity is continually progressing forwards (though towards what remains

²⁸ For example, Irving S. Cooper, *Reincarnation, the Hope of the World* (Wheaton, IL: Theosophical Press, 1955) and Mark Albrecht, *Reincarnation, a Christian Critique of a New Age Doctrine* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1987).

²⁹ Geddes MacGregor, *Reincarnation as a Christian Hope* (Totowa, NJ: Barnes & Noble, 1982).

³⁰ Though still quite prevalent, the myth of progress is not uncontested. See, for example, John Leslie, *The End of the World: The Science and Ethics of Human Extinction* (New York: Routledge, 1996) in which Leslie suggests the extinction of the human species – largely as a result of the "progress" made that result in war, disease, and damage to the environment – is likely in the relatively near future.

Similarly Christopher Lasch suggests that the contemporary (19th and 20th century) notion of and drive towards progress cannot be sustained indefinitely. *The True and Only Heaven: Progress and its Critics* (New York: Norton, 1991).

³¹ For an example of the new atheists' focus on science see Victor J. Stenger, *The New Atheism: Taking a Stand for Science and Reason* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2009). The very title implies not only a disjuncture between faith and reason, but the placement of hope on science and reason alone.

John Haught, however, argues that there is little, if anything, "new" in the writings of the new atheists. Rather, he claims that the wave of new atheists books are rather shallow reincarnations of the intellectually more stimulating writings of Freud, Nietzsche, and Marx. John F. Haught, *God and the New Atheism: A Critical Response to Dawkins, Harris, and Hitchens* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008).

problematically unclear) is a direct result of the Enlightenment. The myth of progress is expressed in two primary ways: science and history.³² Both, however, assume movement towards a new world order as opposed to any expectation of new creation.³³

The scientific notion of progress is largely an outgrowth of the dual Darwinian understanding that the entire universe, including the human race, is continually evolving, and that evolution favors the “fittest” of each species. Scientific advancement is thought to be both evidence for, and a form of, contemporary evolution. Though by no means the only way to which science is looked for salvation, this is perhaps most apparent in the fields of bio-technology, and epitomized by studies in cryogenics and cloning. The Human Genome Project, whose goal was to provide a complete map of human DNA, is perhaps the most significant bio-medical project of the past century.³⁴ The hope of the project is that by mapping the human genome the root of medical problems, whether inherited or acquired, can be determined and therefore resolved. Though the Human Genome Project does not promise an end to illness and death, the medical hope of such a project is that a deeper understanding of the development of diseases at the molecular

³² Despite the element of social Darwinism evident in socio-historical conceptions of the myth of progress, the myth of progress as it is understood scientifically and as it is understood historically are not merely different, but are rather totally irreconcilable. The scientific myth of progress is largely based on evolutionary theory, the cosmological variety of which posits that the universe is continually expanding and will eventually reach a point where it will cease to be. This can perhaps be understood through the theory of entropy – the tendency of the universe to move from a state of order to disorder. The myth of progress as it applies to history presumes movement towards a utopia, which could perhaps be restated as an historical movement from disorder to order. This reflects the general sense of confusion over what precisely constitutes progress.

³³ For an engaging and insightful theological critique of the myth of progress see Lesslie Newbigin, *Signs Amid the Rubble: The Purposes of God in Human History*, ed. Geoffrey Wainwright (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003) and Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989).

³⁴ For a helpful guide to the human genome project and its projections of the transformation of human life that is accessible to the non-scientist see Victor K. McElheny, *Drawing the Map of Life: Inside the Human Genome Project* (New York: Basic Books, 2010).

level will enable treatments aimed at the elimination of illness, the reduction of suffering, and the prolongation of life. Though the Human Genome Project cannot and does not promise an end to suffering, it focuses hopes for a better life on the medical field's ability to minimize suffering.³⁵

The historical version of the myth of progress can be seen in the work of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel. Hegel envisioned history moving towards a particular telos in a dialectical fashion.³⁶ Rather than precluding the scientific myth of progress, Hegel's philosophy of history assumes it. For Hegel, whose philosophy owes a clear debt to Kant's rationalism, the telos of history is human freedom and knowledge.³⁷ This same approach to historical theory can be seen in the more contemporary writings of Fukuyama who claims that history is directional, and its telos is (and always has been) liberal capitalism.³⁸ Fukuyama's claim is that we have now reached the "end of history", insofar as there is no socio-political option save liberal capitalism.

Whether based on science or history, the myth of progress places its trust for a better future on human rationality and will, on the human movement forward in time towards utopia. Such hopes, though largely a reflection of post-Enlightenment idealism,

³⁵ The prevalence of the "prosperity" and "health and wealth" Gospel within the contemporary religious landscape suggests that such an equating of minimized suffering with salvation is hardly limited to the medical profession.

³⁶ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History: Introduction, Reason in History*, ed. Johannes Hoffmeister (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1975).

³⁷ For an overview of Hegel's thought see Daniel Berthold-Bond, *Hegel's Grand Synthesis: A Study of Being, Thought, and History* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1989).

³⁸ Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (Toronto: Free Press, 1992).

are hardly novel, nor are they uncontested.³⁹ They do, however, suggest that if there is no supra-human human telos, human ingenuity is the only hope the future holds.

The problem with each of these secular expressions of hope – glorification of the past, transcendence of the present, and progress towards the future – is that none of them adequately address the problem of suffering. While each attempts in its own way to obviate the pain of suffering, the suffering itself remains a problem because it remains unredeemed.

4.3 A Theological Account of Hope

In what follows I offer a theological account of hope.⁴⁰ I begin by suggesting that Jesus' resurrection is central to any Christian notion of hope, that any discourse of hope is necessarily a theological, a Christological, discourse.⁴¹ In much the same way that human identity is simultaneously retroactive and anticipatory, so is hope. Hope necessarily looks back to the remembered event of the resurrection while remaining

³⁹ Think, for instance, of the popularity of dystopian novels such as George Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four: A Novel* (New York: Plume, 2003), Ray Bradbury, *Fahrenheit 451* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2003), Aldous Huxley *Brave New World* (New York: Harper Collins, 1946), and the more recent Lois Lowry, *The Giver* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1993).

⁴⁰ I offer a theological account of hope as opposed to a theology of hope to maintain a distinction between this project and that of Jürgen Moltmann. Though any contemporary theological engagement with Christian hope is necessarily to a large extent a reflection of the significance of Moltmann and his *Theology of Hope*, I will not be engaging at length directly with Moltmann. For Moltmann, all Christian theology, including Christology, rightly flows from eschatology, and hope is the form this eschatology takes, making the distinction between hope and eschaton a bit blurry. Moltmann's theology of hope suggests that, in the end, eschatology is less about the end and more about hope. My understanding is that the end itself is of primary – in fact, ultimate – significance, and that hope is the theological means, the virtue, by which we move towards that end. See Jürgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope: On the Ground and the Implications of a Christian Eschatology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993).

⁴¹ “[H]ope is either a theological virtue or not a virtue at all. It becomes a virtue by becoming a theological virtue.” Josef Pieper, *Faith, Hope, Love* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1997), 99.

future-oriented, looking towards the promised return of Christ. Hope is that which carries the Christian community through the in-between time from resurrection until eschaton. I then argue that there is a poignant element to hope insofar as it is recognition of becoming, of possibility, and of the gap between what is and what might be. The poignancy of this gap is the creative space of the imagination. Finally, I suggest that hope is necessarily both doxological and participatory; it is the means through which God enables the church to participate in, and witness to, the kingdom of God now.

Christian hope is, first and foremost, epistemological. It is necessarily an eschatological reality grounded simultaneously in the knowledge of the resurrection of Jesus and of the promised Parousia. As such, hope is based on what is ultimate rather than what is speculative. Hope is the recognition that suffering is not ultimate. To say that hope is epistemological is, of course, to call into question the very nature of knowledge, blurring lines that had, before Jesus' resurrection, been perceived as unshiftable. Because Christians know Christ to be raised from the dead – in direct contradiction of all experiential knowledge of death (dead people, after all, tend to remain dead) – Christians know that death is no longer the end of life with God. And because Christ is raised from the dead, Christians, too, trust in their own resurrection. The possibility of hope is contingent upon the trustworthy character of God, not our own strength of character, and upon our trust in God's character. This trust is an anticipation of the fulfillment of God's promises which hinges on the expressed character of God as witnessed in the resurrection of Jesus.⁴²

⁴² Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* illustrates the cautious trust of hope. When Tommy and Kathy confront two of their former teachers about the cloning experiment of which they were unknowing victims Ms. Emily expresses little sorrow for the damage done to most of the cloned children. However, for Tommy and Kathy she is sorry because of the nature of their hope: "But for the two of you... You are

Hope is how the church remembers the past – as a past in which the new thing God is doing has already begun. Hope is the knowledge that memorializing the past, escaping the present, and striving for utopia through scientific and technological progress are *not* the best life has to offer. Fallen humanity is not merely left to its own rather feeble devices. Hope is the knowledge that new creation can happen, is happening, and will happen – that the new thing foretold by Isaiah has begun. Hope, then, is inseparable from trust in God’s promise of new creation. The foundation of hope is the confession that Jesus is Lord *now*, even when Christ’s lordship is hard to see. And, that he is returning, to set all things right.

Hope is the form faithful waiting takes. Hope is eschatological; it anticipates the new creation promise of God. Hope is penultimate and therefore necessarily both precedes the eschaton in a temporal sense and is, yet, entirely dependent upon its coming.⁴³ While Christian hope is only made possible by the resurrection of Jesus, it is not to be equated with the promise of the resurrection.⁴⁴ Rather, hope may be better thought of as both the means and the manner by which we await redemption. “We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? But if we hope for what we do

serious. You’ve thought carefully. You’ve *hoped* carefully. For students like you, I do feel regret.” Kazuo Ishiguro, *Never Let Me Go* (New York: Knopf, 2005), 258. Emphasis in the text.

⁴³ The distinction between hope as ultimate and hope as penultimate is reflected in the tension between theologies of realized eschatology and those of inaugurated eschatology.

⁴⁴ Though not stated so explicitly, the sense that hope and redemption are nearly coterminous is quite striking in Rowan Williams, *Resurrection: Interpreting the Easter Gospel* (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 2002). See especially chapter 2.

not see, we wait for it with patience.” (Rom 8:22-25) Hope provides sustenance in the interim. It fills the gap, the void, between the now and the not yet.

Hope is a theological expression of the subjunctive mood. Whereas the indicative language of past and present describe what *is*, hope describes what *might be*, what *ought to be*, and what, in fact, one day *will be*. Insofar as hope is based on the resurrection promise of what is yet to come, what must be waited upon, hope is necessarily future-oriented; it is an orientation towards a good which can be imagined, because it has been glimpsed, even if it is not yet realized. Hope envisions that which is within the realm of the possible, though as yet unseen. Insofar as hope is recognition of what might be, the language of hope is necessarily imaginative. Hope is “openness of the present toward the boundless horizon of possibility.”⁴⁵ To say that hope is imaginative, however, is not to suggest that it is imaginary.⁴⁶ Rather, hope entails the ability to see a deeper reality than that which is most immediately apparent.⁴⁷

Hope looks not for the un-doing of suffering but for its promised redemption. The recognition of the gap between *is* and *ought* does not, however, spontaneously lead to hope. In fact, an acute recognition of this “ugly broad ditch”⁴⁸ between God’s intention for the world – what ought to be – and the fallenness of the world – what is – can just as

⁴⁵ Crites, “Storytime,” 166.

⁴⁶ For more on the distinction between imagination and imaginary see Garrett Green, *Imagining God: Theology and the Religious Imagination* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1989), chapter 4.

⁴⁷ Stressing the importance of the imagination and of the imaginative in speaking of hope is not to suggest that imagination is a panacea. In fact, imagination can be as much a source of ill as it can of good. The imagination can lead to hope as well as to despair. My contention is that hope requires the development of a particular sort of theological imagination and is not intended as a blanket approbation of the imaginative faculties.

