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## Understanding Sexual Abuse and Redemption of Persons with Sexual Abuse History through the Person and Work of Jesus Christ

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UNDERSTANDING SEXUAL ABUSE and  
REDEMPTION OF PERSONS WITH SEXUAL ABUSE HISTORY THROUGH  
THE PERSON AND WORK OF JESUS CHRIST

WONG, NAG CHI

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE DEGREE REQUIREMENTS OF  
MASTERS OF ARTS IN CHRISTIAN STUDIES AT SEATTLE PACIFIC SEMINARY

2021

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REDEMPTION OF PERSONS WITH SEXUAL ABUSE HISTORY THROUGH  
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the Person and Work of Jesus Christ”

WONG, NAG CHI

SEATTLE PACIFIC SEMINARY

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## Introduction

Sexual Abuse is such an all-encompassing trauma that it can cause vicarious traumatization in those who study and write about it. On the 43<sup>rd</sup> day of my thesis-writing journey, I found myself intimidated by the nature and scope of my thesis' topic and experiencing secondary traumatic stress from reading stories after stories of sexual abuse and its effect on the abused. The heaviness and unspeakableness of this topic left me feeling like screaming in my head while sorrow engulfed my heart and immobilized me on my kitchen floor. During my childhood and teenage years, I suffered several indecency incidents from trusted adults like health care providers and an afterschool tutor. But what I experienced is no comparison to the heartbreaking stories I read from articles and books. Sexual abuse (SA) is a topic that the society wants to turn its eyes away from. Our existing patriarchal structure even outright silences abuse survivors. The Christian faith community also does not talk or hear about SA much, even though Scripture does not shy away from this horrific sin. SA's prevalence is undeniable, ranging from one-time assault to decade-long abuse that started when the victim was a child.

I set out looking for hope for some of the most tortured people among us, but soon found out that without looking squarely at their ultimate suffering, there is no genuine healing and redemption.<sup>1</sup> In order to find the way out of the dark valley, we must first descend into the depth of suffering and death. While pursuing this Christian Studies degree, I am also working in the addiction recovery field as a Marriage and Family Therapist Associate. The vast majority of my

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<sup>1</sup> Redemption is the act of freeing slaves from their bondage through paying the ransom, thus restoring the once stolen worth of the enslaved and delivering them from the bondage and oppression of slavery so that they may begin regaining self-worth. In this sense, the emphasize is not on the 'sinfulness' of person with SA history but rather their 'enslavement to their abuser' physically, mentally, and spiritually. More detailed explanation can be found in Part 3 of this thesis under paragraph "Slavery and Redemption".

female patients and a portion of male patients I work with have been victims of SA. From what my patients told me, the pain that they tried to numb with drugs and alcohol is constant, debilitating, and all-encompassing. One of my patients once told me, “I am not comfortable in my own skin. I hate my past. I hate who I am. I constantly feel raw, cold and wet. I want to get out of this body. I cannot live or function without my drug.” In face of this horrific torture that I witnessed in my patients’ lives, I cannot help but ask, “where can SA survivors find hope in God?”

In order to seek an answer to the above question, I turned to the person and work of Christ. My hope and belief are that through looking at the person and work of Jesus, where the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, we might be able to find the message that God is speaking to God’s hurting children. What is God telling us about Godself, about SA survivors and about all God’s people through Jesus’ incarnation, ministry, crucifixion, resurrection as well as through the eternal Lamb. Much has been written about the impact of SA and the urgency of developing church praxis to address and prevent SA, but less has been written on how God brings hope to SA survivors through the invisible Word of God incarnated, suffered and overcoming death. This thesis is an attempt to fill that important missing piece.

Before considering answers and solutions found in the person and work of Jesus, the first part of the thesis will define SA, looking at the impact of it on survivors. We will do this without any attempt to minimize either the complexity of the damage in the survivors’ bodies, mind, spirit, relationships, or the damage SA causes in society as a whole. Certainly, these are all inter-related. In this thesis, I am using the terms ‘victim’ and ‘survivor’ interchangeably when referring to persons with SA history or those who are currently still experiencing SA. I understand that ‘survivor’ is a more empowering way to describe persons with SA experience

and that ‘victim’ might connote one’s identity exclusively through the lens of loss and destruction. The reason I use both ‘victim’ and ‘survivor’ is because I want to recognize both their loss and strengths without minimizing either facet of their experience.

## **Part 1 What is Sexual Abuse (SA)?**

### **Definitions**

A clear definition of SA is needed before we look into the details of how SA destroys a person and how repair is possible through the person and work of Christ Jesus. Several terminologies are often used when describing sexual violence of one person or party against another. According to the National Institute of Justice, “*the term "sexual violence" refers to a specific constellation of crimes including sexual harassment, sexual assault, and rape.*”<sup>2</sup> Sexual harassment mostly occurs in work settings which involves degrading remarks, gestures, jokes, indecent exposure, victims being touched, grabbed, pinched, or brushed against in a sexual way. Sexual harassment does not involve penetration of any kind.

Sexual assault, on the other hand, is a wide range of activities forced upon a victim who did not or cannot consent due to conditions such as age, disability or intoxication. These nonconsensual sexual acts are proscribed by Federal, tribal, or State law. Like sexual harassment, sexual assault also does not include penetration. Sexual assault includes the following:

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<sup>2</sup> National Institute of Justice, "Overview of Rape and Sexual Violence," 25 October 2010, [nij.ojp.gov, https://nij.ojp.gov/topics/articles/overview-rape-and-sexual-violence](https://nij.ojp.gov/topics/articles/overview-rape-and-sexual-violence). National Institute of Justice (NIJ) is the research, development and evaluation agency of the U.S. Department of Justice. Their mission is to (1) give policymakers and practitioners the best available evidence to make decisions and (2) build knowledge that advances both science and practice. This thesis utilizes information provided by NIJ as they are able to produce a standardized working definitions of rape and sexual violence that informs the judicial system for practical use in prosecution and reduction of crime.

- Intentional touching of the victim's genitals, anus, groin, or breasts.
- Voyeurism.
- Exposure to exhibitionism.
- Undesired exposure to pornography.
- Public display of images that were taken in a private context or when the victim was unaware.

Rape was defined by the National Institute of Justice as “*nonconsensual oral, anal, or vaginal penetration of the victim by body parts or objects using force, threats of bodily harm, or by taking advantage of a victim who is incapacitated or otherwise incapable of giving consent.*”<sup>3</sup>

Both sexual assault and rape are defined as felonies by the judiciary system. Rape or molestation of a child is an especially serious crime. In the state of Washington, rape of a child in the first degree is a class A felony, and the classification of “first degree” is when the person has sexual intercourse with another who is less than twelve years old. It is in the second degree when the victim is between twelve and fourteen years old, and it is in the third degree when the victim is between fourteen and sixteen years old.<sup>4</sup>

SA can be done to any vulnerable person, including children, men and women, and disabled persons where the victim suffers from being controlled by the perpetrator through exercising power (financial, physical or emotional) to engage in sexual activities. SA against a child refers to the sexual assault or rape of a child, which is defined as sexual contact with a minor by force,

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<sup>3</sup> National Institute of Justice, "Overview of Rape and Sexual Violence."

<sup>4</sup> Washington State Legislature, "Chapter 9A.44 RCW SEX OFFENSES," [app.leg.wa.gov](http://app.leg.wa.gov), <https://app.leg.wa.gov/RCW/default.aspx?cite=9A.44>.



trickery, intimidation, or bribery where there is an imbalance in age, size, power, or knowledge. The power difference between the perpetrator and victim is used against the child to silence, threaten, distort, and control him or her into unwanted sexual activities. The perpetrator may be a trusted adult or caregiver, an acquaintance, a friend, a family member, and, less likely, a stranger to the child. Many perpetrators have regular access to the victim child or even live in the same household with the child. Writer and ordained minister Tim Hein made the argument that when talking about child SA, there is no need to mention the word “undesired” in the definition because the child is unable to give any form of consent and the perpetrator is using the child as a sexual object.<sup>5</sup> In most cases, the perpetrator grooms one or more victims through gifting or special attention to gain their trust and establish emotional connection before manipulating them into abusive relationships. “Grooming” is a well-planned and carefully exercised process.<sup>6</sup>

## **Prevalence and Statistics**

### **USA**

According to the Department of Justice’s Bureau of Justice Statistics, the National Crime Victimization Survey,<sup>7</sup> 2019 (2020) found that there are hundreds of thousands of rapes and

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<sup>5</sup> Tim Hein, *Understanding Sexual Abuse: A Guide for Ministry Leaders and Survivors* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP books, 2018), 4.

<sup>6</sup> Victoria State Government, “Child Sexual Exploitation and Grooming,” 14 December 2020, [education.vic.gov.au, https://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/health/childprotection/Pages/expolitationgrooming.aspx](https://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/health/childprotection/Pages/expolitationgrooming.aspx).

<sup>7</sup> “The NCVS is a self-reported survey administered annually from January 1 to December 31. Annual NCVS estimates are based on the number and characteristics of crimes respondents experienced during the prior 6 months, not including the month in which they were interviewed” (U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS), *Criminal Victimization 2019*, by Rachel E. Morgan and Jennifer L. Truman, NCJ 255113 (Washington DC, September 2020), <https://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/cv19.pdf>), 2.

sexual assault victims every year.<sup>8</sup> In 2017, there were 393, 980 victims. In 2018, there were 734, 630 victims, and in 2019, there were 459, 310 victims.<sup>9</sup> In 2018, only 24.9% of the rape or sexual assault victimizations were reported to police. In 2019, the percentage increased to 33.9% but sexual crime is still very much under-reported.<sup>10</sup> The National Violence Against Women Survey (NVAWS), administered in the mid-1990s, estimated that at that time almost 18 million women and almost 3 million men in the United States have been raped. Another 2010 survey found that nearly 1 in 5 women (18.3%) and 1 in 71 men (1.4%) in the United States have been raped in their lifetime. The Developmental Victimization Survey conducted in 2003 indicated that 1 in 12 children in the sample (82 per 1,000) had experienced a sexual victimization in the sample year, including 22 per 1,000 who experienced an attempted or completed rape and 32 per 1,000 who experienced a sexual assault. A 2004 study done by researchers Testa and colleagues found that of the 1,014 women respondents, 38 percent indicated they had experienced sexual victimization since age 14. The National Survey of Children’s Exposure to Violence (NatSCEV) published in 2009 found that 6.1 percent of children had been sexually victimized in the past year and 9.8 percent had been victims during their lifetime.<sup>11</sup> Finally, “Child Maltreatment 2019”, the annual Child Maltreatment report published by National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (NCANDS), revealed that 9.3 percent (60,927) of the 656,000 child abuse victims were sexually abused in 2019. The same report indicates that 29 states reported 877 unique

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<sup>8</sup> U.S. Department of Justice, *Criminal Victimization 2019*, 2.

<sup>9</sup> U.S. Department of Justice, *Criminal Victimization 2019*, 3.

<sup>10</sup> U.S. Department of Justice, *Criminal Victimization 2019*, 6.

<sup>11</sup> U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Office of Sex Offender Sentencing, Monitoring, Apprehending, Registering, and Tracking, *Incidence and Prevalence of Sexual Offending (Part I)*, by Jane Wiseman, SOMAPI Research Brief (Washington DC, July 2015), <https://smart.ojp.gov/sites/g/files/xyckuh231/files/media/document/incidenceandprevalenceofsexualoffending.pdf>.

victims of sex trafficking, with 88.5% female and 10.6 percent male. 30.7 percent of the trafficked female children and 28% of the trafficked male children are also sexually abused.<sup>12</sup>

An extensive medical literature review by Jane Leserman found that in the general US female population, the lifetime occurrence of SA is between 15% and 25% of the population. While there is no empirically developed standard of measuring SA history, the type of sexual encounter and the degree of coercion is generally included as major criteria to be considered. Leserman found that population-based surveys consistently show that women suffer from a higher SA rate than men.<sup>13</sup>

Also, SA and especially child SA, is a crime that was grossly under-addressed. In Lori Handrahan's *Epidemic – America's Trade in Child Rape*, she pointed out how pedophiles enjoy watching others committing sexual violence against children, even against infants and toddlers. The child pornography industry is yielding \$20 to \$50 billion or more globally per year. When broken down by race/ethnicity, it was found that white men in Europe and North America make up well over 90% of the offender population on average and the victims are predominately white also. Handrahan argued that child pornography is a national security threat due to the fact that consumers of child pornography can be found in various local and state law enforcement agencies. Emails circulating child pornography can also be found in accounts used by judges and prosecutors, lawyers, educators of all level, as well as in the church.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Children's Bureau, "Child Maltreatment 2019," 14 January 2021, [acf.hhs.gov](https://www.acf.hhs.gov), <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/documents/cb/cm2019.pdf>, 13, 113.

<sup>13</sup> Jane Leserman, "Sexual Abuse History: Prevalence, Health Effects, Mediators, and Psychological Treatment," *Psychosomatic Medicine* 67 (2005): 906–915.

<sup>14</sup> Lori Handrahan, *Epidemic: America's Trade in Child Rape* (Chicago, IL: Independent Publishers Group), 2017.

## **Globally**

According to studies and statistic provided by the United Nation, women and children are particularly vulnerable to sexual violence and abuse. Their findings are heart-breaking:

- Globally, 6 percent of women report they have been subjected to sexual violence from someone other than their husband or partner.
- Of those who have been in a relationship, almost one in four adolescent girls aged 15 to 19 (24 per cent) have experienced physical and/or sexual violence from an intimate partner or husband. Sixteen per cent of young women aged 15 to 24 experienced this violence in the past 12 months.
- Adult women account for nearly half (49 per cent) of all human trafficking victims detected globally. Women and girls together account for 72 per cent, with girls representing more than three out of every four child trafficking victims. Most women and girls are trafficked for the purpose of sexual exploitation.
- 15 million adolescent girls worldwide, aged 15–19 years, have experienced forced sex. In the vast majority of countries, adolescent girls are most at risk of forced sex (forced sexual intercourse or other sexual acts) by a current or former husband, partner, or boyfriend. Based on data from 30 countries, only one per cent have ever sought professional help.<sup>15</sup>
- One in 5 women and 1 in 13 men report having been sexually abused as a child aged 0-17 years.