⁴⁸ Gotthold Lessing, in reference to what he perceives to be the chasm between the contingent truths of history and the claims of the Christian faith. “On the Proof of the Spirit and of Power” in *Lessing’s Theological Writings* (Stanford University Press, 1956), 55.

easily lead to hopelessness as it does to hope. What opens the future of *ought to be* to hope is the assurance that *ought to be* ultimately *will be*.⁴⁹ Hope exists within the proleptic promise that the resurrection is the inauguration of the new creation still to come. This new creation is not a restoration to a prelapsarian state but is the promise of something new, something beyond even the wildest of human imaginings. It is the promise that what Lessing perceived as a ditch is, in fact, not a chasm that cannot be traversed, but one that is being closed by Christ. As such, hope cannot be stagnant, it implies a movement towards – movement from *is* towards *ought to be* towards *will be*. The ability to see what might be is only hopeful insofar as it is a glimpse of the promise of that which is to come. Hope is a leaning into the future, into the promise of the resurrection.⁵⁰ Otherwise vision is nothing more than salt rubbed in the wound of what is.

⁴⁹ Christian hope, grounded in the resurrection of Jesus, rules out the possibility of hope for anything less than the fulfillment of the promises of Jesus. This logically excludes the possibility of hope for anything contrary to the express will of God. One cannot rightly hope for the triumph of evil. Such cannot be hope, but is instead distorted desire.

⁵⁰ As such, hope is necessarily connected with desire. As recognition of the distance between what is and what might be, hope is inextricably connected with desire. Desire is the reaching out for the good. Desire is the restlessness of which St. Augustine famously speaks. (*Confessions* I,1) The desire we feel is an overflow of God's love in us, pulling us further into communion with God. Desire is productive; it produces a longing for God, a longing for relationship. That desire and hope are integrally connected to one another in the human experience of relationship with God highlights that distance that separates humanity from God. Rather than envisioning this distance as an absence, however, it is perhaps more helpful to see this distance as the space within which relationship exists. Insofar as distance is a necessary component of distinction, distance provides the alterity necessary for relationship. Because hope is the form which right relationship between the present and the future takes, hope works to rightly order desire. For more on desire as presence see Daniel M. Bell, *Liberation Theology after the End of History: The Refusal to Cease Suffering* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 90.

Desire has, of course, often been denigrated in Christian theological and praxis. Insofar as this has been correct it reflects the reality that desire is distorted by sin. Desire, however, is trainable. Mark A. Powell suggests that Matthew 6:21, "Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also," is not merely an observation but a promise, a promise that we can train our hearts, our desires; we can actively participate in the right ordering of our desires. Mark Allan Powell, *Loving Jesus* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004), 137-145. On the trainability of desire, see also T.J. Gorringer, *The Education of Desire: Toward a Theology of the Senses* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press, 2002).

Hope is the vehicle through which we participate in doxological time. Hope is participatory; it is the manner through which the church participates in the time between resurrection and Parousia. The promise that ought to be in fact will be requires patient endurance and inextricably links hope and temporality. Hope is the form which right relationship between the present and the future takes. All time is rightly understood as doxological; time is created for worship.⁵¹ Hope recognizes God's sovereignty over time as well as God's movement in time. It is a willingness in spite of, and in the face of, situations of sin and suffering to wait "for the emergence of a larger moment and a larger time."⁵² Such patience requires an understanding of time as a created good amongst the backdrop of God's eternity. Though not speaking directly of hope, this is, perhaps, what John Howard Yoder means when he suggests that Christian living is "living in such a way that, when the kingdom approaches, we find ourselves among those who are 'at home,' who 'fit' there, who are not out of place."⁵³ This is so because hope is the vision of what might be as well as the commitment to live as one already fit for the new creation.⁵⁴

⁵¹ This is a claim Tran makes explicit and addresses at length in Part II.

⁵² William F. Lynch, *Images of Hope: Imagination as Healer of the Hopeless* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1974), 37.

⁵³ John Howard Yoder, *The Original Revolution: Essays on Christian Pacifism* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1972), 40.

⁵⁴ Garrett Green suggests an important distinction between "as if" (which might seem grammatically smoother and therefore aesthetically more pleasing in the noted sentence) and "as". "As if," he suggests, implies a sense of non-reality, a willingness to play make-believe akin to the story of the Emperor's New Clothes, whereas "as" implies a reality that may or may not be apparent but is no less real as a result of its opaqueness. As I find this distinction logically compelling, it seems more correct to me to suggest that hope is the means by which the church lives as those waiting for the fullness of the kingdom. For more on this distinction see Green, chapter 4.

4.4 Suffering and Hope

Suffering, as defined in chapter one, refers to *intense and enduring pain of a physical, psychic, or social nature, resulting from the violent actions of another human being, the memory of which is disorienting or disintegrating of personal identity, destructive of social bonds, and crippling of the individual's capacity to imagine a future unbounded by the past.* Such suffering impacts not only the ways in which one remembers the past and participates in the present; but, at least as importantly, the experience of such profound suffering can diminish the ability to anticipate a hopeful future. As the first section of this chapter has shown, future stories – the ability to imagine what the future may entail – are, in fact, a constitutive element of identity such that the redemption of the memory of past suffering must necessarily include the promise of a redeemed future as a part of the redemption of the individual. In what follows I consider the impact of suffering on the development of particular imaginative habits as they pertain to an individual's ability to anticipate the future.⁵⁵ First, I propose that hope, like suffering, is a means of knowing. I then suggest that the epistemology of suffering problematizes hope, and I argue that this is a result of the ways in which suffering disorders desire and cripples the imagination's ability to envision the future well. Next, I look at the ways these habits lead both to a diminished ability to imagine the future as well as to an inability to imagine any future other than one which is simply a repetition of the past. Finally, I suggest that redemption of the memory of past suffering cannot be

⁵⁵ By referring to such habits as “imaginative” I do not intend to suggest that future stories are unreal. As I suggested earlier in this chapter, future stories are constitutive of identity. However, because future stories remain, by definition, always stories of what the future “might” hold, they are largely governed by the imaginative faculties. Faculties which have been, and continue to be, formed by the narrative of experiences past and present.

understood only in terms of healing of the past *as* past, but must include the hope for a new future.

Suffering, as illustrated in chapter two, is a way of knowing that can never be unknown. To forget suffering, I suggested, is not to un-know suffering because suffering is remembered implicitly even when it is no longer remembered in an explicitly narratable way. The epistemology of suffering – particularly of prolonged and profound suffering – can overshadow the epistemology of hope. Because the knowledge of suffering is experiential and resides in the body of one who has suffered, suffering can train the habit of expectation of suffering. Once vulnerability to suffering is known in bodily form, particularly in situations of prolonged suffering, it becomes the anticipated norm.⁵⁶ As such, the expectation of suffering can distort the knowledge of hope which is always necessarily, at least in part, anticipatory. For this reason, hope cannot be separated from trust; hope is predicated upon a trust in the promises of God despite the experiential expectation of suffering. Hope trusts that the promises of redemption ultimately will be, even when redemption is not yet known experientially. Therefore exactly to the extent that the epistemology of suffering has ruptured the capacity for trust it will likewise diminish the capacity for hope.⁵⁷

The experience and memory of profound suffering can render hope rather elusive because suffering can destroy the imagination necessary to nourish and sustain hope.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ The epistemological and anticipatory habits of suffering are discussed more fully in chapter 2 and are presumed here.

⁵⁷ That suffering may diminish hope does not suggest that suffering necessarily obliterates hope. Hope does not have to be destroyed in order to be theologically problematic. To the extent that hope is disordered or distorted the ability to envision redemption is diminished.

⁵⁸ Toni Morrison's novel, *Beloved*, offers a poignant illustration of the power of the expectations of future suffering. Sethe, the main character, is a run-away slave who is pursued by four white men who intend to

Suffering problematizes hope. This problematization is not merely theoretical; it is not a question of theodicy, but is primarily pragmatic, and is a result of particular habits of the imagination that are cultivated by the very logic of suffering. Rightly ordered desire reflects an orientation towards both God and towards the neighbor.⁵⁹ And desire rightly ordered is an orientation of charity. As such, desire is a positive good in that it evidences a presence, not an absence. The presence of rightly ordered desire evidences the anticipatory eschatological nature of identity. Desire is constitutive of human identity and human identity is always simultaneously retrospective (reflecting “what the past is doing now”⁶⁰) and anticipatory (reflecting that which one is becoming). Rightly ordered desire propels the individual into the future in which the eschatological promise of who one will be is, to some extent, always already reflected in who one is now.

Profound suffering, however, can disorder desire because it ruptures the experience of temporality which an orientation towards the future eschatological promise requires. In chapter two I discussed the destruction of temporality inherent in profound suffering in regard to the distortion of memory. Suffering can, likewise, distort

capture her and return her to slavery. When faced with the inescapability of her situation, in a desperate refusal to allow her child to be condemned to a future determined by the suffering of slavery, Sethe slits her baby’s throat. Over this backdrop of the memory of profound suffering – both the violence of Sethe’s own experience of slavery as well as her own desperately violent refusal to allow her child to be subjected to slavery – Sethe is befriended by another escaped slave, Paul D. Paul D likewise continues to suffer profoundly the effects of the memory of the violence against him as a slave and, in a moment of remarkable insight, tells Sethe, “me and you, we got more yesterday than anybody. We need some kind of tomorrow.” Sethe and Paul D are, in a sense, defined by their past suffering as slaves. However, that this is so is at least as much because of the lack of any promise that the future will be different from the past as it is because of the memory of slavery. In other words, that Sethe and Paul D have escaped slavery has not freed them from their suffering because they have not yet found hope for a future in which they are, in fact, free. There is, as Paul D suggests, no way for yesterday to be redeemed in the absence of a promise of a tomorrow. Toni Morrison, *Beloved* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 322.

⁵⁹ I have chosen to focus on desire as being rightly ordered towards God in this section largely because the orientation towards others, as well as the propensity of suffering to isolate, is already discussed at length in chapter 3. However, it should be noted that right relationship with God and right relationship with the neighbor are inseparable.

⁶⁰ Williams, *Resurrection*, 23.

perceptions of the future. “The central problem of trauma is a temporal one. The past does not stay, so to speak, in the past.”⁶¹ The past is brought not only into the present, but is also projected into the future – a future of projected suffering.

The sufferer – particularly in the midst of profound suffering, but in suffering’s aftermath as well, because such suffering refuses to remain *past* – often desires an alleviation of suffering above all other desires. The resulting orientation towards whatever might promise to alleviate suffering can become etched so deeply in the psyche of one who has suffered that the very capacity for positive desire can be stunted.⁶² In such times “the past reaches into the present and throttles desire before it can become directed toward the future.”⁶³ And not suffering is, of course, to be desired above suffering.⁶⁴ But not suffering is no substitute for the positive good of God.⁶⁵ This desire

⁶¹ Shelly Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma: A Theology of Remaining* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), 19.

⁶² This is not to suggest that hope and desire are coterminous, but rather to suggest that hope is ontologically prior to desire. Desire presumes hope; without hope, desire, as a reaching out for the good, is extinguished.

⁶³ Susan J. Brison, *Aftermath: Violence and the Remaking of a Self* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002), 96.

⁶⁴ Even martyrdom, rightly understood, does not *seek* suffering for suffering’s sake. Rather, martyrs accept, even embrace, suffering rather than reject God. As such, their suffering is the embracing of the positive good which is God. Were it possible to both embrace the positive good of God *and* avoid suffering the violence of martyrdom, this would, of course, be preferable.

⁶⁵ An avoidance of suffering, as opposed to pursuit of a positive good, is precisely what Marie Fortune advocates in her book, *Love Does No Harm*. “I start from what may sound like a negative place: doing least harm. Why not ‘doing most good’ and ‘making justice,’ you may well ask? ‘Doing most good’ and ‘making justice’ are the vision of possibility for which we may strive in relationship. But ‘doing least harm’ is probably what we are capable of. Doing least harm is a realistic and tangible goal to set for ourselves. I may not know what is the most good that I could do, and if I know, I may not be capable of it. But I probably have an idea about the harm that I could do and hopefully am capable of avoiding it.” Marie M. Fortune, *Love Does No Harm: Sexual Ethics for the Rest of Us* (New York: Continuum, 1995), 34.