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<sup>15</sup> UNWomen, “Facts and Figures: Ending Violence against Women,” March 2021, [www.unwomen.org](http://www.unwomen.org), <https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/ending-violence-against-women/facts-and-figures>.

- 120 million girls and young women under 20 years of age have suffered some form of forced sexual contact.
- Consequences of child maltreatment include impaired lifelong physical and mental health, and the social and occupational outcomes can ultimately slow a country's economic and social development.<sup>16</sup>

### **Public Attention**

In 2006, activist Tarana Burke founded a nonprofit organization named Just Be Inc. which serves survivors of sexual harassment and abuse. Tarana Burke nicknamed her organization “Me Too” because of how often survivors find it hard to share their experience that even uttering the words “me too” can take their entire strength. The #Metoo movement encouraged women to come forward and disclose their SA experience. On October 5, 2017, *The New York Times* published a cover of the systematic sexual harassment and sexual assault against women that Hollywood producer Harvey Weinstein had been committing for decades. One of the victims was actress Alyssa Milano and she tweeted the phrase "Me too" on October 15, 2017. In response, millions of people started coming forward to stand with women who shared their story of suffering from sexual violence. “On Facebook, the hashtag was used by more than 4.7 million people in 12 million posts during the first 24 hours. The platform reported that 45% of users in the United States had a friend who had posted using the term.”<sup>17</sup> It turns out that the movie industry is just one of the many industries and workplaces where women are being sexually

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<sup>16</sup> World Health Organization, “Child Maltreatment,” 8 June 2020, [www.who.int](http://www.who.int), <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/child-maltreatment>.

<sup>17</sup> Wikipedia, “Me Too movement,” 1 June 2021, [en.wikipedia.org](http://en.wikipedia.org), [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Me\\_Too\\_movement#cite\\_note-SantiagoCNN-27](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Me_Too_movement#cite_note-SantiagoCNN-27).

abused by persons of power. Over 200 celebrities, CEOs, and politicians in companies like Uber, Fox News, etc. have since been accused of sexual misconduct and sexual crime investigations and convictions have not stopped. The #MeToo movement forced the public to engage in conversations around gender and power. This movement points to how widespread and under addressed SA has been. “Many of the stories highlighted the dynamics of power, control, inequality, and sense of male entitlement. The stories also recorded the obstacles women faced when they spoke of their experience, and how frequently they were not believed, or their experience was dismissed as normal.”<sup>18</sup> Up until the #MeToo movement, sexual violence and abuse has not received its due attention. Even though very few want to admit its existence and prevalence, SA is a daily reality to millions of survivors and it is an everyday threat to the vulnerable. Societies want to turn away from this topic or even silence the victims, but we can no longer deny the fact that it is prevalent across social classes, race, education, and cultures and it demands our attention and understanding.<sup>19,20</sup>

## **Body, Sexuality, and God**

### **Body and its ‘Belongability’**

SA is significantly bodily in nature. As created mortal and earthly beings, we live in our bodies as we dwell in this world. Our bodies are the gateway to experiencing and communicating

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<sup>18</sup> Jayme Reaves and David Tombs, “#MeToo Jesus: Naming Jesus as a Victim of Sexual Abuse,” *Review and Expositor* 117 (2020): 207.

<sup>19</sup> Leserman, “Sexual Abuse History.”; Handrahan, *Epidemic*

<sup>20</sup> Handrahan, *Epidemic*

to God, ourselves, and each other.<sup>21</sup> We are bound by time, space, and material substances. Therefore, a theology of embodiment is central to both the discussion of the damage of SA and the redemption of the abused. Since the time of Greek philosophy, a body-soul dualism has been upheld where the body is denigrated as unworthy or less honorable than the soul. Adopting the body-soul dualism can mask the truth that bodies are fashioned and created by God with a purposeful existence and are honorable. They are handiwork that bear God's image and ought not to be abused.<sup>22</sup> We shall not divorce the body from the soul or we will end up dismembering the person, yielding a truncated soteriology as well as a truncated anthropology.<sup>23</sup> Feminist theologian and professor Julia Feder, specializing in theological anthropology, emphasized the incarnational nature of Christian tradition and warns us of the pitfall of using dissociation as a mode of coping with trauma. Dissociating from one's body or meeting the divine through 'out-of-body' mystical prayer experiences can come at a cost especially to SA survivors because it pushes them further away from being in touch with their bodies where they need healing the most.<sup>24</sup> Theology professor Jane M. Grovijahn similarly asks her reader to "appreciate flesh as the very condition on which the soul hinges" as she called theologians to "bring the body back to theology".<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Jane M. Grovijahn, "Theology as an Irruption into Embodiment: Our Need for God," *Theology and Sexuality* 9 (September 1998): 30.

<sup>22</sup> Joy A. Schroeder, "Sexual Abuse and a Theology of Embodiment: Incarnating Healing," in *The Long Journey Home: Understanding and Ministering to the Sexually Abused: A Collaborative Address from Psychology, Theology, and Pastoral Care*, ed. Andrew J. Schmutzer (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2011), 191.

<sup>23</sup> Schmutzer, "Spiritual Formation and Sexual Abuse," 75.

<sup>24</sup> Julia A. Feder, "The Body and Posttraumatic Healing: A Teresian Approach," *Journal of Moral Theology* 9 (2020): 75.

<sup>25</sup> Grovijahn, "Theology as an Irruption into Embodiment," 30.

Recognizing the value of our bodies and to whom our bodies belong is of high importance in Christianity. According to 1 Cor 6:19-20, it is our bodies, not our souls that are the temples of the Holy Spirit. Paul also repeatedly highlights how our bodies formerly belonged to sin and were enslaved to sin, but we ought to present our bodies as a living sacrifice to God (Rom 6:6, 7:24, 8:13, 12:1, 1 Cor 6:20). Andrew Schmutzer pointed out that the foundational understanding behind these teachings is that our bodies are belong-able<sup>26</sup>, either belonging to God or to sin. The presumption is that we have the power to decide to whom we want to offer our bodies. However, as SA perpetrators heinously offend and possess the bodies of the victims, this presumption is banished from SA victims because what they experienced and learned is that their bodies no longer belong to them. In SA, the victim's body is violently taken from them by the abuser. The loss of bodily autonomy and integrity through force or coercion is devastating. What was supposed to be offered to God as a living sacrifice was violently taken away and trampled on. Essentially, SA survivors see their bodies as a site of crime. Therefore, a key aspect of redemption for SA survivors is redemption of the integrity and custody of their body so that their bodies are no longer crime scenes but a sacred place they can reclaim ownership over again. Instead of escaping from the wounded body, spiritual healing is more about coming home to one's body and meeting God there.<sup>27</sup>

### **Sexuality with a Purpose**

God created human sexuality and gave it a mandate and a purpose, making sexuality more than just procreation. In another words, God does not simply want humans to increase in

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<sup>26</sup> Andrew J. Schmutzer, "Spiritual Formation and Sexual Abuse: Embodiment, Community, and Healing," *Journal of Spiritual Formation and Soul Care* 2 (2009): 82.

<sup>27</sup> Feder, "The Body and Posttraumatic Healing: A Teresian Approach," 78.



number for no reason or without ethical boundaries. In *The Long Journey Home: Understanding and Ministering to the Sexually Abused* and *A Theology of Sexual Abuse a Reflection on Creation and Devastation*, theologian Andrew Schmutzer used literary methods to exegete Gen 1-3, and proposed two things: one, that sexuality is rooted in creation theology, and two, that sexuality is the framing theme of Gen 1-2.<sup>28</sup>

Firstly, human sexuality distinguished the Creator from the created being. Schmutzer points out that God of Israel is not like other sexed god and goddesses in ancient Near East. God is not sexed but “supra-sexual.” Therefore, sexuality is part of Creation, not the Creator.<sup>29</sup> In another article Schmutzer suggested that Gen 1:27 describes how it is “male” and “female” that explain “human being” and “it is in sexuality that the image bearers differ from their Creator.”<sup>30</sup>

Secondly, God created male and female in the image of Godself with divine intentions, as theomorphic, as under-king with the purpose to rule, and with gendered personhood.<sup>31</sup> God blessed the man and the woman and set boundaries for them. God gave directives for reproduction to foster life and gave a mandate for humans to form a ruling community to prosper other lifeforms. The functional aspect of human sexuality is therefore “fundamentally linked to the *imago Dei*.”<sup>32</sup> Therefore, human sexuality is “defined within the community, granted a royal

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<sup>28</sup> Andrew J. Schmutzer, "A Theology of Sexuality and Its Abuse: Creation, Evil and the Relational Ecosystem," in *The Long Journey Home: Understanding and Ministering to the Sexually Abused: A Collaborative Address from Psychology, Theology, and Pastoral Care*, ed. Andrew J. Schmutzer (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2011), 111-113.

<sup>29</sup> Andrew J. Schmutzer, "A Theology of Sexuality and Its Abuse," 111-112.

<sup>30</sup> Andrew J. Schmutzer, "A Theology of Sexual Abuse," 792.

<sup>31</sup> Andrew J. Schmutzer, "A Theology of Sexual Abuse: A Reflection on Creation and Devastation," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 51 (2008): 790-792.

<sup>32</sup> Andrew J. Schmutzer, "A Theology of Sexual Abuse," 792.

context, and tasked with an ethical mission...presupposed within the relational and ethical dynamic of the Mandate.”<sup>33</sup>

While there is a divine mandate for humans, as a community, to rule over other living creatures, there is no mandate for humans to rule over each other. SA is the “ethical mission in reverse, custodians in sabotage of their royal family, a distortion of delegated authority, a plundering of fellow image-bearers, a degrading of the redemptive horizon, and a marring of connecting metaphors for God.”<sup>34</sup> Moreover, SA perpetrators dismember the victims’ personhood by treating the victims as an object instead of a holistic person with body and soul. The abuser impairs divine-designed sexual expression by exploiting sexuality’s accountable-function of bonding and reproduction into exploitation. Therefore, the sin of SA tramples on the image of God and deeply ruptures relationships. It is not just evil committed on a personal level but also on familial and social levels.

Many misunderstood SA as out-of-control sexual desire. In actuality, it is a sexual manifestation of aggression instead of an aggressive manifestation of sexuality. It is indeed a brutal exercise of power and control, imposition of authority and domination, and an ultimate act of subjugation. Its aim is to humiliate or even annihilate someone who cannot retaliate, esp. when the victim is a female or a child.<sup>35</sup> Having defined SA, the next section of this thesis will take a closer look at the multiple-layered damage of SA, including physical, psychological, spiritual, familial, and social damages.

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<sup>33</sup> Andrew J. Schmutzer, "A Theology of Sexuality and Its Abuse," 114, 115.

<sup>34</sup> Andrew J. Schmutzer, "A Theology of Sexuality and Its Abuse," 117.

<sup>35</sup> Susan Brownmiller, *Against Our Wills: Men, Women and Rape*, First Ballantine Books ed. (New York, New York: Fawcett Books, 1993), 14.

## **Part 2 What was broken? A closer look at the damage**

### **Complexity of the Suffering – Transcends All Boundaries**

SA damages a person holistically, from the physical to the mental, from the relational to the communal, from the spiritual to the theological. It is a horrific crime and sin given its nature. The magnitude and significance of the destruction that the perpetrator brings to the victim and the whole community is difficult to measure. Victims often experience inability to express pain, while assuming qualities of self-blame, shame and invisibility.<sup>36</sup> Physical, mental, spiritual, interpersonal, and even intrapersonal boundaries are damaged and massively violated during and as a result of SA. Studies found that women with SA history have worse physical and mental health status than women who suffered other forms of victimization.<sup>37</sup> Toinette M. Eugene brings in a womanist-informed definition of SA which includes elements of “violation of a person’s integrity by force and/or threat of physical violence, dishonoring the ethnic of mutuality and care in relationships of domination, and an infraction of one’s psycho-spiritual-sexual integrity. Sexual abuse is a sacrilege of God’s spirit in each of us.”<sup>38</sup>

### **Physical Injury**

Physically speaking, the immediate and short-term harm includes bruises, broken bones, sexually transmitted infections, nausea, vomiting, headaches, and pregnancy. Greater bodily injuries and pain will result if the perpetrator used force. Longer-term physical effects may be

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<sup>36</sup> Gina Messina-Dysert, “Rape and Spiritual Death,” *Feminist Theology* 20.2 (January 2012): 120, 125.

<sup>37</sup> Leserman, “Sexual Abuse History: Prevalence, Health Effects, Mediators, and Psychological Treatment.”

<sup>38</sup> Toinette M. Eugene, “‘If You Get There Before I Do!’ A Womanist Ethical Response to Sexual Violence and Abuse,” *The Journal of the Interdenominational Theological Center* 22 (1995): 105.

nightmares, disturbed sleep patterns, insomnia, stomach pains, and loss of appetite.<sup>39</sup> Physical damage from SA is well studied by a plethora of medical journals published since 1990's. Analysis of these studies reveal that SA contributes to a whole host of physical health disorders that continue to be present in the survivor's life long after the abuse has stopped. SA causes twice the emergency room visits, more physician-coded medical diagnosis, poorer health status, worse physical functioning, and higher behavioral health risk factors. It is noteworthy that survivors who were abused only in childhood and those who had recently experienced abuse as adults report similar intensities of physical problems, illustrating the long-lasting effect of SA in the victim's body. Medical research published by Leserman found that common physical symptoms include abdominal pain and gastrointestinal disorders, pelvic pain and gynecologic disorders, and headaches. Other physical symptoms frequently reported by survivors of SA include shortness of breath, chest pain, palpitations, weakness, faintness and numbness. These symptoms are associated with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and anxiety. For male survivors of SA, abuse involving multiple incidents and penetration appears to be the most harmful.<sup>40</sup>

## **Psychological Injury**

Multiple studies confirm that SA is a substantial risk factor causing a wide range of mental disorders in victims. Victims who suffered SA as children will continue to experience mental disorders from childhood into adulthood, with rates of clinical disorders diagnosed significantly higher in adulthood. In a particular study, medical records of 2,759 sexually abused

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<sup>39</sup> Justin S. Holcomb and Lindsey A. Holcomb, *Rid of My Disgrace: Hope and Healing for Victims of Sexual Assault* (Wheaton, IL : Crossway Books, 2011), 39.