Fortune’s claim seems misguided on at least two counts. The presumption that avoiding doing harm is easier than doing good fails to take into account the human capacity for and propensity towards sin. And the presumption that avoidance of a negative – as opposed to pursuit of a good – is the best we have to hope for overlooks the power of the Holy Spirit active in the world now. Fortune’s claim that the

for the alleviation of the pain of suffering is a movement away from the created positive good of rightly ordered desire to the cessation of an evil. And, of course, the cessation of evil *is* good. It is, however, insufficient to the extent that desire comes to be defined in terms of an absence of suffering rather than by the presence of God. When the effects of profound suffering are overwhelming such that the *only* desire is for a cessation of suffering, the desire for the positive good of God is lost. This loss of desire for God is simply another word for despair.⁶⁶

In addition to leading to despair, the distortion of desire wrought by suffering can also cripple the imagination, rendering the sufferer void of any future stories other than those implanted by the event of suffering. That is, in the aftermath of profound suffering it may become nearly impossible even to imagine, let alone to anticipate, the eschatological promise of redemption. The very nature of suffering “destroys a person’s self and world, a destruction experienced spatially as either the contraction of the universe down to the immediate vicinity of the body or as the body swelling to fill the entire universe.”⁶⁷ This diminution of space is not, however, merely geographical but is equally temporal, causing the sufferer’s world to contract to the now. There is no world beyond the locale of the body in pain nor is there a world beyond the moment of its infliction (or anticipation). This loss of any world beyond suffering extends

avoidance of suffering is the best we have to hope for illustrates precisely the sort of loss of hope to which profound suffering can contribute.

⁶⁶ “Suffering can bring us to the point of wishing that the world did not exist, of believing nonbeing is better than being... We then cease loving God.” Sölle, 107.

⁶⁷ Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 35.

imaginatively and indefinitely into the future and often leads to resignation to the inevitability of suffering.

In *Too Scared to Cry*, Leonore Terr describes the effects of profound trauma on children over an extended period of time.⁶⁸ In 1976 a California school bus full of elementary school children was hijacked and the children were buried alive in a cargo hold in an abandoned rock quarry. The children escaped and none were seriously harmed physically. However, Terr, a child psychologist, interviewed the children and their families in the immediate aftermath and at regular intervals for the following two decades, noting that even years after the event itself the majority of the children continue to anticipate a short life. A number of them report making no plans for the future because *they do not expect to have a future*. A single event of profound suffering led to an expectation of a foreshortened future. Terr rightly suggests that this loss of expectation for the future is a direct result of an experience of overwhelming vulnerability such that the children were rendered incapable of imagining their vulnerability not being further exploited in the future. And if such is the outcome of a single event – one in which there was no corresponding physical trauma – how much more so might this sense of a foreshortened future potentially be present in situations of prolonged, repeated, or physically harmful situations of suffering?

However, the complete loss of any sense of futurity is not a given in the aftermath of suffering. The loss of hope brought about by suffering is not limited to the inability to imagine the future but, in a way that is equally problematic, can also result in the ability to imagine only a future of a continuation of unbearable suffering. Insofar as one who

⁶⁸ Leonore Terr, *Too Scared to Cry: How Trauma Affects Children...And Ultimately Us All* (New York: Basic Books, 1990).

has suffered profoundly in the past *does* imagine the future it is likely to be envisioned as a hell which is merely “the ceaseless reiteration of the past.”⁶⁹ The future, insofar as it is thought of at all, is filled with anticipation of more suffering. The inability – or perceived inability – to avoid a future which is simply more of the same suffering may lead to a sense of passive resignation, an acceptance of powerlessness.

Conversely, the inability to imagine a future which will be qualitatively different from past suffering can also lead to an active sense of defiance. If there is no perception of hope that things will be better, that any action on the part of the sufferer can make a positive difference in future experiences, an active form of resignation may be found in defiance. For example, Daoud Hari tells the story of his role as a translator in attempts to document the genocide in Darfur on behalf of human rights organizations. One incident he recounts is of being held captive with three companions by military forces who accused the men of being spies. The three men were tortured in isolation from one another, but were taken from their cell one at a time such that each man witnessed the condition of his companions after sessions in which they were severely beaten. Hari describes repeated attempts to cooperate with his captors. He tried to reason with them, placate them, convince them of the truth of his and his companion’s mission in Darfur. However, he says that when he realized they were going to kill him anyway, and despite knowing it would only further infuriate his captors and likely increase the severity of his beatings, he refused to talk.⁷⁰ Exactly to the extent that there is nothing to gain, there is

⁶⁹ Crites, “Storytime,” 168.

⁷⁰ Daoud Hari, *The Translator* (New York: Random House, 2008), 146ff. Along these same lines, James Baldwin claims “the most dangerous creation in any society is the man with nothing to lose.” Insofar as this is true, it is true because someone with nothing to lose has no hope for anything better than what they

nothing to lose, such that those with no hope for a future other than that of repeated suffering may, in turn, perpetuate the cycle of suffering.⁷¹

The future stories of those who have suffered – whether stories of resignation or of defiance – illustrate the ways in which the constriction of time in the midst of suffering to the “now” handicaps the ability to imagine the future. Suffering can make future stories as threatening to the integrity of the individual as memories of the past and as broken relationships of the present. When the past has been one of profound suffering, the ability to imagine a future that is in any significant way different is often lost. The overwhelming powerlessness against such suffering, coupled with suffering’s incongruity between what is and what ought to be, often leads to a loss of hope for anything other than the repetition of past suffering that continues even long after the suffering itself has ceased. This loss of ability to imagine a future that will be narrated differently than the past is often the case even when the present is qualitatively better than the suffering, when there is clear experiential evidence that the past suffering is *not* ceaselessly repeated.

What I have suggested in this section is that the effects of profound suffering do not cease when the suffering stops. Or, perhaps it is more accurate to say that suffering does not stop when the violence ends, but may extend indefinitely into the future. For this reason the effects of such suffering cannot be expected simply to dissipate with time.

experience as hopeless. This lack of hope may lead to the apathy of despair, but it may also result in rash and irrational behavior. See James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time* (New York: Random House, 1993), 76.

⁷¹ In his book, *A Dream of the Tattered Man*, Randolph Loney describes his experiences as a chaplain working with death row inmates, all of whom shared with him stories of profound personal suffering in the years leading up to the capital offense for which they are in prison. Though there is no simple calculus by which one might determine the reason for murder, lack of hope leading to the sense that there was nothing to lose is a common thread through many of the stories Loney shares. Randolph Loney, *A Dream of a Tattered Man: Stories from Georgia’s Death Row* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001).

Rather, profound suffering can result in a loss of hope that is evidenced in the despair of disordered desire such that there is a loss in desire even for God as well as a crippling of the imagination such that it is rendered unable to imagine a future which differs from the past. Despair and resignation, however, are not so much opposites as they are two paths, often traversed simultaneously, to the same place, as both grant ultimacy to suffering and both result in a loss of perceived future as a direct result of suffering. Though the impact on identity of futurity is considerably more difficult to recognize because of its not-yet nature, the claim of this chapter is that the anticipated narrative of the future is as significant a dimension of identity as is the narrative of the remembered past. And insofar as suffering diminishes the ability of one who has suffered to envision a hopeful future, redemption of the memory of the past will necessarily entail the promise of a redeemed future.

4.5 A Renewal of Hope

This chapter has illustrated the necessarily complexly temporal nature of human identity. This temporality is not limited to remembered past or present experiences but also includes perceived notions of futurity. The contention of this project is that the experience of suffering becomes a constitutive element of identity and is, therefore, necessarily part of the “all things” being made new in the redemption of our bodies. Suffering itself – in all of its temporal dimensions – must be redeemed if the individual who has suffered (and continues to suffer) is to be redeemed. It has been the burden of this chapter to show that insofar as identity is rightly understood to be simultaneously retroactive and anticipatory, suffering damages the futurity of the sufferer in significant

ways. Therefore in this section I argue that any account of the redemption of suffering must consider not merely the redemption of the past and present damage of suffering, it must address the future damage of suffering – the loss of hope – as well.

In order to do this I first consider the vocational calling of forgiveness. I suggest that forgiveness is simultaneously a response of obedience, grounded in the communal practices of the church, as well as receptivity to the imaginative possibilities of a new future. I then suggest that the practices of witness begin to reorder desires which have been disordered in the aftermath of profound suffering. That is, whereas the result of suffering is often the turning of desire *away* from the positive good of God towards nothing more than the elimination of suffering, witness nurtures the habit of a reorientation towards God. The practices of forgiveness and witness do not, themselves, redeem suffering. They do not guarantee a future free from the effects of past suffering; ecclesial practices cannot be thus instrumentalized. Rather, forgiveness and witness are practices through which the Holy Spirit works in and through the church to develop the imagination necessary to begin to envision, even to anticipate eagerly, a future which is already being redeemed by God. And so, finally, I suggest that the experience, albeit partial, of the past and present tense dimensions of redemption offers hope for a redeemed future not only for those who have suffered but for the church and the world. Such a witness of hope is, ultimately, the vocational calling of those who have suffered profoundly and it is in the realization of this calling, I argue, that redemption can be recognized.

4.5.1 Forgiveness

The claim that forgiveness is a practice integral to the Christian faith is a non-controversial assertion – almost a tautology. What exactly the practice of forgiveness means, however, is not always quite so clear. In what follows I suggest that forgiveness is primarily the means by which Christians learn to tell a truthful story. As such it is neither a denial nor a condoning of the suffering of the past, nor is forgiveness a matter of forgetting or excusing the suffering of the past. In fact, I argue that forgiveness is at least as much about the future as it is about the past. Forgiveness addresses the suffering of the past by remembering it well in the present while rightly orientating one towards the future. And it is this future orientation of forgiveness which is crucial in learning to see redemption of the past.

Forgiveness is first and foremost a practice of truth-telling insofar as integral to forgiveness is the right naming of the suffering of the past. That is, forgiveness cannot mean pretending the past did not happen; nor can it be a matter of ignoring or forgetting the suffering of the past.⁷² In fact, forgiveness is a form of active confrontation with the suffering of the past, and perhaps with the perpetrator of the suffering.⁷³ It is a confrontation that names the sin of the past as sin in order to overcome the evil of that

⁷² “Our common experience in fact is the opposite – that the past, far from disappearing or lying down and being quiet, has an embarrassing and persistent way of returning and haunting us unless it has in fact been dealt with adequately. Unless we look the beast in the eye we find it has an uncanny habit of returning to hold us hostage.” Desmond Tutu, *No Future without Forgiveness* (New York: Doubleday, 1999), 28.

⁷³ Forgiveness and peacemaking, though not coterminous, are integrally connected to one another. In his essay on the virtue of peacemaking Stanley Hauerwas makes the point that peacemaking cannot be reduced to an avoidance of conflict but necessarily involves an element of confrontation. See Stanley Hauerwas, “Peacemaking: The Virtue of the Church” in *Christian Existence Today: Essays on Church, World, and Living in Between* (Durham, NC: Labyrinth Press, 1989).

past.⁷⁴ Forgiveness cannot gloss over suffering but attempts to name the damage the suffering has caused. And this naming of the damage of the past is – at least in part – for the sake of those who have caused the suffering. That is, the naming of sin which forgiveness requires is an acknowledgement of the personhood of the perpetrators of suffering. Honest confrontation with the perpetrator of suffering honors the humanity of the perpetrator. “The point is that, if perpetrators were to be despaired of as monsters and demons, then we were thereby letting accountability go out the window because we were then declaring that they were not moral agents...it meant that we had abandoned all hope of their being able to change for the better... despite the awfulness of their deeds, [the perpetrators] remained children of God with the capacity to repent, to be able to change.”⁷⁵ Forgiveness hopes that in the naming of the damage of suffering the perpetrator will be moved to repentance, but forgiveness is not contingent upon said repentance.