<sup>40</sup> Leserman, "Sexual Abuse History," 906.

children were traced and linked with a public psychiatric database between 12 and 43 years later. 23.3% of the SA victims sought public mental health services compared to only 7.7% of the non-abused control group needing mental health services. SA leads to more than three-fold increase in mental health services utilization. SA survivors have higher chances of experiencing Axis I clinical disorders, including psychotic disorders, posttraumatic stress disorder, anxiety disorder and substance abuse. Increased borderline personality disorder in female victims and increased antisocial personality disorder in male victims. Those abused during adolescent years develop more severe dysfunction than children, due to their awareness of sexual boundaries transgression. Sexually abused adolescents generally have poorer long-term mental health and those exposed to severe abuse involving penetration or multiple offenders were associated with greater risk for psychopathology.<sup>41</sup>

Justin and Lindsey Holcomb in their book *Rid of My Disgrace: Hope and Healing for Victims of Sexual Assault* provided an extensive list of emotional impact and psychological damage of SA that is agonizing to read but also calls for sober attention:

guilt, embarrassment, anxiety, stress, fear, anger, confusion, sexualized behaviors, loss of sex drive, interpersonal problems, denial, irritability, depression, despair, social withdrawal, numbing/apathy, chronic and acute somatizing, feelings of isolation and alienation, restricted affect, nightmares, flashbacks, headaches, difficulty concentrating, diminished interest in regular activities, negative self-image, loss of self-esteem, emotional shock or numbness, erratic mood swings, feeling powerless, disorientation, OCD, panic attacks, body memories, loss of security, confusion of sex with love,

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<sup>41</sup> Margaret C. Cutajar et al., "Psychopathology in a Large Cohort of Sexually Abused Children Followed up to 43 Years," *Child Abuse and Neglect* 34 (2010): 813.

extreme dependency, impaired ability to judge the trustworthiness of others, various phobias, hostility, aggression, change in appetite, suicidal ideation, hypervigilance, insomnia or other sleep disturbance, decreased energy and motivation, exaggerated startle response, eating problems/disorders, self-mutilation, sexual dysfunction, sexual effects (ranging from avoidance to compulsive promiscuity), hyperarousal, inability to concentrate or focus, feeling uncomfortable being alone, gastrointestinal disturbance, substance use and abuse (alcohol and other drugs) and other compulsive behaviors, shock, impaired/ repressed memory, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).<sup>42</sup>

Other psychological damage that SA survivors reported includes mistrust, inability to trust self or other, chronic patterns of self-doubt, interpersonal powerlessness,<sup>43</sup> and disconnection from the world, especially when they were met with silence and victim-blaming when they tried to seek help.<sup>44</sup> Some survivors continue to trust the harmful people instead of healthy ones because of inability to trust and follow their inner judgement or to have a roadmap for seeking safety. Some experience internalized or repressed anger, and find themselves in chronic flight/fight/freeze response and disassociation.<sup>45</sup> Survivors are often unable to describe or communicate pain as well as the overwhelming sense of shame and self-blame.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Holcomb and Holcomb, *Rid of My Disgrace*, 39.

<sup>43</sup> Philip G. Monroe, "The Nature of Evil in Child Sexual Abuse: Theological Consideration of Oppression and Its Consequences," in *The Long Journey Home: Understanding and Ministering to the Sexually Abused: A Collaborative Address from Psychology, Theology, and Pastoral Care*, ed. Andrew J. Schmutzer (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2011), 198.

<sup>44</sup> Joan Miller, "Remain Here with Me: Recovering from the Trauma of Rape," *America* 211.10 (October 13, 2014): 27–28.

<sup>45</sup> Philip Browning Helsel, "Witnessing the Body's Response to Trauma: Resistance, Ritual, and Nervous System Activation," *Pastoral Psychology* 64 (October 2015): 681–693.

<sup>46</sup> Messina-Dysert, "Rape and Spiritual Death," 120.

Psychiatric studies recognize the intersection between mental illness and the person's spirituality. K. I. Pargament and J. W. Lomax pointed out that when faith is a resource, it can help with survivor's self-regulation, attachment and connectedness, emotional comfort, meaning, and spirituality. However, if a survivor has a religious sentiment that lacks comprehensiveness, depth, flexibility and balance, it can lead to excessive and repressed anger, guilt, despair, and suffering. Religious struggles can arise within the survivor, between the survivor and others, as well as with the divine. Pargament and Lomax also brought attention to religious violence, for example clergy SA, that can in itself be the primary source of distress. If that is the case, focusing on the psychiatric illness only may not be sufficient to bring healing.<sup>47</sup>

### **Spiritual Crisis**

SA survivors' identity and self-image is often marred and shattered by the abuse and their connection to themselves, others, and God becomes distorted and broken. They can no longer maintain their pre-abuse ways of living and particular viewpoints.<sup>48</sup> SA not only imposes trauma on the victims' bodies, it also traumatizes the victims' (1) understanding of God and (2) how they see themselves in relation to God. The violation of the victim's physical, mental, and relational boundaries immediately trigger a two-fold spiritual crisis for SA victims. In other words, the travesty drastically alters the survivors' theology as well as their relationship with

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<sup>47</sup> K. I. Pargament and J. W. Lomax, "Understanding and Addressing Religion among People with Mental Illness," *World Psychiatry* 12 (2013): 26-32.

<sup>48</sup> Beth R. Crisp, "Spirituality and Sexual Abuse: Issues and Dilemmas for Survivors," *Theology and Sexuality* 13 (2007): 302, 305.

God. Schmutzer explained how SA is a spiritual trauma that leads to profound faith crisis because of three sobering lessons that every SA survivor learned:

- (1) *“I do not have control over my own body”*
- (2) *“The world is not a safe place for me”*
- (3) *“God, the Almighty One, did not step in to prevent it”*<sup>49</sup>

SA causes collateral spiritual and theological mutilation for the survivors and those who love them. It bids us to look at how God is related to and perceived through the disaster, and how the brutal violation impacts how the survivors understand God. It is not surprising yet heartbreaking when we find evidence showing how SA alienates the survivors from God or even instills hostility in the ways they understand and feel about God.<sup>50</sup>

### **Broken Metaphors**

To understand how spiritual crises come about, we need to bring to cognizance metaphors for God that were broken or otherwise proven “untrue” representation of God for survivors. Scripture provides us with archetypal images of God; for example, God as father, provider, protector, fortress, and refuge. Humans not only understand God through metaphors, but even faith that bridges the divine promises and our human experience upon these metaphors. These metaphors are sometimes referred to as “bridging metaphors” or “controlling metaphors.”<sup>51</sup> All who wish to understand SA needs to look at how SA breaks the bridging

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<sup>49</sup> Schmutzer, “Spiritual Formation and Sexual Abuse,” 67.

<sup>50</sup> Grovijahn, “Theology as an Irruption into Embodiment,” 33.

<sup>51</sup> Schmutzer, “Spiritual Formation and Sexual Abuse,” 76.



metaphor of who God is, as well as inform SA survivors what God does or does not do in face of violence and suffering. For example, if we adopt the metaphor of God as a nurturing and protective father, we count on the truth of God's promise in Scripture that God will be our timely aid. That is why we pray to God and seek help from God in times of trouble and danger, expecting God to deliver us from oppression. However, for sexual abuse victims who suffered incest and were victimized by their parents, the analogy of God as a parent becomes all the more terrifying or even feels treacherous. Studies have found that there is a significant difference between how women survivors of father-figure incest and non-abused women view God. Kane, Cheston, and Greer suggest that transference easily happens in the minds of child incest survivors. If the earthly father who has power over the child is abusive, God the father, who has even more power, may be even more abusive. The metaphor of God as father becomes a symbol of abuse because in the child's mind the father-image of God is an extension of father-the-abuser. Some survivors report that they feel or felt that God was disapproving and rigid, and they experience more anger at God and feel more distant from God.<sup>52</sup> Jane Grovijahn invented the following two terms to describe the religious aversiveness that female child SA survivors describe: 'Not-God' and 'God-Gone-Wrong'. "For many women abused in childhood, God is just like the trusted adult (usually male) who abused them – someone to be feared, possibly appeased and definitely something to be survived".<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Donna Kane, Sharon E Cheston, and Joanne M Greer, "Perceptions of God by Survivors of Childhood Sexual Abuse: An Exploratory Study in an Underresearched Area," *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 21 (1993): 228–37.

<sup>53</sup> Grovijahn, "Theology as an Irruption into Embodiment," 33.

## Broken relationship with God

How do SA victims see themselves in relation to God, if their experience sharply contradicts their identity as a precious and protected child of God? There are multiple ways in which SA victims' relationship with God is contorted by the abuse. Sue Magrath in her book points out that SA survivors "struggle daily with deep theological questions about a suffering humanity and the nature of God."<sup>54</sup> When trying to make sense of God's role in the tragedy, every SA victim must wrestle with the unavoidable question of theodicy: "where were you, God, when they violated me?" Unanswered questions raised in doubt of God's character or conclusions that God does not care can shatter faith.<sup>55</sup>

Grovijahn speaks about a "bodily loss of God" and how the SA survivors' access to God and the wellbeing of their visceral self is interdependent. When a SA victim's body becomes a location of injustice and sin, "God is ripped out of a woman's body in the very same acts that violate her."<sup>56</sup> The intense shame, anger (both repressed and expressed), self-hatred, feelings of being defiled and unworthiness can be debilitating. SA changes the victim's self-consciousness and God-consciousness, forcing them to ask themselves and ask God heartbreaking questions like *How can I be acceptable to you, God, now that my body is defiled?* Messina-Dysert points out that victims are often concerned about their own ability to see themselves in relation to the divine because they "no longer feel capable of embodying the divine."<sup>57</sup> This is especially true for those who did not find support from their faith community and did not receive divine

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<sup>54</sup> Sue Magrath, *Healing the Ravaged Soul: Tending the Spiritual Wounds of Child Sexual Abuse* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2016), 15.

<sup>55</sup> Geoffrey Robinson, "Spiritual Harm and Spiritual Healing in Cases of Sexual Abuse," *The Australasian Catholic Record* 77 (January 2000): 79.

<sup>56</sup> Grovijahn, "Theology as an Irruption into Embodiment," 31.

<sup>57</sup> Messina-Dysert, "Rape and Spiritual Death," 124.

consolation and acceptance mediated through other believers. Some even "feel abandoned or intentionally rejected by the divine", "invisible to the divine" or even see their abuse experience as "punishment and suffering that is warranted."<sup>58</sup> The shame and self-accusation brought on by SA becomes a powerful tool in the Evil One's hand to spiritually attack and oppress the victim and further estrange them from God and from others.<sup>59</sup>

### **Anger**

It is definitely spiritually traumatic for survivors who could not stand the theodicy and abandoned their faith. Yet survivors who manage to hold onto their faith and relationship with God still face ever surging spiritual and emotional challenges. Many survivors experience repressed anger or even feel guilty over their anger towards God or the perpetrator. Anger is not generally viewed as a positive healing force, and at times Jesus' teachings of "turn the other cheek" and "forgive seventy- seven times" are slapped onto survivors' conscience by the church or other spiritual authority figures. In doing so, these spiritual authorities disregard the serious wrong that has been done to the survivors which requires justice or at least an honest recognition.<sup>60</sup> Allowing space for the survivor to feel and even express anger is essential because multiple boundaries have been trespassed and the survivor's life and dignity have been threatened. The capacity to feel anger against violation proves that their lives are worth fighting

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<sup>58</sup> Messina-Dysert, "Rape and Spiritual Death," 127.

<sup>59</sup> Mary DeMuth, "The Hard Road to a Restored Heart: Sexual Abuse Victims Have a Spiritual War to Wage," *Christianity Today* 60.2 (March 2016): 55.

<sup>60</sup> Donna Kane et al., "Perceptions of God by Survivors of Childhood Sexual Abuse: An Exploratory Study in an Underresearched Area." *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 21 (1993): 229.

for and they are valuable.<sup>61</sup> Holcomb and Holcomb explained how anger against injustice and sin is summoned by God and SA is an unquestionably sinful act that warrants God's anger.<sup>62</sup> In fact, 'much revictimization can occur due to a simplistic rush to forgiveness.'<sup>63</sup> Turning repressed rage to expressed rage is critical, yet it still takes years to be processed. Often unprocessed rage separates the survivor from the faith community and acts as a roadblock to their access to God's words of redemption and comfort.

### **Clergy abuse**

Victims abused by clergy suffer from even more complex and layered spiritual trauma. The unraveled SA pandemic both within the Catholic Church and in Christian church in general has horrified believers as well as the secular world in recent decades. Molestation and all forms of SA committed by clergy against the vulnerable ones in the church, especially on young boys and girls, has brought ultimate sacrilege and insult to both Christ and the Body of Christ. Joseph J. Guido explained how detrimental it is when church officials molest and sexually violate vulnerable members of the congregation, particularly because of the sacramental and hierarchical culture of the Catholic Church.

Catholicism maintains that the created order of people and things manifests an otherwise invisible divine order...the priest-perpetrator is not only a trusted and honored figure but is by virtue of ordination an *alter Chrisus*, another Christ, and his betrayal of that trust and dishonoring of that role cannot be separated from his sacramental character and meaning...A bishop's authority

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<sup>61</sup> Beth R. Crisp, "Spirituality and Sexual Abuse," 307.

<sup>62</sup> Holcomb and Holcomb, *Rid of My Disgrace*, 62.

<sup>63</sup> Holcomb and Holcomb, *Rid of My Disgrace*, 138.

derives from that of Christ... a betrayal of the sacramental meaning of his authority and leaves his flock spiritual orphans<sup>64</sup>

It is not difficult to see how SA survivors who experienced such betrayal can no longer trust church governance and operations, nor can they easily trust and offer themselves freely to God whom the clergy-perpetrator has been representing and mediating in worship. Teachings around surrender and submission are particularly mentally arduous for SA survivors to take, in fact those can be offensive and retraumatizing. ‘Surrender’ and ‘submission’ become trigger words when the survivors hear them as meaning offering their bodies up to be abused. It is unrealistic to expect SA survivors to feel trusting and safe enough to relinquish control of themselves and to ‘surrender’ themselves to God.<sup>65</sup>

## **Research**

In addition to what was discussed above, other spiritual effects of SA were found in a study published by Terese A. Hall. Adult survivors of SA who completed the Religious Status Inventory (RSI) rated themselves significantly lower in the areas of Awareness of God, Acceptance of God’s Grace and Steadfast Love, Knowing God’s Leadership and Direction, Involvement in Organized Religion, Experiencing Fellowship, and Being Ethical. This means that survivors of SA feel less loved and accepted by God, experience challenges in trusting in God’s providential care for them for the future and generally find it harder to view suffering as meaningful. Also, survivors have a higher chance of decreasing their involvement in church and

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<sup>64</sup> Joseph J. Guido, “A Unique Betrayal: Clergy Sexual Abuse in the Context of the Catholic Religious Tradition,” *Journal of Child Sexual Abuse* 17 (2008): 257-258.

<sup>65</sup> Magrath, *Healing the Ravaged Soul*, 41.

are less likely to experience a sense of community with others. As a result, there is a higher chance of isolation.<sup>66</sup> When child SA survivors reach adulthood, those who were raised in the church often fall away from religion.<sup>67</sup> 27% of participants in a study identify incest as at least a partial reason for them leaving the faith community of their family of origin.<sup>68</sup> The repulsion experienced by survivors against church is particularly strong when the perpetrator(s) are part of church hierarchy. Even though the survivors may not have outright rejected a relationship with God, they could likely feel unsupported at least and betrayed by the church who failed to protect them. When churches turned a blind eye to the abuse and re-victimized survivors by silencing them or minimizing their pain, it is not surprising if the survivors arrive at the conclusion that the church was allied with their abuser.<sup>69</sup>

### **Non-Christians**

Spiritual implications of SA are not just an issue for Christian victims. Beth R. Crisp explains that all people are inherently spiritual. She defines spirituality as “an awareness of the other, which may be God or other human or divine beings or something else, which provides the basis for us to establish our needs and desires for, understand our experiences of, and ask questions about meaning, identity, connectedness, transformation, and transcendence.”<sup>70</sup> Crisp’s five areas of questioning are significant for survivors as follows. For SA’s impact on *meaning*,

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<sup>66</sup> Terese A. Hall, “Spiritual Effects of Childhood Sexual Abuse in Adult Christian Women,” *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 23 (1995): 129–34.

<sup>67</sup> Magrath, *Healing the Ravaged Soul*, 15.

<sup>68</sup> Kane, “Perceptions of God by Survivors of Childhood Sexual Abuse,” 231.

<sup>69</sup> Beth R. Crisp, “Beyond Crucifixion: Remaining Christian after Sexual Abuse,” *Theology and Sexuality* 15 (2009): 67.

<sup>70</sup> Beth R. Crisp, “The Spiritual Implications of Sexual Abuse: Not Just an Issue for Religious Women?” *Feminist Theology* 20 (2012): 136.

because trust and boundaries of intimacy were violated, the meaning of touch and the meaning of relationship is permanently changed. Previous core assumptions about people and the world are shattered and interpretations no longer hold true. For *identity*, SA causes an identity crisis for victims. They may feel that they are horrible people and experience low self-esteem. As a result, sexual trauma *disconnects* survivors from the community by means of shame, silence, and isolation. To experience healing, all survivors need to go through *transformation*, to process their emotions, to recognize the injustice they are suffering, and to lament that which they have lost. Finally, *transcendence* is essential for survivors who wish to be connected to something greater than themselves and to be reborn from their experience of spiritual death.<sup>71</sup>

### **Relational and Familial Distortion**

Schmutzer argues that Western anthropology is not only dualistic but also excessively individualized. However, when we look at the creation account, we see that humans are created as persons in relationships in the image of a relational trinitarian God. Due to ideologies of hyper-individualism and autonomy, Western anthropology often regards something even as deeply relational as sex as a personally owned entity. Hyper-individualism fostered a culture that lacks awareness around the indispensability of constant human connection, giving rise to ethical oxymorons and ideas like: “my sex life”.

Sex is the most intimate form of relationship as two human beings literally interpenetrate each other, leaving no physical or mental space between them. With an understanding of the relational nature of human and sexuality, we can see that SA is absolutely not just an event but is

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<sup>71</sup> Beth R. Crisp, “The Spiritual Implications of Sexual Abuse.”

indeed a relationship; a perverted relationship that distorts both the abuser and the victim through damage to the most intimate relationship. It has a ripple effect on a larger web of relationships and its destructive force contaminates grounds way beyond the victim's body. The relational dynamic of SA accentuates the devastation factor of human-induced trauma.<sup>72</sup>

### **Marital Sexual Abuse and Incest**

Marital SA is characterized by power and control through force or manipulation by the perpetrator-spouse, more often the husband, within a marriage context. SA is often accompanied by other forms of abuse, for example physical and emotional abuse. Studies found that marital rape was strongly correlated with level of interpersonal violence in the relationship. Acceptance of interpersonal violence, hostility toward women, and early childhood exposure to violence are the three factors that distinguish sexually aggressive males from nonaggressive ones.<sup>73</sup> If the victims try to break away from the marriage and fail to find shelter and hide their location, they could be stalked by the perpetrator and even be killed.

Even more disgusting is SA committed against children by adults within the family. Family, both immediate and extended, are the primary context where children receive love and care. It is a system designed by God to protect weaker members of the covenantal community. Philip Monroe highlighted the inter-relational nature of *Imago Dei* and how SA distorts the

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<sup>72</sup> Schmutzer, "A Theology of Sexuality and Its Abuse," 110.

<sup>73</sup> Lori L. Heise, "Violence against Women: An Integrated, Ecological Framework," *Violence Against Women* 4 (1998): 282.



*Imago Dei* of the developing child while confusing familial relationship and parental functional roles. In an abusive relationship, authority is being held over the victim by the abuser to meet violent ends. This oppression completely reversed God's mandate to love those who are in need and dependent on mercy of others to survive. Monroe pointed out five facets of oppression in child SA and some consequences for the child. First is the abuse of power which causes fear and bodily harm. Second is deception and false teaching that creates moral and relational confusion. Children who are sexually abused often were told by the perpetrator that they are responsible for the wrong committed against them and that abuse is the only way they can earn self-worth. Third is the adult's failure to lead and protect leading to more chaotic choices. Fourth is objectification causing distortion of a child's self-perception and sexuality. Last is forced false worship, where the perpetrator clearly is worshiping and following their evil desires while forcing the child to participate in this idol worship relationship.<sup>74</sup>

### **Family System**

SA within families is not committed by an individual alone, it is often continued or conceded by a family system that is dysfunctional or fail to recognize the abuse that is going on. The family sometimes participates in the abuse by rationalizing, maintaining, and perpetuating the behavior pattern of the abuser. Incest by a parent is the demonstration of profound malicious leadership, completely fracturing the delegated authority that God intended for humanity. Parents or family members in positions of power preying on vulnerable and dependable members

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<sup>74</sup> Monroe, "The Nature of Evil in Child Sexual Abuse," 202-207.

completely counter God's design for accountable stewardship.<sup>75</sup> Schmutzer describes how incest counters God's design for family:

Incest further counters the creation design because a child cannot give or receive as an equal. A son or daughter who represents the union of their mother and father, is not sufficiently "other" to be an object of their parent's sexual love. Incest destroys families because it disregards created boundaries.<sup>76</sup>

The child was involuntarily objectified and sexualized to assume a role only supposed to be fulfilled by a parent. The child was forced to become the "lover". Indescribable confusion, distortion, and shame, along with the parent-perpetrator's threat and victim-blaming silences the child. SA in the family becomes a secret too heavy for the child to keep. The secrecy conceals the unspeakable evil and crushes the child's spirit. It prevents the child and the family from grieving and lamenting the corruption of their sanctuary and teaches the child that relationships develop on a foundation of deception and shame. Unhealed wounds from SA manifest as patterns of dysfunctional relationships, isolation, and mental illness in the child that can be passed down from one generation to the next. SA within the family produces lasting and multi-generational consequences and impacts on all its members.

### **Society, Violence, Patriarchy**

SA isolates victims, distorts relationships, and fragments societies. Schmutzer discusses how SA isolates the "self" from community by stripping survivors of their ability to read social

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<sup>75</sup> Schmutzer, "A Theology of Sexual Abuse," 796.

<sup>76</sup> Schmutzer, "A Theology of Sexual Abuse," 802-803.

interactions and alienating them from others through self-hatred. Struggling with post-traumatic symptoms, survivors spend an enormous amount of energy trying to function in a life characterized by the need to suppress their fight/flight/freeze response and avoid interpersonal and situational triggers. Unfortunately, due to an individualized and overly privatized faith, spirituality and relationship with God is seen as an internal-only experience and strictly transcendence in nature, something ought not to be interfered by everyday difficulties and struggles. As a result, faith communities fail to address or even minimize these physical realities and life struggles experienced by SA survivors and overlook the relational consequence of sin.<sup>77</sup>

### **Patriarchy**

Patriarchal culture condones violence and profits from objectification of women. Such culture also constitutes an environment that practices victim-blaming and justifies rape, allowing the sin of SA to proliferate and perpetuate. Susan Brownmiller in her book *Against Our Will—Men, Women and Rape* thoroughly discusses the history and function of rape in a patriarchal culture; how the penis was weaponized to generate fear and how women are viewed as properties subjected to men's possession and protection. Brownmiller pointed out that sexual violence against women is a forceful demonstration of power and rape can annihilate victims who cannot retaliate due to anatomical differences from the perpetrator who is often a man using his penis as a weapon.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Schmutzer, "A Theology of Sexual Abuse," 800-801.

<sup>78</sup> Brownmiller, *Against Our Will*, 14.

A major predictor of sexual violence against women is the degree of interpersonal violence tolerated in the society at large.<sup>79</sup> The United Nations identified Congo as the rape epicenter of the world. More than 50,000 women reported being raped in a single province in 2007, mostly by rebel soldiers. This shows a clear correlation between violence in society and sexual victimization. Women suffered from gang-rape publicly and victims were abandoned by their husbands and churches due to victim-blaming. Very sadly, even pastor's wives reported being raped and/or battered by their husbands. Extreme patriarchal teachings promote mistreatment of women.<sup>80</sup> Brownmiller suggested that sexual violence, especially against women, can be eradicated only in a society free from dominance of all kinds.<sup>81</sup>

## **Rape Culture**

Messina-Dysert sheds light on how SA is kept alive in our society today by describing what a rape culture is and how it provokes shame, self-blame and invisibility in female SA victims. Rape culture values a woman's chastity over her life, imposing shame on the woman's inability to 'protect her virginity' while at the same time demonstrating a tendency to confuse rape with sex, failing to recognize that rape is a brutal exercise of power and control. This double standard re-victimizes women who were sexually abused through blaming them for their suffering, causing withdrawal and isolation. Victims are often threatened by the perpetrator that if they disclose their abuse, horrible things will happen to them or their love ones. When

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<sup>79</sup> Heise, "Violence against Women," 282.

<sup>80</sup> Steven R. Tracy, "Patriarchy, Rape, and Heroism," 5 December 2008, [www.cbeinternational.org](http://www.cbeinternational.org), <https://www.cbeinternational.org/resource/article/mutuality-blog-magazine/patriarchy-rape-and-heroism>.

<sup>81</sup> Brownmiller, *Against Our Will*, 388-389.

survivors finally are able to disclose the injustice done to them, they are denied justice, rejected, humiliated, and silenced. They suffer from estrangement from the community, believing they are flawed and unworthy of acceptance and belonging.<sup>82</sup> All these experiences lead to a system in which abuse gets continued. Until society stops turning a blind eye to this sin and starts to reckon and take seriously the suffering of SA victims, SA will not be stopped. We continue to tolerate, accede to, and sanction SA by staying complacent and failing to intervene and interrupt the cycle of abuse.

## Scripture

Social-scale destruction and consequences of sexual violation are evident in Scripture, which does not shy away from or mask such abominable sin. There are multiple Biblical accounts of sexual violence committed either by descendants of Abraham or gentiles that set off a domino effect of violence in the society and social disintegration. Through studying of the rape narratives in the Old Testament, particularly Genesis 34, Judges 19, and 2 Samuel 13, Frank M. Yamada came to the conclusion that rape leads to excessive male violence and culminates in social fragmentation. Schmutzer added Genesis 19 into the textual analysis and proposed that political turmoil and the absence of God are also recurring themes in these narratives. In an ancient western Asian society and culture, collective shame and anger are evident when hospitality and safety is replaced by abhorrent misuse of power manifested sexually. There are “antecedent moral, domestic, and cultural patterns that lead up to the female rape, excessive male

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<sup>82</sup> Messina-Dysert, “Rape and Spiritual Death,” 125.

violence, and social fragmentation...entire communities socially estranged or physically destroyed.”<sup>83</sup>

### **Rape and Sexual Violence in Hebrew Scripture**

There is no lack of sexual violence and injustice in the Israelite history adequately recorded in the Hebrew Scripture. Susanne Scholz identified texts on acquaintance rape (e.g. Tamar daughter of David), rape in marriage context (e.g. Sarai and Pharaoh, Sarai and Abimelek), failed rape (e.g. Abishag the Shunammite), resisted rape (e.g. Susanna), rape of enslaved women (e.g. Hagar), gang rape (e.g. Levite’s concubine), rape of men (Lot and two guests), and rape imagery in prophetic literature.<sup>84</sup> Crisp introduced a hermeneutic of rape that helps readers take into account the social location and life experience of different Bible characters, affirming the occurrence of both explicit and implicit rape and sexual victimization of many named and unnamed women in the Hebrew Text. For example, the way Abraham gave his wife Sarah up to different kings for marriage and sex in exchange for his personal safety and wealth can fit into the definition of sex trafficking. The Bible faithfully documented patriarchal attempts to control and suppress women both in times of war and peace. Crisp pointed out that these rape narratives refute modern myths around rape and SA, such as the idea that rape is deserved or rape is committed by strangers. This acknowledgement gives voice to SA survivors readers to acknowledge their own story and raise awareness in the faith community to such oppression around and among them.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Schmutzer, "A Theology of Sexuality and Its Abuse," 129.