In situations of profound suffering the need to forgive the perpetrator will likely be obvious. However, what may be less apparent is the need to forgive others who may

⁷⁴ Milbank, 79.

⁷⁵ Tutu, 83. Recognizing the moral agency of the perpetrators of suffering includes the practice of holding them accountable for the behavior even, and perhaps especially when, such accountability becomes a matter of criminal law. Though revenge and forgiveness are clearly mutually exclusive, forgiveness does not necessarily entail a refusal to address the suffering through legal channels.

Miroslav Volf, however, does see retributive justice as antithetical to forgiveness. He claims, “To forgive means, first, *not to press charges against the wrongdoer*.” Additionally he suggests that “a person cannot forgive while at the same time *wanting* the state to punish the offender.” Miroslav Volf, *Free of Charge: Giving and Forgiving in a Culture Stripped of Grace* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005), 169, 171. Volf’s claim seems problematic to me on a number of grounds. In addition to denying moral agency by refusing to hold the perpetrators of violence accountable for past actions, a refusal to consider legal recourse may well set the stage for future violence and as such it fails to take seriously the call to protect not only other innocent persons but the perpetrator himself. Forgiveness does not negate agency, and neither judicial nor non-judicial protective behavior precludes the possibility of forgiveness. In fact, insofar as forgiveness is the telling of a truthful story, protective behavior may – in situations of domestic violence, for example – be a necessary precursor to, and condition of, forgiveness.

be indirectly implicated in the suffering. For example, telling a truthful story of the past may include the recognition that the perpetrator was enabled by others. That is, there may have been others who chose not to get involved, not to act in order to prevent the perpetrator from acting.⁷⁶ Likewise there may have even been bystanders, those who stood by and watched rather than risk involvement in the situation.⁷⁷ And there are some situations of profound suffering in which there may be larger systemic networks of institutional structures or socio-political powers who, were the story to be truthfully narrated, bear a portion of the burden or responsibility for suffering.⁷⁸

Perhaps as importantly as the forgiveness of the perpetrator and of others who may have participated in creating the conditions in which the suffering occurred, there may be a need for forgiving oneself. This is emphatically *not* to suggest that those who suffer are in some way at fault for their suffering. It is rather to recognize that a common response to profound suffering is to misappropriate guilt and shame. For example, Susan Brison, who was sexually assaulted in the midst of an early morning run, discusses at length her sense that, though the attack itself was not her fault, she was at least partially

⁷⁶ The danger of the complacency of those not directly involved is perhaps most famously noted by Martin Luther King, Jr. in his *Letter from Birmingham Jail* – “I must confess that over the last few years I have been gravely disappointed with the white moderate. I have almost reached the regrettable conclusion that the Negro’s great stumbling block in the stride towards freedom is not the White Citizens Councillor or the Ku Klux Klanner but the white moderate who is more devoted to order than to justice; who prefers a negative peace which is the absence of tension to a positive peace which is the presence of justice.”

⁷⁷ Social psychologists have noted that the larger the crowd of on-lookers, the *less* likely someone is to intervene on behalf of an innocent third party. They have labeled this phenomenon the “bystander effect.” A recent horrendous example took place in 2009 when a 15-year-old girl was gang raped outside the gymnasium of Richmond High School in suburban San Francisco, CA over the course of several hours while dozens of students looked on. As news of the attack spread, the crowd of spectators grew, some onlookers using their cell phones to take pictures. Yet no attempt was made to stop the attack. For more on this see http://articles.cnn.com/2009-10-28/justice/california.gang.rape.bystander_1_bystander-crime-prevention-kitty-genovese?_s=PM:CRIME. Accessed 2/20/2012.

⁷⁸ For example, the suffering of slavery, or of the Holocaust, or of social conditions which make violence against vulnerable persons accepted or even normative. The forgiveness of such systems and powers is *not* acquiescence to injustice. In fact, forgiveness may include socio-political activity focused on the alleviation of the very injustice which creates the conditions for suffering.

to blame insofar as she chose to run alone on a rural road, placing herself in a potentially vulnerable situation.⁷⁹ Brison recognizes that her self-blame is as much an attempt at self-protection – that is, if she were to blame for the first attack, she could prevent a second attack simply by not repeating her past mistake. However, the propensity to blame oneself for such suffering is considerably more complex than protection from future suffering. As I showed in chapter three, profound physical suffering creates conditions in which the body is often experienced as an object of shame and of ridicule. The body – which cannot, of course, be separated from the sense of self – may be blamed for its weakness, its vulnerability. That one is vulnerable is, of course, not something for which one can be culpable; however, in order to narrate the suffering truthfully there may need to be an acknowledgement of one’s vulnerability and an openness to forgiving oneself for vulnerability which is remembered as weakness.⁸⁰

In focusing attention on the need to forgive oneself, I am not suggesting that such forgiveness is a private or individualistic reassurance of one’s innocence – though (re)assurances of innocence may also be needed. Rather, the forgiveness of oneself is integrally connected to the practice of holy friendship *within* the community of the church which I discuss in chapter 3. Forgiveness of oneself is perhaps best understood as a gift one receives in and through restorative relationships with others. Insofar as forgiveness is a matter of telling a truthful story, to forgive oneself may require having one’s story re-narrated by truthful friends such that one is enabled to be the recipient of

⁷⁹ Brison, 73-77.

⁸⁰ The potential need to practice forgiveness of oneself is closely related to the practice of repentance I discuss in chapter 2. Neither is a matter of blaming the victim. Rather, both are an acknowledgment of the complexity of truthfully narrating the experience of profound suffering.

grace. As long as the story of suffering remains a private story, interpreted only by and through the lens of the one who suffered, and given both the temptations Brison alludes to of self-blame as well as the human propensity for self-deception, the ability to narrate one's own story rightly is rather limited. Because of the isolating nature of suffering and because of the shame often involved, forgiveness may be made possible only in and through the sharing of the suffering such that the possibility of a different narration of the story of suffering is glimpsed.

Forgiveness tells a truthful story not merely in its confrontation with past suffering; forgiveness tells a truthful story in *how* it remembers. Forgiveness remembers the suffering of the past within the context of the broader narrative of God's story of redemption as one who has been incorporated into the Body of Christ. As such, not only is forgiveness explicitly *not* a matter of forgetting; it is a way of learning to remember the past such that "we can envision and embody a future different from the past."⁸¹

Forgiveness is one of the means by which the church participates in the eschatological kingdom, the promised future, now. As such forgiveness is a way of remembering that is simultaneously retrospective – remembering backwards not only to the particular situations of suffering of one's own life, but to Jesus' life, death, and resurrection – and anticipatory – remembering forwards into the future God has promised in Jesus' return.

Though forgiveness may indeed involve *feelings* of love for one's enemies, forgiveness is not limited to feelings but involves concrete *acts* of love as well.⁸²

⁸¹ L. Gregory Jones, *Embodying Forgiveness: A Theological Analysis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), 149. Jones refers to such a way of remembering as "remembering well."

⁸² This, of course, is not to deny the very real possibility that one may genuinely feel love towards those who have perpetrated great suffering. Rather, what I am claiming is that feelings are not reliable indices of love. Love is something that can be willed and acted upon even in the absence of loving emotions. Thus,

Forgiveness is both an act of the will and a disposition developed by intentional immersion in the practices of the church.⁸³ Forgiveness is both a single practice and a constellation of practices. That is, forgiveness is first an act of obedience in which one who has been profoundly injured by another refuses to allow the injury to be the defining lens through which they view the other. In *Death and the Maiden*, with which I began chapter 3, Paulina's unwillingness to forgive Dr. Miranda is evidenced at least in part by her inability ever to see him as anything other than the man who raped her.⁸⁴ His identity is reduced to his act of violence. Forgiveness refuses the lie that one's sin is ultimately determinative of one's identity, even – and perhaps especially – when another's sin mars one's own identity.

But this act of obedience is not a singularly individual act. Rather, it is an act undertaken within a community that is continually learning what it means to both be forgiven and to forgive. In fact, Paulina's isolation significantly impedes her capacity to forgive. This is so because forgiveness is a gift that is primarily received through the communal formation of habits of speech and of worship which rightly form – or re-form – one's ability to remember well. Because forgiveness is a habit, a disposition which has to be formed, it is rarely experienced instantaneously. In fact, forgiveness is as likely to be retrospective judgment as it is a prospective intention.⁸⁵

forgiveness can be a choice, in the form of concrete acts of love, grace, and charity, a choice through which the Holy Spirit may transform the heart.

⁸³ For more on the concrete communal practices of forgiveness see also L. Gregory Jones, "Crafting Communities of Forgiveness" in *Interpretation* (April 2000), 121-134.

⁸⁴ Ariel Dorfman, *Death and the Maiden* (New York: Penguin Books, 1992).

⁸⁵ Jones, *Embodying Forgiveness*, 235.

In addition to being a practice learned in and through the participation in a community which intentionally cultivates habits of forgiveness, forgiveness is a practice of the community. That is, forgiveness – like love and justice – is not an individual virtue, not something any one person, no matter how holy, can be expected to exhibit alone. In the aftermath of the Nickel Mines School shooting in which Charles Roberts shot ten young girls, killing five of them and seriously wounding the other five before killing himself, the Amish community immediately expressed its collective forgiveness of both Roberts and his family. “[T]he responsibility to forgive Charles Roberts was not assigned to the school children or even to their families but was embraced by the entire Amish community...the Amish would never place the responsibility to forgive an offense of this magnitude on the principal victims alone.”⁸⁶ Forgiveness cannot be reduced to a choice that an individual must wrestle over alone, but is a practice of and for the entire body of Christ to wrestle with together.⁸⁷

That forgiveness is necessarily connected to community is not incidental to forgiveness. Rather it is a reflection of the telos of forgiveness, which is the restoration

⁸⁶ Donald B. Kraybill, Steven M. Nolt, and David L. Weaver-Zercher, *Amish Grace: How Forgiveness Transcended Tragedy* (San Francisco: Jossey Bass, 2007), 133. I do not want to idealize the Amish, nor to commend all that is integrally connected to their understanding of forgiveness. However, that forgiveness is woven into the very fabric of Amish communal life such that the community understands itself to have the responsibility to forgive on behalf of those who may not yet be able to do so, and perhaps more significantly that the individuals within the community rely on the community’s willingness to do so, is a critical point.

Kraybill et al note that from the perspective of many outsiders the Amish forgiveness of Roberts did appear to be automatic, instantaneous. And in a sense, they suggest, this is the case. But insofar as this is the case it is only so because of the habits of worship and discipleship by which the community has been and continues to be formed. What appears to be an automatic response is not incidental to an intentional way of life. The authors of *Amish Grace* demonstrate that what allows for forgiveness to spring up spontaneously is a practice which is carefully and painstakingly cultivated.

⁸⁷ The problem of an individual offering forgiveness on behalf of a community, without the support of the community, is the poignant struggle of Simon Wiesenthal in *The Sunflower: On the Possibilities and Limits of Forgiveness* (New York: Schocken Books, 1997). Wiesenthal tells of being asked by a dying SS member for absolution for the officer’s participation in the horrors of a concentration camp. Wiesenthal finds himself unable to respond and wonders later whether or not he ought to have forgiven the man.

of communion. This does not deny the painful reality that there are indeed situations of profound suffering in which the restoration of community with the perpetrator of the suffering is neither possible (e.g. in situations where the perpetrator is deceased) nor prudent (e.g. in situations where the perpetrator is unrepentant and therefore continues to pose a threat of further violence).⁸⁸ But forgiveness recognizes this as a sign of the continued rupture in community which evidences the fall and *not* as the ultimate end to which Christ calls us. Forgiveness even in the midst of such situations that defy reconciliation – and perhaps *especially* in the midst of such situations – is a reminder that though forgiveness can neither undo the suffering of the past nor diminish vulnerability to suffering in the future, it can, in fact, imagine that there is hope for a future which is not bound by the suffering of the past. It can begin to imagine the mending of relationships ruptured, and the memories shattered, by past suffering. That is, forgiveness may open a space for the possibility that the *ought to be*, in fact, *will be* – which is, of course, definitive of hope.