<sup>84</sup> Susanne Scholz, *Sacred Witness: Rape in the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2010).

<sup>85</sup> Beth R. Crisp, "Reading Scripture from a Hermeneutic of Rape," *Theology and Sexuality* 14 (2001): 32.

## **Tamar (2 Samuel 13)**

Though there are several accounts of SA within Scripture, the story of the rape of David's daughter Tamar is worth special attention in this thesis for how it eloquently recorded the catastrophic and collateral physical, psychological, spiritual, relational, and societal damage that results from sexual violence. The narration of this abhorrent abuse provided a comprehensive account of what sexual violence can produce. We see evidence of power and control manifested sexually throughout this account. The control element is especially apparent after the violation of Tamar when Amnon's attitude towards Tamar had a 180-degree change and ordered "this thing" –Tamar - to be thrown outside of the door. There was no true sacrificial or altruistic love involved but lust and force. Amnon abused his power and used deceptive means to his perverted ends. The devastating effect of this abuse manifested both in Tamar and in the whole household of David.

The physical and psychological damage of SA is most noticeable in 2 Samuel 13:11-19. Holcomb and Holcomb pointed out that 2 Samuel 13 is portrayed through a sexual assault survivor's eyes, allowing readers to see how Tamar's personal and social boundaries are violated. Tamar was reduced to the state of a disposable object.<sup>86</sup> All elements of SA, including manipulation, negation of victim's will, force, and violence was present in the incident. Tamar's desperate appeal for preservation of her dignity was ignored. We can see how Tamar's physical appearance was altered by her putting ashes on her head and tearing her ornate robe. Tamar

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<sup>86</sup> Richard M. Davidson, "Sexual Abuse in The Old Testament: An Overview of Laws, Narratives, and Oracles," in *The Long Journey Home: Understanding and Ministering to the Sexually Abused: A Collaborative Address from Psychology, Theology, and Pastoral Care*, ed. Andrew J. Schmutzer (Eugene, OR.: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2011), 149.

clearly experienced emotional trauma--including loss of sense of self and identity--crushing shame and degradation, grief and disgrace. Being victimized with these psychological damages, she buried her face in her hands and cried aloud.<sup>87</sup>

The familial, spiritual and social damage of SA can be found in the remaining part of 2 Samuel 13, as well as in many chapters before 2 Samuel 13 and in social fragmentation in later chapters of 2 Samuel. Tamar, the king's daughter, did not receive protection from David the father. David was the one who gave permission to Amnon's request and sent Tamar to him. David was also the one who gave Amnon no punishment for the abominable sin he committed against his sister because he was the king's firstborn. For Tamar, this has no doubt shattered trust and the protective father image of David. It is not hard to imagine that for Tamar, trust was also broken between her and Yahweh the Heavenly Father who failed to protect the SA victim.

Many misunderstood that the rape of Tamar started with Amnon lusting after Tamar, but in actuality the cycle of abuse started at least one generation before them. David lusted after Bathsheba, schemed to take her and to violate her sexually, employed a scheme of deceit to trick Uriah, and abused his power to achieve Uriah's murder in war. All the elements in the account of David's sinful capture of Bathsheba reappear in the narratives about David's offspring Tamar, Amnon, and Absalom, from David's abuse of his power to the rape of Bathsheba to the subsequent bloodshed and political turmoil. As James T. Dennison, Jr. pointed out:

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<sup>87</sup> Holcomb and Holcomb, *Rid of My Disgrace*, 17-21.



The circle which David has drawn with Bathsheba has been drawn within his own house... The David who could not control his own passions cannot control the passions of his sons. The David who would not deny himself discovers his sons will not deny themselves. The house of this kingdom is torn – even as Tamar’s purity is torn from her. So the integrity and dignity of this kingdom is torn: raped, defiled, dishonored.<sup>88</sup>

2 Samuel 13:20-21 is a clear example of silencing and re-victimizing SA victims by a patriarchal family and society. Richard M. Davidson writes, “As too often in cases of domestic rape and incest where the family tries to belittle the seriousness of the sexual violation and cover up the crime, Absalom, apparently for political motivation, minimizes what happened to her.”<sup>89</sup> Tamar remained a “desolate” woman residing in Absalom’s house suffering from prolonged social isolation. “Desolate” is a word used in the Hebrew Scripture (Lam 1:16; 3:11; Isa. 54:1) to describe a person destroyed by an enemy or torn to pieces by an animal.<sup>90</sup> Healing can hardly happen when the survivor is disconnected from support and not allowed to have their suffering acknowledged in a safe context. Perhaps the fact that her story appears in the Scriptures is testimony to God’s remembrance of her. In 2 Samuel 13:22-39, there are clear social and political repercussions of SA including male-male violence, political turmoil, and social fragmentation.<sup>91</sup> Absalom conspired a plot to take revenge for his sister and killed Amnon by the hands of his servants, and although Absalom attempted to exercise retribution and restore justice, he did so without first tending to the survivor’s suffering or seeking the will of God. Sin

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<sup>88</sup> James T Dennison Jr., “The Rape of Tamar,” *Kerux* 3.2 (September 1988): 31.

<sup>89</sup> Davidson, “Sexual Abuse in The Old Testament”, 149.

<sup>90</sup> Davidson, “Sexual Abuse in The Old Testament”, 149.

<sup>91</sup> Schmutzer, “A Theology of Sexuality and Its Abuse”, 129.

snowballed and violence continued to fill the household of the king. As Dennison stated in his analysis of the text, “The drama of the royal house is a drama of the kingdom. This kingdom is riddled with lust and murder; this kingdom is advanced by deceit and injustice.”<sup>92</sup>

### **Part 3 Redemption through Person and Work of Jesus Christ**

#### **Slavery and Redemption**

Parts 1 and 2 of this thesis defined and discussed the multi-layered and multi-dimensional destruction caused by SA on the survivor, the family, and the community. SA victims are enslaved to the perpetrator’s sinful will and act and are devalued, depersonalized and deprived of freedom. They are controlled and held captive physically, psychologically, spiritually and systematically. They are literally a slave- sex slave of their perpetrators. What every survivor needs, and ultimately every human being who is enslaved by sin needs, is a redeemer who can bring redemption to their trampled bodies, minds, and souls. This section of the thesis will turn attention towards the Redeemer who is life, who pours out life, and can restore life.

Exploring and utilizing redemption language in discussing the healing of SA victims is especially appropriate theologically. Redemption is the act of freeing slaves from their bondage through paying the ransom, thus restoring the once stolen worth of the enslaved and delivering

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<sup>92</sup> Dennison, “The Rape of Tamar,” 31.

them from the bondage and oppression of slavery so that they may begin regaining self-worth. For those who believe in a God who has been working redemption in this world and is still actively redeeming all who are under oppression and torture of sin, healing, then, is the process of living into the redemption that has already been accomplished. More precisely, redemption has been accomplished by Jesus Christ because of who he is and what he has done. This thesis suggests that there is redemptive quality in Christ's person, as well as redemptive effect in Christ's work - incarnation, ministry, crucifixion and resurrection -- that is intimately appropriated and applied to the lives of the sexually abused. The physical, psychological and spiritual collateral damage of SA is interrelated and inherently spiritual and theological. Theologians have tried to draw insights from various traditions and theological perspectives to seek explanations for how the redemption process of the SA may come about. In the following section this thesis looks at the elements and process of redemption through the person and work of Jesus Christ.

### **Subsection 1 – Incarnation - Person of Christ**

Drawing from theologian Karl Barth, contemporary theologian Joy A. Schroeder, and personal interpretations of the significance of Christ's incarnation, the following paragraphs attempt to illustrate five facets of the person of Jesus Christ in relation to SA survivors. These five facets include: (1) Christ is "God covenanting with us" (2) Christ is "God caring for us" (3) Christ is "God communing with us" (4) Christ is "God assuming us" and (5) Christ is "God glorifying us".

## (1) Christ is “God covenanting with us”

Christians have a triune God who is both transcendent and immanent. God the Father created humanity, which demonstrated God’s transcendence, hence *being above us*. God the Spirit dwells among humanity, which demonstrates God’s continuous imminence of *being with us*. God the Son, according to Karl Barth, is the point of connection where God *covenants with us*. “Jesus Christ is the reality of the covenant between God and man.”<sup>93</sup> Christ is simultaneously the Word and work of God; as Barth stated, “the *verbum* is also the *opus*.”<sup>94</sup> Christ is the Word in action, connecting Godself with humanity. Christ is the point of connection where God covenants with God’s creation. This act of covenant is an act of binding which makes the divine and humanity inseparable within the being of the Son of God. “In Christ’s existence that God was made man, that consequently his existence was identical with the existence of God.”<sup>95</sup> God and humanity co-exist within the second person of the Trinity. This guarantees that one will not move on without the other. God will never leave or forsake those whom God has entered into a covenant with. Christ being our covenant is a demonstration of faithfulness and it is unending love in action. In the incarnation of the Son of God, the divine and the mortal united and nothing shall take God’s loving care away from those who accept God.

Even more amazing is how this is an event God has willed from eternity, from before creation, which means that Christ is also where “creation and redemption are united.”<sup>96</sup> The fact that this covenant is already set in place speaks a loud message to the sexually abused that God has never excluded them from God’s redemption plan despite how beyond redemption they

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<sup>93</sup> Karl Barth, *Dogmatics in Outline*, Harper Torchbooks 56 (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1959), 69.

<sup>94</sup> Barth, *Dogmatics in Outline*, 67.

<sup>95</sup> Barth, *Dogmatics in Outline*, 69.

<sup>96</sup> Barth, *Dogmatics in Outline*, 69.

might think they are. Nor has God ever left them to their own device to cope with the consuming feelings of shame and isolations. God is ever present and available for every one of them, and this promise is materialized in the person of Jesus Christ.

## **(2) Christ is “God caring for us”**

Not only did Christ bind us to God, He also embodied God’s care for us. God from eternity already knew that humanity is helpless in our sin and suffering. If left without God’s mighty intervention, we are but prey to be devoured by the Evil One. God chose to come into God’s created world because humanity is important in God’s eyes. It is very understandable that SA survivors feel unlovable and unwanted. In Christ, we receive the confirmation that God is determined to be our God and God willed to love us, loved and still loves us.<sup>97</sup>

“God from all eternity willed to become man in Jesus Christ for our good, did become man in time for our good, and will be and remain man in eternity for our good. This work of the Son of God includes in itself the work of the Father as its presupposition and the work of the Holy Spirit as its consequence.”<sup>98</sup>

For SA survivors, the circumstances they cope with are so overwhelming and the darkness they live in can make them feel so desolate that they forget God is caring for them through Christ. “To pronounce the name of Jesus Christ means to acknowledge that we are cared for, that we are not lost. Jesus Christ is man’s salvation in all circumstances and in face of all that darkens his life, including the evil that proceeds from himself.”<sup>99</sup> If the hopelessness is real, the

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<sup>97</sup> Karl Barth, *The Humanity of God* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 73.

<sup>98</sup> Barth, *Dogmatics in Outline*, 65.

<sup>99</sup> Barth, *Dogmatics in Outline*, 71.

care of God is just as real. There is no condition beyond God's willingness and ability to redeem. "God has so acted for our good, does and will so act, that there exists salvation for every lost condition. It is this faith that we are called to believe through the Christian Church and in the Holy Spirit."<sup>100</sup>

### **(3) Christ is "God communing with us"**

God longs to be with us and to commune with us. God in Jesus Christ displayed God's freedom for love and that God is willing to bend downwards and to attach Godself to humanity. Through Jesus Christ, humanity is grafted into God's deity.<sup>101</sup> God does not only dwell "in the heights, but also in the depths, not only great but also small, not only in and for himself but also with another distinct from Him, and to offer himself to him."<sup>102</sup> The person of Jesus Christ demonstrated the welcoming presence of God where God comes close to all humanity, including SA victims, and encloses them into Godself. "God on high is really near to us men in the depths. God is present."<sup>103</sup> This is an extremely important knowledge because SA survivors often do not feel like they belong anywhere. They do not even want to belong to themselves. However, they are part of God through Jesus Christ. Survivors, along with all the injustice and pain that their mind, body, and soul carry, are in communion with God. God does not reject any part of them. God knows very well what helpless state humanity is in and it is by no mistake or accident that God through Jesus Christ includes humanity in God's deity. The second person of the trinity is

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<sup>100</sup> Barth, *Dogmatics in Outline*, 71.

<sup>101</sup> Barth, *The Humanity of God*, 49.

<sup>102</sup> Barth, *The Humanity of God*, 51.

<sup>103</sup> Barth, *Dogmatics in Outline*, 69.

embracing humanity within Godself. As Ghanaian theologian Mercy Amba Oduyoye pointed out, seeing the image of God in women's bodies empowers and encourages women to fight dehumanization.<sup>104</sup>

#### **(4) Christ is “God assuming us”**

Docetism and Gnosticism are some of the heretical movements that the early church battled, as seen in the words of admonishment in 2 John. For those who are heavily influenced by Greek philosophical thinking that upholds body-soul duality, God coming to the world in flesh and bone might be the most absurd idea because the pure and blameless spirit and the filthy and detestable flesh shall never mingle. But in Christ we see the divine embodied, walking and eating, talking and crying, teaching and healing among us. Jesus Christ is God who assumed a human body, shared created substance with us, and experienced all our struggles and pain. In Christ God takes on human form and lives in this physical realm along with all its limitations and tension. God voluntarily entered into Creation, being bound by time and space, became vulnerable to abuse and subjugated to physical deprivation. Incarnation theology is the foundation of our appreciation of how closely God joins us in our everyday embodied experience in this life. For the sexually abused, the good news is that God is not just some spiritual being who is distant and apathetic, who considers their bodily assault and molestation irrelevant and peripheral. Jesus Christ's broken body tells us that “intended embodied living, and especially those in broken and violated bodies deserve empathy and special care. This is also necessary if

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<sup>104</sup> Mercy Amba Oduyoye, “Spirituality of Resistance and Reconstruction,” in *Women Resisting Violence: Spirituality for Life*, ed. Mary John Mananzan et al. (New York: Orbis Books, 1995), 170.

violence is to be adequately addressed.”<sup>105</sup> As the image of the invisible God, Christ is wounded—even after resurrection—the second person of the trinity literally holds woundedness in the hands, feet and side of God.