Forgiveness is how the church remembers in hope. Forgiveness is about “drawing out the sting in the memory that threatens to poison our entire existence”⁸⁹ such that it becomes possible to imagine a future which is no longer held captive by the past. Because profound suffering can lead to a crippling of the imagination such that it becomes impossible to remember a past that predates suffering or to imagine a future not

⁸⁸ Nor does the partial nature of forgiveness render it void. Whatever steps can be taken in the direction of forgiveness are steps worth taking. This may mean that acknowledging that there are times in which forgiveness means not wishing evil for another. Perhaps it means being able to pray for another’s well-being. The point is, though the telos of forgiveness is reconciliation, forgiveness is not diminished by its incompleteness, because forgiveness is a reflection of, and movement towards, the eschatological redemption promised by Christ. As such, its fulfillment is not contingent upon human attempts to get it right, but on the power of the Holy Spirit.

⁸⁹ Tutu, 271.

still mired in that suffering, redemption necessarily involves a freeing of the imagination. Forgiveness, insofar as it creates a space for the activity of the Holy Spirit, can open up possibilities for the future that are simply unimaginable as long as the future remains clouded by the suffering of the past.

4.5.2 Bearing Witness

In what follows I suggest that not only can the memory of past suffering be redeemed such that one who has suffered is no longer bound by the memories of the past nor isolated by those bonds, but that one who has suffered profoundly can bear witness to the hope of redemption. And in so doing one who has suffered profoundly can become a blessing for others. In order to do this I define “witness” by differentiating between watching and witnessing. I then suggest that witnessing to the redemption of suffering is never a denial of suffering but is instead a recognition that the power of God’s love prevails over even the most horrendous suffering. Finally, I argue that the recognition – even the inchoate recognition – of the narrative and incorporative dimensions of redemption witness to the possibility of change, to the possibility, that is, that the future is not, in fact, determined by the suffering of the past. And that hope resides in the promise that the future is open to God’s continued grace and love.

Contemporary secular discourse regarding the naming of those who have experienced profound suffering has shifted away from that of “victim” to that of “survivor.” This linguistic shift has the advantage of defining one who has suffered in terms of strength rather than of weakness, in terms of activity rather than of passivity. And though “survivor” definitely has theological advantages over “victim” as well,

particularly in terms of agency, it is still a theologically inadequate designation in large part because of its individualistic assumptions in terms of identity. I have chosen to speak in terms of *witness* instead because this designation necessarily includes both an element of testimony to the power of God working in and through situations of suffering while being simultaneously grounded in relationship. A “survivor” is understood simply as one who has lived another day. A survivor, therefore, may well live for herself alone. A witness, on the other hand, necessarily exists as a *living symbol* pointing others towards the redemption found in and through the love of Christ. As such, *witness* is fundamentally a teleological designation.

Witnessing is *not* coterminous with watching or seeing. To watch is to be a spectator but to witness is to become, in a qualified but significant way, a participant. John Milbank claims that spectator violence, the non-participatory watching of violence, is perhaps intrinsically *more* violent than participation in acts of violence themselves.⁹⁰ Milbank’s suggestion rests on his understanding that in watching violence the spectator remains detached, uninvolved, and therefore un-impacted by the violence. Such detachment can render the spectator void of empathy for those who suffer violence. In fact, perhaps it can render the spectator incapable of empathy, rendering the spectator more prone to actual violence. Milbank’s claim is correct insofar as *watching* violence is not *witnessing* violence. To watch violence in a detached manner or voyeuristic manner – or worse yet, for sport – is, indeed, itself a form of violence.⁹¹ To *witness* suffering –

⁹⁰ John Milbank, *Being Reconciled: Ontology and Pardon*, Radical Orthodoxy Series (New York: Routledge, 2003), chapter 2.

⁹¹ I remain unconvinced that such violence is qualitatively *more* violent than participatory violence. The point is that spectator violence *is* violence. It is the form that is different not the degree.

whether one's own or that of another (and the one to whom suffering is narrated is, in fact, a witness to that suffering) is not violence, but is a form of solidarity because to witness to suffering is to pronounce a judgment upon that suffering. It is a recognition that the suffering of violence is *not* God's intention.

One of the starkest and most disturbing images in *Night* is Wiesel's description of the hanging of three prisoners – two grown men and one young boy.⁹² The entire prison camp is forced to witness the execution. Wiesel explains that the two adults die instantly, but the boy simply does not weigh enough to break his neck, so he dangles for nearly a half an hour, slowly suffocating. Wiesel, a young adolescent himself, speaks of looking into the child's eyes as he is marched past the barely still alive boy. Though Wiesel does not describe this moment as a moment of witness nor as a moment of solidarity, it seems to me quite likely that in the moment, in the gaze of another suffering person, the little boy recognized an affirmation of his own humanity in the prisoners who met his eyes. Wiesel did not look on for sport, he was not a detached spectator, but a witness to the incredible inhumanity of the child's suffering and in that witness he was united with the boy in his suffering.⁹³

When I speak of bearing witness to suffering it is to this sense of solidarity, of validation of the humanity of the other, that I refer. When one who has suffered profoundly begins to recognize the redemption of their own suffering such that they can bear witness of that suffering to others, a solidarity is created through which hope for one's own future redemption is inextricably bound to the hope for the redemption of

⁹² Wiesel, 63-65.

⁹³ The camp guards, however, who watched were *not* witnesses but were spectators who were, in fact, guilty of violence regardless of whether or not they participated in the actual hanging.

others. Bearing witness to suffering is always, then, an act of solidarity.⁹⁴ Witness is that dimension of redemption which is primarily other rather than self-directed. It is the dimension of the redemption of suffering through which the life of one who has suffered profoundly becomes, itself, a gift to others. “Those who go through their suffering and produce (or even, in a sense, become) a diamond that can reflect the light of hope, are offering other people the most precious gift imaginable.”⁹⁵

Bearing witness in the aftermath of profound suffering does not mean that one has forgotten the depth of one’s suffering. It is not a denial of the intensity of the suffering, nor a naïve refusal to recognize the significant harm that the suffering has done – and continues to do. Rather, bearing witness “is based not on the illusion that evil has been overcome, but rather on the knowledge that it has not entirely prevailed.”⁹⁶ In fact, bearing witness recognizes that it is in remembering suffering well, in its re-narration, that one is able to remember suffering not merely as an instrument of horrible pain but also as the vehicle for incredible grace. That suffering has not entirely prevailed leaves a space for hope, for a future that is not merely a replica of the past’s suffering. This hope for the future never forgets or denies the contingent realities of past suffering, but it no

⁹⁴ For more on the significance of bearing witness within a therapeutic setting, see Judith Lewis Herman, *Trauma and Recovery* (New York: BasicBooks, 1997), 246-7.

⁹⁵ David Ford, *The Shape of Living: Spiritual Directions for Modern Everyday Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1998), 166.

⁹⁶ Herman, 211. In her memoir, *The Glass Castle*, Jeannette Walls offers a poignant example of the ways in which the scars of past suffering (whether physical or metaphysical) bear witness to the failure of suffering to prevail. Though not physically abused, Walls was neglected. As a young child she was routinely left alone to cook and care for herself. At the age of three, while preparing herself a hot dog she scalded herself with boiling water, leaving a scar on her chest, which she remained acutely self-conscious about well into adulthood. She describes the first time her now husband saw the scar, “he said it was interesting. He used the word ‘textured.’ He said ‘smooth’ was boring but ‘textured’ was interesting, and the scar meant that I was stronger than whatever it was that had tried to hurt me.” Jeanette Walls, *The Glass Castle: A Memoir* (New York: Scribner, 2005).

longer grants suffering primacy or ultimacy. As such, while continually shaped by the past, hope is uniquely open to the promise of the future, to the new thing God is doing.⁹⁷

This openness to the future that acknowledges its continuity with the past allows for an ever-increasing recognition that change is possible, that the future is not merely a ceaseless repetition of the past. Significantly the bearing witness of this reality to others who suffer is simultaneously to bear witness to this for oneself. The reception and embodiment of the new story made possible in and through redemption necessarily involves a transformation of the self which may lead to further re-narration of one's story as well as to greater and deeper incorporation within communities of caring. The vocational dimension of redemption, while remaining largely dependent upon the other two, is also to some extent reciprocal with them, perhaps especially with the narrative dimension, as it is in the realization of the vocation of bearing witness that the new narrative of redemption is performed.⁹⁸ The hope of witness, and the witness of hope, cannot be reduced to sentimentalism or blind optimism. "It is a mode of knowing, a mode within which new things are possible, options are not shut down, new creation can happen."⁹⁹ Such hope for new creation, the hope to which redemption bears witness, is

⁹⁷ In speaking of biblical interpretation, Stephen Fowl suggests there are three primary approaches. One can approach the text as if it is a determined text with one meaning at all times for all people. One can approach the text as if it is indeterminate such that there is no definitive meaning to be found in the text. Or, one can approach the text from what Fowl refers to as an underdetermined text which both shapes and is shaped by the community in which it is interpreted. This third category of Scripture interpretation, the underdetermined approach, is an apt analogy for the hope to which I am suggesting redemption bears witness. Stephen Fowl, *Engaging Scripture: A Model for Theological Interpretation* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1998), chapter 2.

⁹⁸ Hogue suggests that change in oneself is made possible through the deliberate re-writing of one's story. Redemption, however, is less a matter of the individual re-writing of a story, and more a matter of learning to re-narrate the story of God's redemption in and through the body of Christ. See David Hogue, *Remembering the Future, Imagining the Past: Story, Ritual, and the Human Brain* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2003), 107.

⁹⁹ Wright, 72.

the hope that as those who have suffered are set free *from* the bondage to the suffering of the past, they are set free *for* a future which is bounded only by Christ's redeeming love.¹⁰⁰

4.5.3 – Vocation

This project has largely described the collision of ontological narratives between suffering and redemption. The experiences of suffering, particularly profound suffering inflicted by the cruelty of another human being, though in no way being a chosen or desired experience, is a contingent aspect of a person's identity. There is simply nothing that can be done to change this. That is what I mean by suggesting that the profound suffering I have been describing is ontological – it becomes an integral part of *who* one is, it gets to core of *being* itself. As this chapter has shown, *one of the most enduring and pernicious ways in which profound suffering damages the identity of one who has suffered is by rendering the imagination void of hopeful future stories*. Thus, the final aspect of the redemption of suffering is transforming it such that it is not merely ontological but teleological. That is, the final (temporal) aspect of redeeming the memory of profound suffering is the transformation of that memory into a hope-filled vocation.¹⁰¹ In what follows I explore what I see as the three primary attributes of vocation. It is first and foremost a gift of *moreness* from a good and gracious God.

¹⁰⁰ See Barth, *CD II/1*, 628.

¹⁰¹ The same claim could be made for sin; sin can be transformed into vocation. Think, for instance, of the movies "Schindler's List" (Steven Spielberg, 1993) or "The Mission" (Ronald Joffe, 1986). The focus of this project has been on the sufferer of profound suffering. I have not addressed sin at length. Sin, however, is integrally connected to this conversation of suffering. It is, in a sense, the photographic negative image of suffering.

Vocation is simultaneously the result of the intentional crafting of something beautiful from the rubble of suffering. Lastly, vocation is integrally connected to community.

Vocation is, at root, *moreness*. That is, whereas the therapeutic response to suffering is adaptation, developing coping skills, the new life of redemption entails the reception of a new vocation. Vocation has to do with the flourishing of life, with Jesus' proclamation that he came to offer abundant life. (John 10:10) The *moreness* of vocation is not the self-actualization of Maslow's hierarchy of needs.¹⁰² Nor can this *moreness* be reduced to the consumeristic pursuit of happiness. Rather, vocation is the *moreness* that obviates the diminishment of sin and suffering by augmenting the self, not in an individualistic or narcissistic way, but in a way that is primarily teleological. Thus, the *moreness* of vocation has to do with becoming who one is called to be in and through the waters of baptism. The *moreness* of vocation is the means by which the individual participates in, and contributes to, the larger narrative of God's redeeming work in the world.

This *moreness* of new vocation does not forget the suffering of the past, but finds creative and imaginative ways to integrate it into the new narrative of one's life. Samuel Wells refers to this as "reincorporating the lost."¹⁰³ Wells, speaking in largely eschatological terms, suggests that the end of a story is recognized, at least in part, by the re-weaving into the thread of the narrative, previously discarded bits. Though I in no way intend this to glorify, or even justify, the narratives of suffering I have used throughout this project, the promise of vocation is that somehow God can – and will –

¹⁰² Abraham Maslow, "A Theory of Human Motivation" in *Psychological Review* 50 (4) 1943: 370-396.

¹⁰³ Samuel Wells, *Improvisation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2004), chapter 10.

take the experience of suffering and use it as the soil in which something beautiful might grow.¹⁰⁴

Vocation is something which is more often discovered than it is chosen. This is perhaps more acutely the case in the aftermath of profound suffering. Vocation as a dimension of the redemption of the memory of suffering is both discovered in, and clarified by, the redemptive dimensions of narration and incorporation. That is, as one continues to learn how to narrate suffering rightly as a part of the larger story of God, and as one learns what it means to be incorporated into the community of those striving to live into this larger story, one may receive the gift of vocation.

That vocation is largely a gift of redemption discovered often retrospectively does not lessen human agency in the crafting of vocation. Vocation as a discovered gift is inextricably intertwined with vocation as a choice to make something beautiful, even in the aftermath of the ugliness of suffering. Vocation understood in this way is dependent upon – and perhaps necessarily preceded by (though in such a way as to be mutually reinforcing) – the development of agency (chapter 2) and of trust (chapter 3). Agency and trust allow for hope to take root, filling in the creative gap between the *was* of suffering and the *will be* of redemption. The practices of forgiveness and witness – though by no means the only vocational practices – are both ultimately vocational acts.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁴ This is what the author of Genesis says in regards to Joseph's suffering at the hands of his brothers. What the brothers intended for harm, God intended for good. The Hebrew is *בִּוְיָ*, (*chashav*) which means "intend" but carries with it the connotation of creativity or artistry. God's intention was *not* that Joseph suffer. God's intention was that even Joseph's suffering could be creatively used within the larger narration of God's redemptive work.

¹⁰⁵ I want to again stress here that this is *not* an instrumentalization of ecclesial practices. That forgiveness is a vocational practice does not mean that forgiveness can be practiced for the sake of receiving and crafting a vocation. Rather, the recognition that practices make evident redemption is a reminder that redemption is a reality that one has to be taught to see. The telos of the ecclesial practices is always right

That is, they are ecclesial practices both rooted in an understanding of the vocational calling of discipleship while simultaneously transforming the identity of their practitioners. Witness recognizes that the present is already participating in the redemption of the past while forgiveness, in its openness to the future, allows for the possibility of a future story unbounded by the suffering of the past.

Vocation is bound to community; it is never private. Though it may be experienced in an intensely personal and particular way, the *moreness* of vocation is for the common good, for the building up of the community.¹⁰⁶ Vocation is the means through which one who has suffered profoundly is enabled to become a blessing, a gift, to the church and to the world.

What might it look like to imagine a future unbounded by the suffering of the past and yet in which one continues to tell a truthful story of that suffering as a vocational act? There are countless accounts of those who have suffered profoundly turning transforming their suffering into a vocation. Think, for example, of the story I recount in chapter 3 of Maggy Barankitse who survived the Tutsi massacre in her village of Ruyigi. In the aftermath of such horrifying violence Maggy began an orphanage to care for the twenty-five orphaned children in which she continues to work to raise a new generation of children who will not be bound by the ethnic hatred which left them orphaned.¹⁰⁷ Or, think about Candy Lightner, whose 13-year-old daughter was struck and killed by a drunk driver, and who channeled her suffering into a campaign to end such needless

relationship with God. *That* the practices often aid us in right vision so that we can also see God is the result of God's grace, not the efficacy of our performance.

¹⁰⁶ See 1 Cor 14.

¹⁰⁷ For Maggy's story see Emmanuel Katangole, *The Sacrifice of Africa: A Political Theology for Africa* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011), chapter 9.

suffering.¹⁰⁸ Or, think of the countless writers who have taken their own experiences of suffering and used them to help others who have suffered similarly.¹⁰⁹ Each of these individuals discovered a vocation in and through their suffering. The suffering, while being neither glorified nor justified, is the impetus behind the creation of something new, something which is intended to alleviate or prevent others from experiencing similar suffering. Vocation is an energy and a direction in which the telos of the reincorporation of suffering, even the aspects of suffering one might ardently wish could be forgotten, is participation in the creation of a new narrative.¹¹⁰ Just like there is no way to speak of suffering in the abstract, there is no way to speak of vocation in the abstract. What vocation means in the aftermath of situations of profound suffering necessarily depends on a constellation of factors, including the particulars of the suffering as well as the particularities of the individual, and upon how these factors interact with the creative and redemptive activity of God.

¹⁰⁸ Candy Lightner founded MADD (Mothers Against Drunk Driving) in 1980, shortly after her daughter, Cari's, death.

¹⁰⁹ A good number of the texts I have used in this project serve as examples of this vocational response to personal suffering: Elie Wiesel, Pat Conroy, Alice Sebold, Nancy Raine, and Jill Saward.

¹¹⁰ Nicholas Wolterstorff offers an important cautionary note about how we interpret the acceptance and crafting of a vocation as an element of the redemption of the memory of suffering. Wolterstorff, writing of the loss of his young adult son, recognizes this vocation of those who have suffered to recognize the blessings they have both received and been enabled to give to others as a result of their unique experience of pain. However, in his recognition that his life has changed profoundly as a result of his suffering – in ways that have enabled him to be a blessing to others – he says “without a moment's hesitation I would exchange those changes for Eric back.” I suspect this tension between embracing the redemption of the memory of past suffering while never embracing the suffering itself is a theologically necessary tension with which those who have suffered profoundly will struggle until Jesus' return. See Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Lament for a Son* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987), 73.

Epilogue: Bearing Hope in the Aftermath of Violence: An Experiment in Redemption

In this final section, I revisit the profound suffering of Pecola Breedlove and, using the lens developed in chapters one through four, I engage in an act of theological imagination, considering how and to what extent it might be possible for redemption to be evidenced in the aftermath of this particular situation of profound suffering. This is not intended to be a work of fiction. I am *not* offering literary alternatives to Morrison's work. And this is neither wishful thinking nor a therapeutic exercise. Rather, in what follows I take seriously the claims made throughout this project of the redemptive power of God, working in and through the very earthy body of Christ. I do this while remaining acutely aware of the often partial nature of redemption in this lifetime as well as of the contingency of both suffering and the experience of redemption.

In order to do this I first set the stage by drawing a picture of Pecola as an adult who is just beginning to enter into relationship with a Christian congregation.¹ I then describe three potential scenarios and comment on the implications for redemption of each. That I imagine three scenarios does not imply that I imagine these three possibilities to be exhaustive. Nor does the suggestion of these three scenarios rule out the distinct possibility that Pecola, like Zahra, may not survive her childhood. Furthermore, it does not rule out the equally distinct possibility that if she lives into adulthood she may turn to drugs, prostitution, and even suicide in an attempt to deal with the perduring pain of her suffering. It is, rather, both to suggest that, with a little imagination, redemption may become visible in even the most intractably painful

¹ In each scenario I imagine Pecola engaging in worship in a traditional local congregation. That I do so is not intended to limit the notion of "church" to a local, denominational worshipping community. It is, in fact, quite possible for the Pecolas of the world to find church through any number of communities: inner-city mission organizations, student ministry settings, or service-oriented outreach groups.

situations of profound suffering as well as to acknowledge the complexities of such situations and to emphasize that participation in ecclesial practices does not spontaneously redeem suffering. The three scenarios I describe are:

1. *Vague hope of redemption* – In this scenario I consider a less than desirable possibility. It is one in which there is some hint of redemption, but one in which redemption remains more an implied possibility than an actuality.
2. *Glimpse of redemption* – I then describe a more desirable outcome; one in which redemption is glimpsed with a greater degree of certainty but in which the pain of profound suffering is only marginally obviated.
3. *Bearing witness to redemption* – And finally, I offer an account of what I imagine it might look like for Pecola to begin to experience, and bear witness to, the new life of redemption now.

In order to set the stage for all three scenarios I want first to imagine Pecola as an adult. She is detached, seeming merely to go through the motions of life rather than living it. As a teenager she, like Sammy, ran away from home numerous times. Her mother died during this time and Pecola long ago lost contact with Sammy. In her early twenties she began to settle down, even getting her GED, and she now has a reliable job. She is somewhat of a loner; she has a deep sense of shame and has internalized the belief that she is deserving of scorn and violence. Perhaps this is why Pecola has never entered into any long-term intimate relationships. However, she has never given up the longing to be loved which drove her to desire blue eyes as a child. She is not sure if it is the hauntingly beautiful sound of voices raised in song, or the giddiness of the children

running around before and after worship, or the sheer oddness of the liturgy, or the weekly sharing of the Eucharist. But whatever it is, she finds herself drawn to a small local church. Despite her fear that there is no way God could possibly love her, that she could ever be beautiful or good enough to make God accept her, Pecola hesitantly but steadily becomes more involved in the life of this community.

Scenario 1: Redemption of the Past Remains a Vague Hope

In the first scenario I imagine that Pecola continues to be haunted by her childhood memories – both the explicit, acutely horrifying memories of being raped by her father and beaten by her mother, as well as the implicit memory of the low-level constant veil of anxiety that hung over a home in which violence was never far removed. Though Pecola struggles to submerge these memories somewhere deep inside her, they are routinely triggered by simple things such as the sound of raised voices or the smell of whiskey. Sometimes her memories take the intrusive form of flashbacks and nightmares, but at other times Pecola ruminates over her childhood suffering in her waking hours, often finding herself unable to focus on much else. Pecola feels a deep, aching sadness, or perhaps it is an emptiness. In many ways, this sadness is exacerbated by her assumptions about the people she sees in church. They all seem so happy, so perfect. Their children remind her of the happy children of the white families her mother worked for. She finds herself resenting these families with happy, beautiful children much like she resented the families of the houses her mother cleaned.

In worship Pecola begins to hear prayers offered for those who have suffered. The church's prayers for those who have been abused or sexually assaulted often go unrecognized as prayers for her; that is, she hears the words but makes no connection

with the content. Occasionally, however, such prayers trigger bouts of extreme sadness or rage. She experiences these moments as an invasion, almost as another assault. The memory of the past remains an indelible mark on the soul of her present; she is unable to cease the repetitive re-playing of the first night her father raped her. Her lament is genuine, but it is without direction; rather than lamenting the suffering of her childhood she fluctuates between unremitting periods of generalized but intense sadness, punctuated by explosions of rage, and periods in which she is numb to all emotion. She does not speak of her childhood at all. Though it is never far from her consciousness, she cannot give voice to her pain. Because Pecola remains unable to name the suffering of the past as both the cause and content of her sadness, she cannot renounce it. Rather than repenting of the diminishment of her suffering, Pecola's sense of shame grows stronger the more intently she attempts to squelch her memory rather than struggling to narrate it.