### **(5) Christ is “God glorifying us”**

God does not simply empathize with humanity; God also reaffirms and professes the worth of the human body and human experience when Christ assumes a human body. “Christian tradition has repeatedly professed that the body is a noble and worthy creation.”<sup>106</sup> Through incarnation, Christ has glorified creation by becoming part of it, putting on human flesh, and dwelling among mortals. God cares to be of one substance with us, and through that communicated God’s holiness to humanity. Christ is the altar, the priest, and the gift that sanctifies whoever draws close to Him and touches Him.<sup>107</sup> Most importantly, incarnation reaffirmed the sacredness of the bodies of SA survivors. Survivors feel a deep sense of worthlessness and hatred towards their own bodies due to the ineffable dehumanization that they went through. Self-hatred, self-harm, self-mutilation, or even compulsive re-enactment of abuse are part of SA survivors’ constant struggles. It is almost impossible for some to see any value in their deformed and unrecognizable bodies and humanness. Therefore, to see that God in Jesus Christ assumed a body just like theirs is an essential step towards acceptance and redemption of their own bodies and humanity. Jesus Christ’s body affirms the essentiality and meritoriousness

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<sup>105</sup> Schroeder, "Sexual Abuse and a Theology of Embodiment," 191.

<sup>106</sup> Schroeder, "Sexual Abuse and a Theology of Embodiment," 187.

<sup>107</sup> Elaine Heath, Tim Krueger, and Megan Greulich, "Conduits of Extraordinary Compassion," 5 March 2013, [www.cbeinternational.org](https://www.cbeinternational.org), <https://www.cbeinternational.org/resource/article/mutuality-blog-magazine/conduits-extraordinary-compassion>



of the survivors' bodies. Not only that, the self-sufficient God freely chose to ultimately become a substitution for all those trapped in hopelessness.<sup>108</sup> This added another layer of worthiness and acceptance.

## **Subsection 2 – Ministry - Work of Christ**

### **Holistic Healing and the Gospel**

In Luke's gospel, Jesus states in his inaugural address that the promise in Isaiah 61:1-2 is being fulfilled through Him - "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor" (Luke 4:18-19 NRSV). For all who are held captive and oppressed, including the sexually abused, Jesus clearly stated that the purpose of his work is to set them free. Jesus did not teach that suffering was a punishment sent by God (John 9:3). On the contrary, Jesus consistently relieves their suffering by healing the sick and driving out demons. Jesus was always filled with compassion for people who suffered (Matthew 9:36, 14:14, 15:32, 20:34). In fact, not one person who came to Him with faith and seeking healing was turned away, but he healed all who came. Not only did Jesus himself heal, he also trained his disciples to heal (Luke 10:9). This healing is in line with what Jesus stated about the purpose of his coming to this world, which is "to give life in its fullness (Jn 10:10)."<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> Barth, *The Humanity of God*, 51.

<sup>109</sup> Leena Augustine, "The Plight of Adivasi Domestic Maids: A Call to Liberating Praxis," *Sevartham* 36 (2011): 54.

## **Woman with Hemorrhages**

A particularly relevant miracle of healing that Jesus performed was to the woman with 12 years of hemorrhages (Matt 9:20-22/Mark 5:24-34/Luke 8:43-48). Schroeder points out that the healing of a women's bleeding vagina offers hope for women who were victimized by sexual violence and suffer from chronic bleeding of their vaginas. It is encouraging for SA survivors to read in Scripture a faithful recording of the healing of such intimate and bodily affliction.<sup>110</sup> Jesus did not participate in victim blaming or exclusion but healed her and publicly praised this women's faith. Elaine Heath writes, "It is vital to remember that Jesus is not bound by our cultural and religious taboos. He's beyond them and he's determined to heal us."<sup>111</sup> For SA survivors, Jesus' ministry proves that God definitely does not ignore or condemn them in any way like the society does, but desires to liberate and release them from their suffering and oppression.

## **Restoring Women's Dignity**

The majority of SA victims have been women. Throughout the Gospels, we read about how Jesus ministered to women and the oppressed and how he brought healing to their bodies and emotion. Jesus also removed their shame and restored their dignity and personhood by defending them, accepting them, and speaking words of truth and grace to them regardless of their social status.<sup>112</sup> Not only that, the Gospel according to John narrated the importance of women's presence in Jesus' ministry and how women are definitely not excluded from both the

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<sup>110</sup> Schroeder, "Sexual Abuse and a Theology of Embodiment," 191.

<sup>111</sup> Elaine Heath et al., "Conduits of Extraordinary Compassion."

<sup>112</sup> Linda Bailey, "Women and Rape," *Pastoral Psychology* 29 (1981): 172.

giving and receiving end of Jesus' ministry. Bonnie Bowman Thurston writes, "In John the ministry of Jesus begins and ends in the company of women...women also exemplify the response to Jesus that the evangelist is seeking to engender."<sup>113</sup> Jesus reaffirmed both women's essentiality and worth, how they shall not be silenced or excluded from the believing community, especially when they are the ones suffering from oppression.

### **The Unnamed Woman**

John 8:1-11 provided us with an eloquent example of how Jesus responded to objectification of women by the elite and powerful scribes and pharisees. This unnamed woman was caught in adultery and was brought to Jesus as a test in order to bring charges against Jesus. This woman was not given a proper trial: there was no witness brought along to testify against her, the male adulterer was not caught or brought with her, and she was not given a chance to defend herself. Evidently, her life did not even matter to those in power and they do not care if she was stoned to death on the spot. The Pharisees just wanted to catch Jesus saying anything that could be condemnable according to their interpretation of the law. It is not difficult to imagine the amount of shame, horror, and hopelessness the woman must have felt as she was made to stand in front of the crowd, about to be killed the next minute. Jesus not only turned the crowd's attention to their own sin and hypocrisy as they claimed the authority to condemn this woman, Jesus forgave the woman's sin and removed her shame. No one talked to the woman or treated her like a human being except Jesus. Jesus gave this woman a voice in the text by

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<sup>113</sup>Bonnie Bowman Thurston, *Women in the New Testament: Questions and Commentary*, Companions to the New Testament (New York: Crossroad, 1998), 83.

addressing her towards the end of the narration and helping her see that she stands on level ground with all those trying to accuse her. This woman was not condemned by Jesus. The woman was freed to start a new life as a human with restored dignity. Here we see evidence of “Jesus’ protest of the treatment which dehumanized women and saw her as a woman in her own right.”<sup>114</sup>

Linda Bailey noticed that when her rape survivor patient recognized her worth in God’s eyes, she was able to “accept herself as a person in her own right, worthy of God’s love even though raped...was able to express her anger and indignation at being violated...experienced grief at the loss of her autonomy.”<sup>115</sup> Valerie Geer employed Mujerista and Womanist theologies to reflect on how those who minister to sex trafficking victims must imitate Jesus’ way of talking with, healing, touching, affirming, and properly seeing and valuing marginalized women. Jesus did this because Jesus “recognized them as human persons made in the image of God.”<sup>116</sup>

### **The Least Among Us**

In Elaine Heath’s book, *We Were the Least of These*, she utilizes reader-response hermeneutics and expounds on Jesus’ description of identification with the least among us in Matt 25:36-46 to discuss its implications for the sexually abused. In this passage, Jesus rewarded the righteous who clothed and fed the least among them and pointed out that any act of

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<sup>114</sup> Bailey, “Women and Rape,” 174.

<sup>115</sup> Bailey, “Women and Rape,” 174.

<sup>116</sup> Valerie Geer, “Truth Be Told: Leveraging Mujerista and Womanist Theologies for Ministry Among Victims and Survivors of Sex Trafficking,” *Priscilla Papers* 31 (2017): 28.

generosity and care is directly effective to Christ himself: “I was naked and you gave me clothing...just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me” (Matt 25:36, 40 NRSV). Jesus also condemned and judged the wicked who showed no mercy or compassion to the least among them. Jesus explained how any act of neglect, violence, and abuse that was done to the least among them is directly done to Christ himself: “naked and you did not give me clothing...just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me” (Matt 25:43, 45 NRSV). Heath shares her epiphany while reading Matt 25:36-46:

I had a profound experience of seeing Jesus with me and in me, suffering with me through the things that had happened. And it just undid me! ... It opened my heart and mind to a different way of thinking about Jesus. I realized that Jesus is with us and in us when we experience sexual abuse, and those things are happening to him, through us. There’s a tight bonding with us in our suffering<sup>117</sup>

Heath proposed a twofold thesis: (1) Jesus is in and with all who suffer and (2) SA survivors are better able to hear God’s voice when they read Scripture through their own experience.<sup>118</sup> SA survivors are the least among us. They were dehumanized by their perpetrators and they were stripped naked physically, psychologically, relationally, and spiritually. They are hungry for compassion, deliverance, and restoration. They are thirsty for righteousness and justice. Jesus Christ is right there with them in their nakedness, hunger and thirst, never left them or forsook them though they may have felt like God has abandoned them to their abuse. This

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<sup>117</sup> Elaine Heath et al., “Conduits of Extraordinary Compassion.”

<sup>118</sup> Elaine Heath, *We Were the Least of These: Reading the Bible with Survivors of Sexual Abuse* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2011).

passage encourages survivors to have faith in Jesus' presence in their suffering. Jesus bears all the abuse with them and for them.

### **Subsection 3 – Crucifixion - Person and Work of Christ**

Some survivors likened their experience of being sexually violated to that of crucifixion and can personally identify with the painful image of Jesus hanging on the cross.<sup>119</sup> Crucifixion is arguably the climax of Jesus' work on earth as we can find an extensive part of the four-fold gospel dedicated to details of how Jesus was arrested, trialed, insulted, flogged, rejected, and crucified. What does Christ's suffering mean to us and to SA survivors? We now take on the challenge of seeking meaning in the passion of Christ as we search for appropriate ways to interpret the significance of Christ's death and apply that to the redemption of SA victims.

#### **Atonement Theory Evolution**

Different theologians throughout the millennia have been propounding the meaning of Christ's crucifixion. The salvific efficacy of crucifixion is often captured and described by the word "atonement". Henri Blocher points out the consistent attention that Scripture pays to atonement and noteworthy association of atonement with Christ's passion:

the theme of atonement could hardly be more prominent than it is in Scripture: the major topic of one book in the Law, the concern of several psalms, an important interest of prophecy.

Atonement lies at the heart of the good news. The striking NT feature is its close association with

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<sup>119</sup> Crisp, "Spirituality and Sexual Abuse," 305.

the death of Jesus, not only in Paul's evangel (1 Cor. 2:2–13), but also in all strands of apostolic witness.<sup>120</sup>

Based on the work of R. W. Dale and E. Brunner, there are five schemes through which the New Testament authors account for the atoning efficacy of Christ's crucifixion: **1) Sacrifice** (Isa. 53, 1 John 2:1-2 and 4:10, Rom. 3:25); **2) Penal Execution** (Isa. 53, 1 Tim. 3:16, 1 Pet. 2:24, Rom. 8:3, Gal. 3:13); **3) Ransom** (1 Cor. 6:20 and 7:23, 1 Pet. 1:19, Gal. 3:23; 5:1–3); **4) Victory** (John 12:31; Col. 2:14; Heb. 2:14; Rev. 5; 12); and **5) Passover** (Luke 22:15–16, John 19:36, 1 Cor. 5:7)<sup>121</sup>

#### **From Penal Substitution to Moral Exemplar Theory**

Both Latin and Greek church fathers contend that sacrifices and penal substitution are piacular. "God's veracity demanded that sin be retributed with the death penalty (Gen. 2:17); Christ offered his mortal body in death as a substitute for ours (*antipsychon hyper pantōn*); thus was our debt repaid."<sup>122</sup> This view is supported by Eusebius, Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, and later by Magisterial Reformers like Luther and Calvin. Luther and Calvin's doctrine of atonement formed the core of evangelical crucicentrism.

Some theologians moved away from penal substitution towards moral exemplary theory of atonement. For example, Anselm upholds Christ's work of supererogation through denial of self rather than enduring penalty. Abelard is the pioneer who introduced a moral influence view

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<sup>120</sup> Henri A. G. Blocher, "Atonement," *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible*, 113-114.

<sup>121</sup> Blocher, "Atonement," 116.

<sup>122</sup> Blocher, "Atonement," 114.

of Christ's Crucifixion while still holding on to the traditional interpretation of Rom 4:25. Anabaptists emphasizes how Christ set forth an example of martyrdom.

### **Against Penal Substitution**

In contrast to these church fathers, Anabaptists, and reformers, Catholic modernism and protestant liberalism rejected penal substitution and the objective theories of atonement. Moltmann disagreed with the notion that God's wrath was appeased in atonement and Pannenberg opposed the interpretation of Christ's death as Christ's payment to God in place of others.<sup>123</sup> Most Liberal, Feminist, Womanist, and Liberation theologians struggle deeply with penal substitutional view of Jesus' crucifixion due to its implication that salvific efficacy was built upon Jesus' abuse. Aruna Gnanadason and Rebecca Larson offer a critique of penal substitution theory and discussed how the problematic "divine child abuse" theory could give rise to an abusive theology that endorsement surrogacy and glorifies suffering.<sup>124</sup> In an abusive relationship, when the teaching of "becoming Christ-like" in combination with "leading a sacrificial lifestyle" is imposed on SA victims, one can imagine the floodgate of harm opening.

Nancy Eileen Nienhuis questioned how "self-sacrifice and obedience, even in the face of abuse and violence, comes to be understood by some as the definition of a faithful Christian

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<sup>123</sup> Blocher, "Atonement," 115.