Pecola's inability to narrate her past necessarily precludes any ability to re-narrate it within a new framework. And if during this time, Pecola senses that her suffering is not welcome in the life of the church, that the hidden transcript of the community is one in which only happiness is understood to be faithful and that therefore the negative feelings which overwhelm her are unwelcome, this will make even more difficult an already nearly intractable situation for Pecola. That is, insofar as the narration of a truthful story is a significant dimension of redemption, the expectation that the only truthful stories for faithful Christians are stories of joy and happiness will continue to preclude the stories of the Pecolas of the world from being re-narrated in light of the story of redemption.

Perhaps because church was one of the only places in her childhood where she had felt safe, she continues to find herself drawn to worship. Perhaps her inability to narrate the draw of the community is reflective of her inability to narrate her past. However, despite her continued participation in communal worship there is a sense in which her experience of worship actually seems to reinforce her sense of isolation and therefore to reinforce her sense that the story of her suffering cannot be narrated here. She feels so removed from the other congregants, as if her suffering has made her a different *sort* of person. She often experiences worship much as she experiences much of life – as more observer than participant, as if she is watching it from some great distance. In worship, particularly during the passing of the peace, Pecola finds herself recoiling from the intimacy of physical contact. Though she longs for human touch, she simply cannot expose herself to the vulnerability that comes with touch, so she avoids eye contact and nods her head in the general direction of anyone who approaches her in lieu of shaking hands with others. I imagine that Pecola’s discomfort with touch remains so acute that she is simply unable to participate in the more highly formalized and intently personal liturgical instances of touch – the anointing of a healing service or the imposition of ashes on Ash Wednesday.²

Despite Pecola’s dis-ease with others and despite the fact that she lacks the confidence to initiate relationship, she does begin slowly to make friends with a few members of the congregation who continue to actively seek to engage her in conversation. Though these friendships are handicapped by Pecola’s hesitancy – her

² In chapter three I suggest that the healing liturgy can be done without actual physical contact precisely for those who, like Pecola, are extremely touch-averse. For someone like Pecola, however, I do not imagine this as likely to happen because that which keeps Pecola from tolerating touch also prevents her from seeking out the help she so desperately wants and needs.

stiffness and detachment – with others, this hesitancy does not preclude fleeting moments of intimacy. Sadly for Pecola, however, she continues to lack the confidence necessary to trust her own judgment. So, even though in her heart of hearts she knows a deeper friendship with a handful of people is not only possible, but would be healing, she cannot quite muster the requisite trust. For this reason, in many ways her new life within the ecclesial community is experienced largely as a painful reminder of her own relative isolation rather than as the communion worship is intended to be.

Within the context of the worshipping community Pecola routinely participates in the public rite of confession. However, I imagine that Pecola continues to receive the words of absolution with a degree of skepticism, doubting the words are really intended for her, and wondering if there is any way she can possibly ever be forgiven. Her inability to receive forgiveness is not connected to any sense, let alone any concrete reality, that she *did* something to cause her suffering. Adulthood has, itself, brought her an acute recognition of the vulnerability of children to abuse at the hands of much more powerful adults. For Pecola, the burden she bears is not one of guilt but of shame. That is, she does not imagine that her actions caused her suffering. Rather, she imagines it is her *being* that triggered her parents' violence. Forgiveness for being is, of course, experienced as more elusive than forgiveness for any concrete action she may be able to confess.

Pecola begins to suspect that God will not forgive her because she cannot – or will not, she remains unsure how much will she actually possess – forgive her parents. Especially her father. She imagines she should, but to Pecola forgiveness seems to diminish the severity of her suffering and this is more than she can tolerate. Pecola

would rather hang onto her anger because she is afraid that letting go of her anger would mean letting go of some vital part of who she is and her hold on being is tenuous enough. To forgive her parents would be, in her mind, to lose a bit of herself, leaving her with nothing.

In this scenario there is no doubt that Pecola's life is qualitatively different than the life she lived as a child. She is a productive adult, no longer routinely subjected to violence and abuse. However to the extent that she does, in fact, continue to suffer the memory of violence, whether her *memories* of the suffering from that childhood are redeemed, however, remains a bit ambiguous. On the one hand, Pecola has been incorporated into a caring community of people, even if that incorporation remains – and perhaps always will remain – stilted and halting. On the other hand, insofar as her incorporation into the community of the church remains tentative, Pecola remains unable to hear her story re-narrated by the community. *That* Pecola's story is being woven into God's story is still a rightful claim. But as long as Pecola remains unable to claim this new story as her own, the redemption of her memory remains fleeting at best and she continues to be haunted by the memories of her suffering. In the end, though Pecola's very existence may, in fact, bear witness to God's redeeming and reconciling love she may remain unaware of the reality of this redemption. As a result, rather than trusting in the hope of a future in which redemption is possible, Pecola simply continues to wish that such a hope were possible.

Scenario 2: Pecola Glimpses the Redemption of her Memories of Suffering

In the second scenario I again imagine that Pecola continues, into adulthood, to be haunted by the memories of her profound past suffering. Rather than as intense

flashbacks, in this scenario I imagine that Pecola experiences these memories in something of a detached manner. It is as if she remembers something from a book she read or a movie she has seen. The memories are easily triggered, but generally remain void of emotive content. She knows that she is the child she remembers, but she experiences no continuity between the child she was and the woman she is. When faced with memories of the past she experiences little sadness or anger about what happened to the child and no love for the child she used to be.

As she becomes more involved in the active life of worship, Pecola finds herself intrigued by the liturgy. She enjoys the ebb and flow of the service – moments of silent reflection, moments of communal prayer, readings from Scripture. She begins, albeit slowly, to recognize that she is a part of a much larger story and as such she learns to re-narrate her own story with some degree of insight. This re-narration, however, fills her with turmoil as much as it does solace. The recognition of the sinfulness of her childhood suffering threatens to overwhelm her with moments of overwhelming sadness such that she senses it better to remain a detached observer of her own life. During prayers, particularly prayers that mention the well-being of children, she looks around the congregation and notices the acute vulnerability of the children around her. She wonders how many of them are living her childhood. She begins to lament the suffering of the vulnerable, but rarely in a way that recognizes her own exploited vulnerability. Though her lament is deep it remains largely disconnected from her own experiences.

Though she becomes increasingly aware of the acute vulnerability of others, Pecola cannot recognize her own vulnerability. Rather than remembering her suffering as an act of violence done *to* her, Pecola continues to wrestle with paralyzing feelings of

shame. She recognizes the horror of what happened to her, and even of the significance of such suffering on identity. But this recognition is in principle only. That is, she is extraordinarily empathetic towards others who suffer violence but remains unable to extend that empathy towards herself. As such, she is unable to repent of her own diminishment and, in fact, continues to define herself as one for whom such suffering must have been deserved.

Pecola does claim her adult agency. That is, she does not continue to imagine herself as merely a vulnerable object. However, despite her recognition of the innocence and vulnerability of the children around her, when she reflects back on her own childhood memories she overlays her adult self and adult agency on the child she was. This results in a cognitive dissonance not unlike the dissonance of the story of suffering itself. The result of this misappropriation of agency, while Pecola continues to learn to re-narrate the suffering and childhood and while she learns to recognize her own story as being woven into the larger narrative of God, she continues to cordon off her own narrative of past suffering from her present and from the suffering of others as if these are three unrelated stories that must be held in tension.³

Pecola experiences the communal life of the congregation with the same sense of detachment with which she remembers her past. She finds the interaction between people fascinating. In fact she thinks of herself as quite a people-watcher. And she longs to be an integral part of these interactions. Yet she remains on the sidelines, feeling like more of an observer than a participant. When she is drawn into relationship she remains acutely uncomfortable. Though she forces herself to participate, even to smile, the

³ To a large extent Pecola's narration of her childhood may be likened to the style of Camus' *The Stranger*. She begins to get the details more or less correct, but the details remain cold facts, void of emotional content or import. See Albert Camus, *The Stranger* (New York: Knopf, 1988).

passing of the peace seems threatening. She experiences it as something to be tolerated, not as a healing rite. In order to go through the motions of the liturgical life of the community, particularly the aspects in which physical contact is unavoidable, Pecola continues to numb herself.

She is not unaware of her disembodiment from the community and she does, in fact, make sporadic overtures of friendship with a number of members of the community. And she does develop a degree of intimacy with a few people. However, her fear of vulnerability repeatedly overpowers her yearning for community and even though Pecola recognizes on a cognitive level that she is a valuable member of a community where trust is possible, she remains unable to trust her own judgment. Her nagging distrust of people coupled with her heightened recognition of her need for community results in Pecola becoming something of a satellite to the church community. That is, she remains affiliated, even integrally involved, in the life of the community without being fully incorporated into the body itself.

Unlike in the previous scenario, in this one I imagine that Pecola recognizes that her past suffering is not what God desires for her. Furthermore, I imagine that she recognizes that there is a sense in which she is called to something more than the rather studied detachment with which she now lives. She suspects that the first step towards the future she is called to is forgiveness of the past. And while she wants to forgive her parents she fears that forgiveness entails letting go of something crucial to her identity. She experiences the call to forgiveness as a burden she simply cannot bear. And much like the first scenario, Pecola remains unable to receive forgiveness exactly to the extent that she remains convinced that, though she recognizes that no child deserves the

suffering she experienced, she must be an exception. There is added poignancy to the recognition that there can be no way she deserved her suffering insofar as in this scenario she believes it to be true nonetheless. That is, she cannot relinquish the illusion that something internal to her was the cause of her parents' violence.

Pecola's life, particularly in her concern and tenderness for the vulnerable in her midst, does bear witness to the redemption of her own life. In large part through her participation in the ecclesial practices of her community, Pecola is moved beyond a complete boundedness to her memories of past suffering. However, because Pecola remains capable of recognizing this redemption only in occasional glimpses – snatches of grace – she is not (yet) free to embrace the possibility of a redeemed future. These glimpses of grace are enough to offer her hope that the memory of her suffering will yet be redeemed, that she will eventually be able to narrate her suffering as a part of a story of healing and forgiveness from within a community of which she is a fully incorporated member. However, for the most part, the most Pecola can hope for is that her hope will not prove to be in vain.

Scenario 3: Pecola Bears Witness to the Redemption of her Profound Suffering

In this final scenario I explore what I imagine to be ideal for Pecola. I do not imagine that Pecola's past ceases to be a painful memory, nor do I imagine that it no longer continues to impact Pecola's present and even to problematize her hopes for the future. However, *despite* a level of on-goingness to Pecola's suffering, in this scenario I imagine Pecola, through participation in the practices of an ecclesial community, coming to recognize the redeeming work of Christ in her life such that she does indeed bear witness of the love of God at work in the world to those who know her and her story.

Over time, as Pecola participates in the liturgical life of the congregation she begins to internalize the story of God, active in the world. The crucial part of this story for Pecola is the recognition that the violation of vulnerability by those in positions of power is never a part of God's intention for creation. She learns to recognize what happened to her as sin. This recognition of the disjuncture between the narrative of God's desire and the narrative of her experience is, at first, jarring. The recognition that her childhood narrative was so vastly different from the narrative of the Gospel causes tremendous grief for Pecola. The congregation's public prayers for those who suffer coupled with the liturgical use of the Psalms, however, begins to give Pecola words for her grief. She becomes able actively to lament her own suffering. Early on this lament includes bitterness and anger, perhaps even hatred, for and against her parents. But in time she recognizes that her parents' own suffering created the conditions for her suffering and she comes to lament over them and for a social world in which such suffering remains possible.

Her growing capacity to lament the suffering of her childhood and all that made it possible is accompanied by a deepening recognition that her identity is not dependent upon her suffering, and her determination *not* to allow such suffering to continue to dictate the narrative of her life. This recognition does not, of course, instantaneously undo the mnemonic habits of suffering which continue to plague Pecola. That is, though she continually repents of the habits of suffering which continue to tempt her to blame herself for her childhood she also continues to struggle with intense, sometimes frighteningly intense, feelings of sadness, anger, and fear. However, she experiences a growing ability to narrate these feelings and the memories that provoke them within the

framework of a new narrative in which she recognizes *both* the vulnerability of her child-self as well as the agency of her adult-self as participants in the narrative of Christ's reconciling and redeeming love. This continual re-narrating of her suffering allows her to see, with increasing clarity, that the story of her life is not dictated by the story of her suffering.