<sup>124</sup> Aruna Gnanadason and Rebecca Larson, "'We Have Spoken so Long O God: When Will We Be Heard?': Theological Reflections on Overcoming Violence against Women," *Theology and Sexuality* 13 (2006): 16.



identity?”<sup>125</sup> She identified two ways that Christ’s crucifixion is very different from abuse survivor’s suffering: (1) Christ voluntarily went to the cross; and (2) the point of the cross was the resurrection, not the suffering. Christ’s suffering does not prescribe suffering on anyone and thus there needs to be a theology of empowerment and life needs instead of a theology of suffering.<sup>126</sup> Knowing that Christ suffered could be empowering for victims because of the solidarity of Christ with the survivors and the promise of resurrection that follows. James Newton Poling discusses how “Incarnational Atonement” seems to offer a loving image of God, in the form of Jesus freely choosing to suffer, which proves that love is greater than hate and more powerful than violence. Poling suggests that although this theory resolved the problem of an abusive God, it did encourage suffering and ignored the SA victim’s cries for justice and protection.<sup>127</sup>

Arnfríður Guðmundsdóttir called for a “fundamental distinction between a theology that is abusive in essence and a theology that is used for abusive purposes.”<sup>128</sup> Guðmundsdóttir cautions us from making an overgeneralized claim that theology of the cross can only justify or promote abuse and violence. She suggests that her readers engage in a “constructive use of the cross” as both a sign of God’s solidarity with those who suffer and a “symbol of empowerment and resistance to evil.”<sup>129</sup> Mary Grey suggests that Christ’s struggle which ends in crucifixion is

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<sup>125</sup> Nancy E. Nienhuis, “Theological Reflections on Violence and Abuse,” *The Journal of Pastoral Care and Counseling* 59 (1–2) (2005): 111.

<sup>126</sup> Nienhuis, “Theological Reflections on Violence and Abuse,” 122.

<sup>127</sup> James N. Poling, “God, Sex, and Power,” *Theology & Sexuality* 11 (2) (2005): 66.

<sup>128</sup> Arnfríður Guðmundsdóttir, “Abusive or Abused?: Theology of the Cross from a Feminist Critical Perspective,” *Journal of the European Society of Women in Theological Research* 15 (2007): 51.

<sup>129</sup> Arnfríður Guðmundsdóttir, “Abusive or Abused?: Theology of the Cross from a Feminist Critical Perspective,” 51-52.

a protest against all crucifixions. It is “against the necessity of the violent putting to death of the innocent, poor and vulnerable.”<sup>130</sup> Grey also celebrated both Jesus’ life and death as life-giving and inspired by God’s compassionate love. Due to God’s suffering love for creation, we have hope of a restored embodied life.<sup>131</sup> Finally, Gnanadason and Larson remind us that sin is a distorted relationship between human and God as well as between humans. If we hold on to a reduced interpretation of sin, we will stop at the crucifixion of Jesus and omit the necessity of righting relationships between victims and victimizers.<sup>132</sup> Serene Jones sees crucifixion as a demonstration of the power of unending love in the midst of torture and violence, writing that crucifixion is “about the horror of the violence and persistence of love.”<sup>133</sup>

Some theologians like Delores Williams and Mary Hunt are eager to remove Christ’s crucifixion from the centrality of the redemption narrative as an endeavor to break the perceived causality between Christianity and a violent culture. They call for attention to be placed on Jesus’ life and ministry instead of his violent death.<sup>134</sup> I suggest that by doing so, they doubt the necessity of Christ’s crucifixion and reveal an ideology that wants to do away with the reality of violence by discounting God’s effort in exposing and overcoming violence through Christ’s suffering. I am afraid that they place blame on the wrong party. *Patriarchy* has aided and perpetuated the distorted application of atonement theory, not Jesus. As Grey points out:

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<sup>130</sup> Mary C. Grey-Hughes, “Struggling with Reconciling Hearts and Holding Fast to Our Dreams,” *Feminist Theology* 17 (2009): 350.

<sup>131</sup> Grey-Hughes, “Struggling with Reconciling Hearts and Holding Fast to Our Dreams,” 353.

<sup>132</sup> Gnanadason and Larson, “We Have Spoken so Long O God,” 17.

<sup>133</sup> Serene Jones, *Trauma and Grace: Theology in a Ruptured World*, 2nd ed. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2019), xvii.

<sup>134</sup> Gnanadason and Larson, “We Have Spoken so Long O God,” 17.

this...is a distortion of a Cross theology that persuades women, and any victim group, that enduring suffering, never mind its unjust origins, is identifying with Jesus on the Cross, and obtaining a reward in Heaven...Behind this is the distorted image of God, seeming to sanction the logic of violence, sending Jesus, the obedient son, to a violent death.<sup>135</sup>

### **Willing Sufferer**

It is of insurmountable importance that we clarify this: none of the abuse should have happened to the victims, and Christ going through suffering does not endorse abuse. “There is a huge difference between Jesus and the female victims of rape and trafficking: *Jesus was a willing victim.*”<sup>136</sup> There is much more depth in the meaning of Christ’s crucifixion and its achievement than a simple endorsing versus condemning violence. Instead of minimizing the necessity or significance of Christ’s suffering, I argue that we must reject the abusive interpretation of the cross. The four-fold gospel records that Jesus prophesied his own death and resurrection multiple times before his arrest, both plainly and directly and figuratively using parables (Matt 16:21–28, Matt 17:22–23, Matt 20:17–19, Matt 26:1–2, Mark 8:31, Mark 9:31, Mark 10:32–34, Luke 9:21–22, Luke 9:43–45, Luke 18:31–34, John 12:23–28, John 12:35–36, John 13:33–36, John 16:19–33). Although the “messiah” was not prophesied to suffer in the Old Testament, the disciples finally understood that Jesus is the suffering servant in Isaiah 40–55 who took on the messianic role. Jesus’ crucifixion is clearly part of the redemption plan. Jesus was aware of his trajectory and goal as he proactively moved towards its fulfillment. Therefore, it is

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<sup>135</sup> Grey-Hughes, “Struggling with Reconciling Hearts and Holding Fast to Our Dreams,” 347.

<sup>136</sup> Grey-Hughes, “Struggling with Reconciling Hearts and Holding Fast to Our Dreams,” 348.

unhelpful to dispute biblical evidence that Christ's crucifixion is a requisite for redemption of Creation.

Additionally, when we reject Christ's suffering, we are actually rejecting our own suffering. Some of us cannot bear to see the totality and reality of our condition condensed into the form of a man hanging on a cross. Suffering is not just a series of painful events; it is a human condition and a process which we go through. I understand the hankering to escape suffering but can we possibly reject our way out of our suffering? In fact, refusing the salvific efficacy of Christ's crucifixion, could lead to refusing God's endeavor to assume and absorb our suffering, as well as God's benevolence to touch and dwell with all those who suffer. It is important to differentiate between accepting the reality of suffering and endorsing suffering. We need to do the first without doing the second. The good news is God did not save the world through rejection and condemnation, but God loved God's way through the violence to fully overcome it. The way God proved God is stronger than evil is to confront it in its full force and not just to survive it but to thrive and be glorified in the process. God, who dealt with the world as it is, not as what we wished it could have been would otherwise God be unable to meet us where we are, and we could never see the light. But praise God, the Light did come into the darkness.

### **The Invitation**

Through crucifixion, Jesus was confronted by violence face-to-face and was swallowed by abuse of every form - physical, emotional, spiritual, and even sexual violence in the form of

forced exposure. The passion of Christ is a path of descent where Jesus forgoes his will, power, lordship, dignity, safety, physical needs, emotional wellbeing, boundaries, connection, righteousness, and every last bit of his humanity as he continued to move down towards the rock bottom of the sinful world. Parallel with this forgoing process is that Jesus took on and absorbed brutality, insult, rejection, violation, condemnation, torture, pain, sorrow, abandonment, isolation, powerlessness, helplessness, shame, and hatred (being despised?). There in the bottom of the pit, Jesus meets the SA victims who are in the same condition, and were stripped of the same humanity and dignity. “They are on the cross with Jesus, but also that Jesus is with them in their crucifying realities.”<sup>137</sup>

Therefore, Jesus hanging on the cross is an invitation. It is an invitation to travel to the deepest place of suffering and overcome it by allowing Jesus to carry us through it. SA survivors are indeed carried by the One who has already gained victory over all suffering and evil. Jesus came down to the abyss to find them, stands in solidarity with them, bears all their pain, and carries them through all their memories and tortures. The presence and love of Jesus in their pain gives SA survivors the supernatural courage and power to be brutally honest with the reality of their trampled bodies, knowing that Jesus has gone through every moment of their abuse without rejecting any part of it. The fact that Jesus lived through the survivor’s abuse does not only make God more relatable, God indeed has touched and redeemed every experience of SA victim.

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<sup>137</sup> Jones, *Trauma and Grace*, ix.

## Ultimate suffering

In his crucifixion, Jesus was lifted up for the world to see. The question is what does Jesus want the world to see? What do we see? There are at least three revelations embodied and carried in the deformed body of Jesus on the cross - sin of this world, suffering of God, and suffering of this world. First, crucifixion is a public event that exposes the violence of this world. Jesus' nakedness exposed the nakedness of the authorities. The cross revealed the false god that the religious leaders were worshiping and the faithlessness of the world. It also displayed how empty and shameful their actions were. The affliction and persecution that was intended for intimidation puts the shame back on violence.<sup>138</sup>

Second, the cross revealed God's determination to bear the affliction caused by the world's sin. Torment and trauma, pain and sorrow were piled onto Jesus' flogged and bruised body and soul, crushing his every thought, slowly draining every drop of his blood, drawing every breath out of his lungs. Jesus did not avoid but endured every part of the excruciation. Stephen Seamands writes, "In no uncertain terms, the cross tells us that God in Christ is one with us in our suffering...at the cross the depth of his involvement with us is fully revealed"<sup>139</sup> Seamands also interprets God's suffering with us as an attestation to God's goodness and trustworthiness, that God does not "standoff, aloof and unconcerned, unable or unwilling to get involved".<sup>140</sup> Jesus dealt with the root of evil by taking on the effect of sin of the world on

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<sup>138</sup> Stephen Seamands, *Wounds That Heal: Bringing Our Hurts to The Cross* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP books, 2003), 53.

<sup>139</sup> Seamands, *Wounds That Heal*, 15-16.

<sup>140</sup> Seamands, *Wounds That Heal*, 15-16.

himself. God in Jesus suffered for us and it enables us to cope with the suffering of this world. “God became the embodiment of trauma, for me.”<sup>141</sup>

Third, the cross acknowledged and gave voice to the ongoing injustice and misery that SA survivors go through. There is no dissimulating sin’s ramification or pretending that the ramification does not hurt. The broken and abused body of Jesus is visible to everyone. When we look squarely at Jesus’ brutal abuse, torture, and death on the cross, it summons us to also look at the abuse, torture, and death in our midst. Christ was crucified publicly for people to see Him, which gives us strength to see the suffering in ourselves as well as in each other. The society has put so much effort into burying and silencing stories of SA due to fear and stigma. Rev. Robert Wheelock wrote of his own SA victimization, “until the man hears other men tell of the abuse they endured, it is almost impossible to believe that anyone could have been abused like they were.”<sup>142</sup> Tim Hein explained how the moment when we realize that we and those among us have been abused marks the point when we begin to take back what was lost to the abuse.<sup>143</sup> Jesus’ victimization bids us to start looking at the ongoing victimization among us.

### **Sexually Abused Christ**

In addition to experiencing physical, emotional, and spiritual abuse, a number of scholars have concluded that Jesus was sexually abused during his crucifixion. Heath writes, “one aspect

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<sup>141</sup> Hein, *Understanding Sexual Abuse*, 148.

<sup>142</sup> Robert D. Wheelock, “Gently Healing Bruised Reeds,” *Pastoral Life* 52.4 (April 2003): 7-8.

<sup>143</sup> Hein, *Understanding Sexual Abuse*, 25.

of Jesus' crucifixion was explicitly sexual assault. When Jesus was stripped naked and tortured, it was an act of sexual violence. It was meant to heap complete shame upon him. Nakedness is strongly associated with shame in the Hebrew Scripture also. Persons who were taken in battle, for example, were often stripped naked, Noah was naked and in shame before his sons, David's wife was disgusted by David's dancing naked before the Lord. As our Savior voluntarily became a target of such abuse, I see clearly Jesus' solidarity with those of us who've been stripped against our will, pinned down and sexually violated."<sup>144</sup> David Tombs and Jayme R. Reaves offer insights on how authoritarian regimes like the Romans uses crucifixion as a political means to impose state terror and how sexual violence is frequently utilized to demonstrate power over the persecuted and degrade their humanity. Jesus was repeatedly stripped naked in front of a whole camp of Roman soldiers and mocked. Forced exposure combined with flogging is highly sexually violent in nature as well as calculated and deliberant. The purpose is to maximize humiliation.<sup>145</sup> Similar to how society avoids acknowledging SA today, throughout history images of Jesus in paintings and crucifixes have literally covered up Jesus' nakedness with a loincloth. Nowhere in Scripture does it mention that Jesus' nakedness was covered on the cross. Tombs and Reaves concluded that:

- (i) "Jesus was a victim of sexual abuse and he should be acknowledged as such";
- (ii) "Punitive humiliation was central to the abuse, and that sexual violence is highly effective way to do this." It serves to degrade and dehumanize the victim while destroying their sense of self and self-worth.

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<sup>144</sup> Elaine Heath et al., "Conduits of Extraordinary Compassion."

<sup>145</sup> Reaves and Tombs, "#MeToo Jesus," 214.



- (iii) Artistic representation has been misrepresenting the crucifixion scene and covering the disturbing truth, which leads to a failure to recognize the sexual abuse Jesus endured.<sup>146</sup>

Taking an honest look at the crucifixion narrative and naming Jesus as a SA victim has profound healing power for survivors. Diane Langberg wrote about a SA survivor's response to discovering Jesus was a SA victim:

She returned the next week and had barely sat down when she began saying over and over: "They took his clothes. I never saw it before. They took his clothes." This is a woman who had many perpetrators and has countless memories of standing naked as an adolescent in a group of men. Something way down deep in her soul was touched that day when she saw that *Jesus knew and understood the humiliation, exposure, and shame she had experienced.*<sup>147</sup>

Rediscovering and identifying Jesus as a SA victim also opens up conversations in the Christian community about SA. God has never forgotten the sexually abused. God indeed *became* one of them but unfortunately, many did not even realize that. SA survivors suffer revictimization as they are often disregarded or subjected to victim-blaming and stigmatizing inside and outside of churches. "Recognizing Jesus as a victim challenges the prejudice that a

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<sup>146</sup> Reaves and Tombs, "#MeToo Jesus," 217.