Pecola's growing ability to re-narrate her suffering cannot be understood as an isolated intellectual enterprise. That is, though it is in many ways a cognitive act, this re-narration is made possible not simply by the learning of a new story but by the learning of a new story from *within* a new community. Just as in the previous scenarios, I imagine that for Pecola physical expressions of intimacy continue to remain exceedingly difficult. However, I also imagine that within what she comes to perceive as the relative safety of the worship space Pecola slowly comes to tolerate, and eventually even to enjoy, the physical expressions of intimacy such as the passing of the peace. I imagine that, after some extended period of time in which the handshakes and hugs of this liturgical greeting have become comfortable for Pecola, she participates in a healing service in which she begins to experience – or perhaps more accurately to recognize – healing. That this is so does not guarantee that Pecola will not continue to struggle with a discomfort with physical intimacy. Rather, what I imagine it meaning is that she will learn to recognize her discomfort as an element of an old narrative, one which continues to impact her, but is no longer determinative for her life.

During this time Pecola also finds herself increasingly open to friendships with those who are a part of this community. Though her ability to engage in the intimacy of friendship continues to be hampered by her lack of trust, she is increasingly able to

choose to trust despite her continued anxiety. As such, she does begin to engage in relationships which are mutual and reciprocal. Over time the congregation of worship begins to overcome the isolation her suffering and she finds herself becoming more fully incorporated into a broader community which helps her continue to learn to re-narrate her own story as a part of the story of this community.

As Pecola's ability to lament the tragedy of her childhood suffering within the context of a loving community develops, she begins to recognize the pain of her parents' lives with an increasing degree of compassion. As this recognition grows Pecola realizes – perhaps rather suddenly and as something of a surprise – that she has forgiven them. This recognition of forgiveness does not erase her anger and sadness, in fact to some extent it may exacerbate her sadness, but it does make it possible for her to begin to learn to love her parents. And she finds this realization, this experience of love for her parents, to be remarkably freeing.

Inextricably connected to her recognition that she can forgive and even love her parents while still feeling a deep sadness and even anger at the suffering she experienced, is the forgiveness Pecola begins to appropriate for herself. Her early experiences with confession and absolution were trying – she vacillated between fury that *she* was the one confessing someone else's violence and despair that perhaps she really was simply unforgiveable. However, as Pecola's ability to trust her community grows and as she begins to hear her own story narrated back to her by this community in the context of the narrative of God's love, she is able to forgive what she perceived as culpable weakness – her inability to hold her family together and to make her parents love her. She is able to begin to recognize the incongruity of such expectations being placed on an eleven-year-

old child. The more aware Pecola becomes of the incongruity between the narrative of her childhood and the narrative of her adult life within the community of the church the more aware she becomes of the continued presence of the Holy Spirit in her life, bringing her through such profound suffering into a place of profound friendship. The more acutely aware Pecola becomes of God's redemption working in her life the greater her witness of this redemption becomes for others. As such, Pecola becomes not only more hopeful, but a living icon of hope.

These three imaginative scenarios are by no means intended to be absolute. There are an infinite number of variables which might impact the way in which Pecola interacts with the community of the church, not least of which is the manner in which the church performs the liturgy and engages in the practices by which the community is constituted. External contingent factors are equally important – not least of which would include a consideration of how much time has elapsed, Pecola's access to education, and her developmental maturity level as well as whether or not Pecola continues to experience violence in her adult life. This act of theological imagination takes seriously Barth's claim, addressed in chapter one, that redemption is, in fact, in no way contingent upon the individual, the community, or our perceived experience of redemption. What *is* contingent upon both the individual and the ecclesial community, however, is the ability to make redemption evident. Bearing witness in the aftermath of profound suffering is always, first and foremost, a gift of pure grace. Though one who has suffered profoundly may, in fact, embrace the role of witness, it is not something which can be accomplished by the exertion of sheer will-power. The perceived failure of a life burdened by profound

suffering to bear witness is *not* an objective failure of redemption, but evidence of the continued brokenness that continues to cry out for redemption. The significance of this exercise in theological imagination is the theological assertion that the redemption of even the most profound suffering *is* possible. And moreover, that redemption *is* happening. And sometimes God uses the practices of the church to bear witness to the reality of redemption.

This project is ultimately about learning to see rightly. It is predicated upon the understanding that to see rightly is necessarily to see that which is ultimate rather than merely apparent. That God chooses to continue to work in situations of profound suffering through the most ordinary practices of the most ordinary ecclesial communities in order to make apparent the ultimate reality of God's redemptive love is nothing short of miraculous. That those who have suffered profoundly are occasionally enabled to become living icons of hope by bearing witness to the redemption of their suffering is a gift of sheer grace.

Conclusion

This dissertation began with the question of whether or not there are some situations of profound violence and suffering that are so horrendous as to be beyond the scope of redemption. And, if not, does redemption necessarily require a level of forgetting? The claim of this project has been that the answer to both of these questions is no. Faced with even the cruelest situations of suffering, I have suggested that the imaginative power of God to redeem human suffering far exceeds even the most atrocious of suffering.

In order to do this I have first shown that human identity is tensed. That is, not only is identity experienced in terms of past, present, and future, but it is actually *constituted* by these temporal dimensions. All three elements of identity are simultaneously present at all times, and each contributes something unique to identity. The *past* is constituted by and made available through the vehicle of memory. The *present* is largely constructed in and through relationships with others. The *future* is present in the imaginative expectations for what is possible. These three elements cannot be separated from one another; they are mutually interdependent. I have dissected them for heuristic purposes and, using insights gleaned from the corresponding disciplines of psychology, sociology, and philosophy, demonstrated how the experience of profound suffering impacts each temporal dimension – and thus the totality of identity – in predictable but unique ways long after the cessation of the instigating violence.

I understand redemption to be the work God the Father continues to do in the world, making all things new as he draws them towards their telos, in the love of Christ and through the power of the Holy Spirit. Drawing on the work of Karl Barth and of

David Kelsey I suggested that the Christian claim is both an objective reality, independent of its apprehension by any given individual, *and* is specific to the very unique needs of particular situations of suffering. That redemption is understood as an *objective* reality is based solely on the promise that God is, indeed, making all things new. That redemption is *particular* is based on the recognition that, given the profundity of suffering and its effects on identity, suffering cannot be redeemed in the abstract. Rather, redemption as new creation must involve the redemption of each temporal aspect in order for the individual whose identity is constituted by this temporality to be redeemed, to be made new.

Though the promise of redemption is ultimately an eschatological promise, it is one which has been initiated in the resurrection of Jesus and therefore can be seen – albeit often in only the faintest of shadows – now. The ability to see redemption now is primarily a matter of training in seeing what *is* rather than merely what appears to be. I have shown that the practices of the church are a means of grace given by God to train the imagination such that the on-going act of redemption comes into focus more clearly. This neither denies nor diminishes the ability to recognize the profundity of suffering, but enables suffering to be re-narrated as a smaller part of a much larger and greater story. This re-narration of suffering both makes possible, and is made possible by, the incorporation of the one who has suffered into the community of the church in which this new narration belongs.

In speaking of the ecclesial practices that train Christians to see rightly I acknowledge the complexity and interrelatedness of such practices. No practice stands alone. Each is both constitutive of, and constituted by, a variety of other practices.

Likewise no single practice develops the vision needed to see redemption. Rather, the gift given to the church is a constellation of practices, each of which is grounded both in the tradition of the church and in the particularity of the local congregation. The practices I suggested for addressing each dimension of suffering are in no way intended to be comprehensive. I suggested a number of practices which are most suitable for addressing the temporal effects of profound suffering; these practices, however, cannot be extracted from the communal contexts in which they are embedded. That I isolated them was purely heuristic. I also suggested that the practices cannot be used for the sake of procuring redemption. Instead, the practices aid the church in the act of description. Description, of course, is not an objective or neutral act, but is an inherently theological and ethical act. My account suggests that the ecclesial practices supersede the competing therapeutic practices to the extent that they develop the imaginative habit of right vision.

In this dissertation I have described the teleological nature of the ecclesial narrative of suffering. That is, while therapeutic accounts of the healing of the damage of suffering offer, at best, the promise that one who has suffered profoundly can survive, can learn to move on despite the memory of suffering, the Christian narrative of redemption is one in which one who has suffered profoundly can learn to remember the past *as* a past which has been and is being redeemed. As such, the Christian narrative of redemption creates witnesses – those whose very lives become icons to the redeeming love of God in Christ active in the world through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Implications

This project has applications in both the field of theology as well as that of pastoral care. The particularity of this project – focused on seeing the redemption of the

most profound situations of the suffering of human violence – offers a lens to the wider theological questions of suffering. The point of the particularity has been to broaden the theological imagination. As the church learns to re-situate the narratives of profound suffering within the wider context of God’s continuing work of redemption, the ability to recognize – and therefore bear witness to – redemption may be heightened. Theology cannot be separated from pastoral care. Pastoral care is an inherently theological practice. Likewise, it is my contention that theology should be alert to its pastoral application. Though this project is in no way intended to offer a therapeutic model for the pastoral care of those who have experienced traumatic suffering, I have highlighted the significance of a number of rather ordinary ecclesial practices in order to illustrate what is already going on but may be overlooked even, and perhaps especially, by those for whom such practices are routine. By calling attention to the formative nature of ecclesial practices I hope to make explicit what has been present but hidden all along.

Further Study

In addition to further study connecting this project to pastoral care practices, there are at least two other areas for further study this project motions towards. The first is the very closely related question of what redemption might look like for the perpetrator of such situations of suffering. There would clearly be much overlap in terms of practices – practices of lament, repentance, anointing, friendship, forgiveness, and bearing witness, would all still be vital – though they would be nuanced differently. That is, what it means to lament having caused profound suffering would necessarily look different than what it means to lament having suffered profoundly. A key difference between redemption for the one who has suffered and the one who has caused suffering may be in

the possibility of reconciliation. I suspect reconciliation may be a more constitutive element of redemption for the perpetrator than it is for the one who has suffered. I think it would be interesting and fruitful to expand this project by including a consideration of the redemption of the perpetrator's memory in each temporal dimension as well.

A second area for further study grows out of the awareness (made explicit in chapter three) that there is no such thing as an individual outside of community. And, similarly, that memory is never the exclusive property of the individual. Therefore, the bifurcation of memory and community, though necessary and helpful for heuristic purposes in considering the particularity of individual incidents of profound suffering, is somewhat artificial. That is, there is no individual whose memory is not always already both formed, and continually shaped, by the communities of which the individual is a part. Likewise communities are shaped, in varying degrees, by every individual who participates in the community. Similarly, there is a communal form of memory which is also a significant dimension of the memory of suffering. So, further study on the interplay between how communities remember both communal suffering *and* the suffering of individuals, and how the individuals who constitute those memories would perhaps offer an even broader theological lens into the ways in which the church can learn to remember suffering as a witness to redemption.

My thesis has been that redemption *is* happening in even the most horrendous situations of suffering. Furthermore, I have argued that this redemption is visible for those whose imaginations have been trained to see what is, rather than merely what appears to be. What I have done in this project is to offer a lens, not a theorem. That is, in the end I can neither prove nor explain redemption. The intent of this project has been

to explore the temporal dimensions of redemption. I cannot empirically rule out the possibility that there may be situations of suffering in which the best hope for redemption is the “grace of nonremembering.” I began this project with the conviction that all suffering – and the memory of all suffering – can be redeemed, at least to some extent, *in* time, not merely eschatologically. Having explored this question at length, through a variety of temporal lenses, I now think it is not just theologically compelling, but also experientially possible to suggest that, rather than being forgotten, suffering can, in fact, be re-membered as redemption.

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Biography

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