<sup>147</sup> Diane M. Langberg, "What Every Minister Should Know about Sexual Abuse," in *The Long Journey Home: Understanding and Ministering to the Sexually Abused: A Collaborative Address from Psychology, Theology, and Pastoral Care*, ed. Andrew J. Schmutzer (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2011), 231.

victim of SA is somehow at fault and/or spoiled by their experience.”<sup>148</sup> The compassion and reverence we have for the body of our savior ought to be extended to all SA victims.<sup>149</sup>

### **Suffering Transferred onto Jesus**

This thesis proposes that God in Jesus being crucified was an act of receiving all the suffering of the world. It is the transferal of all the mutilating and annihilating effect of humanity’s sin onto the Son of God. Seamands wrote: “Christ not only identifies with us completely in our suffering because he has had an experience like ours, he also participates in our suffering because our very own experience of suffering has mysteriously been laid upon him.”<sup>150</sup> Understanding this opens up an avenue where SA survivors can come before God to unload their suffering, trusting that their pain will be held with honor and they will receive healing and dignity. Beyond the texts that bear witness to how Jesus can help those who suffer because of his own suffering, other texts narrate how Jesus calls out to all who are weary and heavy laden to find rest in Him and to be bound to Him as a source of strength as they go through their struggles (Matt 11:28-29). The burdens of shame, of broken trust, of fear, of powerlessness are not for the survivors to bear alone. The promise from God is the peace that surpasses all understanding (Phil 4:7).<sup>151</sup> Seamands hopes that all abuse survivors can “hear Jesus saying, ‘Give it all to me. Let me bear your rejection in my broken body. Let me absorb the pain into myself...Give me the abuse.’”<sup>152</sup>

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<sup>148</sup> Reaves and Tombs, “#MeToo Jesus,” 220.

<sup>149</sup> Schroeder, “Sexual Abuse and a Theology of Embodiment,” 192.

<sup>150</sup> Seamands, *Wounds That Heal*, 18.

<sup>151</sup> J. Edward Ellis, “Experiencing God’s Healing Power: a New Testament Perspective on Sexual Abuse,” in *The Long Journey Home: Understanding and Ministering to the Sexually Abused: A Collaborative Address from Psychology, Theology, and Pastoral Care*, ed. by Andrew J. Schmutzer (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2011), 165.

<sup>152</sup> Seamands, *Wounds That Heal*, 37.

## **Redeeming Shame**

As discussed in part 2, one of the most devastating and destructive burdens that SA survivors bear is shame. The shame that should be borne by the perpetrator as the one who sinned, gets transferred onto the victim who has done nothing wrong to deserve it. The shame that was shed from the offender's shoulder is such a heavy load that often suffocates the victim. It can lead to low self-esteem and manifest as self-sabotaging and self-harm behaviors, including re-enactment of abuse leading to a feeling of being trapped and despair. The shame that was transferred onto the victim by the abuser needs to be brought to Jesus and unloaded at the feet of the cross. It is not a load meant for the abused to carry. Jesus is the only one who can cleanse and sanctify all those who touch Him. The insult and blemish get absorbed and removed by Jesus who alone has the ability to do so. Jesus assumed our suffering on the cross and sanctified it. Through this act of taking on suffering, Jesus restored the worth of SA victims. Jesus took the survivors' shame upon himself on the cross as an act of love providing God's confirmation that every SA survivor is worthy of God's sacrifice and acceptance.<sup>153</sup>

Removing shame and the subsequent harmful impact is not enough. After the survivors' disgrace is removed, the void needs to be filled by God's grace. Holcomb and Holcomb emphasize the creative nature of grace, suggesting that God's grace can dismantle ideas and beliefs of unworthiness and shame that SA survivors develop towards themselves and re-create that which violence destroyed. Because Holcomb and Holcomb define SA as one-way evil from the perpetrator to the victim, therefore they argue that one-way love and grace is needed from God to restore the survivors. "One-way love is the change agent you need. Grace transforms and

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<sup>153</sup> Hein, *Understanding Sexual Abuse*, 148.

heals; and healing comes by hearing God's statements to you, not speaking your own statements to yourself."<sup>154</sup> In Christ's crucifixion we find God's clear declaration of God's love for the sexually abused. God reaffirms their personhood and preciousness which counters the dehumanization and objectification that they suffered. This grace reverses the message of defile and licentiousness and frees survivors from disgrace.

SA survivors are given a new identity through accepting Jesus's work for them. They are declared blameless, holy and above reproach by God because Christ has imputed his blamelessness, holiness, and righteousness to them.<sup>155</sup> They are called chosen, beloved, a new creation, and children of God. They are no longer orphans who feel abandoned by their family, community, and the world. They have a safe place in God. They are indeed wanted and precious. This new identity provides survivors the sense of security necessary to move on to the next step of their healing journey. It enables survivors to experience their anger and rage, to exercise their right to protest against their maltreatment. This new identity tells them that they are worthy of justice and are free to pursue freedom through forgiving themselves and others. It reassures them that God has a plan for them to be healed and to be remembered and for their loss to be mourned and honored.

### **Creating space for anger**

We have discussed how SA can lead to anger in the "Psychological Injury" and "Broken Metaphor" sessions in Part 2. At the cross, we find that God has created space for the expression

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<sup>154</sup> Holcomb and Holcomb, *Rid of My Disgrace*, 45.

<sup>155</sup> Holcomb and Holcomb, *Rid of My Disgrace*, 80.

and transformation of anger. SA survivors are rightfully angry about many things, including the abuser's deception, manipulation, objectification, assault, threatening and control of them. They are also rightfully angry about the system and structure that enables and advantages the perpetrator while disempowering, oppressing, and silencing them. They are even rightfully angry about God's seeming lack of intervention and protection in their situation. Unfortunately, since anger is not considered "appropriate or aligned with Christian teaching," for some survivors, more often female survivors, anger was repressed or they would feel guilty about feeling angry towards their abuser and God. However, as Jesus has demonstrated in cleansing of the Temple, anger is necessary to recognize and communicate that something is not right.<sup>156</sup> Here in SA survivors' case, something is *seriously* not right.

In fact, our anger does not intimidate or push away God. We can find evidence for this at the cross. Seamands offered the insight that "At the cross it was not 'sinners in the hands of an angry God' but 'God in the hands of angry sinners.' Christ became the willing, innocent victim of their rage. But not only their rage – ours too." Seamands reminded us that our anger was heard loud and clear by Jesus and has nailed Jesus on the cross. The reality that Jesus has already willingly borne all the anger of the SA survivors in his broken body testifies that there is nothing that can separate survivors from God's care and they do not need to hold onto their anger for fear that it will offend God. They can freely express their rage and give it to Jesus.<sup>157</sup> Hein provides further cognizance around God's anger with regard to SA and how God wrath stems from God's love for his creation. Even Jesus himself taught that if anyone causes a young child to stumble, it

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<sup>156</sup> Crisp, "Spirituality and Sexual Abuse," 307.

<sup>157</sup> Seamands, *Wounds That Heal*, 69.

is better if “a great millstone were fastened around your neck and you were drowned in the depth of the sea” (Matt 18:6. Recognizing that God is angry on the survivor’s behalf helps them get in touch with their own anger.<sup>158</sup>

### **Chutzpah - anger as attachment**

The Old Testament also gives us clues that God welcomes God’s people to express their anger. The biblical pattern of lament is well established in the Bible, especially in the numerous psalms of lament. As a specific aspect of lament, Mel Leaman discusses the anger and questions directed towards God in Lam 1-3 through the rabbinic tradition of chutzpah. Chutzpah is the process in which people of God disagree and debate with God. “The Hebrew commutation of the word *chutz* is that of ‘outside’ or ‘beyond.’ The word for mouth is *pah*. Together they suggest that the one who uses chutzpah steps outside the confines of typical conversational norms.”<sup>159</sup> God’s suffering people voice their disillusionment, anger, and disenchantment towards God, demanding a righteous response from God, believing and insisting that God eventually will give them an answer or change his mind about certain things. “Chutzpah often carries the negative connotations of insolence, audacity, and even impudence.”<sup>160</sup> However, Leaman pointed out that at the base of chutzpah lies a conviction that God indeed cares about his people. There is a hope that their pain will be heard by God and God will remember his everlasting love for his people

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<sup>158</sup> Hein, *Understanding Sexual Abuse*, 102.

<sup>159</sup> Mel Leaman, “Love’s Angry Lament: Confronting Our Anger with God: Based on Lamentations 1-3,” *The Journal of Pastoral Care and Counseling* 63 (2009): 6.

<sup>160</sup> Leaman, “Love’s Angry Lament,” 1.

and their covenantal relationship. It communicates a yearning for the victim's suffering to be noticed by the divine and a deep conviction that God is righteous, God is compassionate, and God has the power to end suffering. Not only that, survivors who dare to express their anger towards God are indeed demanding intimacy with God out of a desire to be known and be understood. Anger also empowers survivors to argue on behalf of their worthiness and self-respect. Anger is a sign of attachment and it "can be a doorway to deeper understanding, closer intimacy, and a helpful means of identifying problems." All laments should be given freedom to experience and work through their anger and they may discover deeper faith, hope, and life on the other end.<sup>161</sup>

## **Forgiveness**

Compared to anger, forgiveness is an even more difficult subject to navigate. Some authors suggest that forgiveness may not be necessary or possible for SA survivors in this life. Holding on to the option of not forgiving provides some SA survivors with a sense of control.<sup>162</sup> Yet, empirical research suggests that forgiveness is associated with more resilience and higher posttraumatic growth in adult survivors of childhood sexual and/or physical abuse.<sup>163</sup> Another smaller study found that participants who adopt nonjudgmental forgiveness of their perpetrators show an average of 94.9% decline in Traumagenic Psychopathologies.<sup>164</sup> Seeing these promising

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<sup>161</sup> Leaman, "Love's Angry Lament," 8.

<sup>162</sup> Crisp, "Spirituality and Sexual Abuse," 309.

<sup>163</sup> Lauren M. Schaefer et al., "A Concurrent Examination of Protective Factors Associated with Resilience and Posttraumatic Growth Following Childhood Victimization," *Child Abuse and Neglect* 85 (2018): 17.

<sup>164</sup> Bonnie L. Oakes, "God Image, Counseling, and Strategies Used for Healing of Childhood Sexual Abuse," *Journal for the Sociological Integration of Religion and Society* 3 (2013): 39.

research results may prompt us in thinking that forgiveness is something to be achieved the sooner the better. However, multiple scholars warn their readers against simplistic, premature, or even pressured forgiving. Simplistic forgiveness is “a fantasy of bypassing pain.”<sup>165</sup> Premature forgiveness “disregards the offence”<sup>166</sup> and pressured forgiving reinforces a sense of powerlessness and can be in itself a form of abuse.<sup>167</sup> These kinds of forgiveness minimize the scope of the trauma. Instead of healing trauma, they perpetuate it. They are counterproductive and might even excuse and perpetuate the abuse.<sup>168</sup> Forgiveness should not be confused with condoning or minimizing the offense. True forgiveness is beneficial for the self because it ultimately frees the person who was hurt by severing the emotional and spiritual connection with the abuser.

### **Count the loss**

Jesus repeatedly taught forgiveness with the language of debt cancellation (Matt 6:12, 18:21-35; Luke 7:40-48). Forgive [ἄφεσις] carries two interrelated meanings: (1) “to leave” or “to release,” and (2) “to remit or forgive, especially a debt.”<sup>169</sup> In fact, for every wronged person, something has been robbed from them – a debt is incurred – and the offender is responsible for repairing their loss. For SA survivors, it is even more obvious that they have indeed suffered a calamitous loss. Things that were robbed during SA include the victim’s autonomy, freedom, dignity, physical and emotional safety, self-esteem, power, physical, mental, and spiritual health,

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<sup>165</sup> Hein, *Understanding Sexual Abuse*, 96.

<sup>166</sup> Hein, *Understanding Sexual Abuse*, 98.

<sup>167</sup> Ellis, "Experiencing God's Healing Power," 169.

<sup>168</sup> Hein, *Understanding Sexual Abuse*, 95-97.

<sup>169</sup> Ellis, "Experiencing God's Healing Power," 162.



joy, confidence, faith, trust, identity, their entire pre-abuse worldview, their image of God, their relationship with God, their social circle, their dreams, hope, etc. If we are asking survivors to forgive their abusers (their debtors), does it mean they have to give up trying to get back what was robbed from them? If so, how is that fair? Who is going to restore to the survivors what they have lost? How can this debt be settled?

### **Search for repayment**

It is understandable why it is so hard for the sexually abused to forgive the offender for that harm they have done because to forgive means to relinquish rights or attempt to demand compensation from them. However, to continue to place the abuser in the debtor position implies hope that the abuser can somehow pay back what they have robbed from their victim – all the joy, confidence, faith, trust, identity, health, love, etc. The harsh reality is that no one has the ability to repay any of those things. If the abuser has enough health, joy, and love to repay the victim, they would not have become an abuser in the first place. Someone at some point in the abusers' lives has robbed those qualities from them and thus created a debtor in them. The good news is that for people who could get stuck in this “loss and rob limbo,” God decided to end the robbing by repaying the loss through divine intervention in the person and work of Jesus Christ. Only God can provide and restore all the stolen peace, freedom, dignity, sense of safety, self-esteem, health, joy, confidence, faith, trust, identity etc. God, who was powerful enough to provide water from a rock for the Israelites in the wilderness (Exodus 17:5-6), can provide and restore all the stolen peace through breaking the Rock Christ Jesus (1 Corinthians 10:4) and allowing the endless fountain of Life to satisfy all those who are thirsty.

## **Father, forgive them**

Jesus made a conscious and intentional effort<sup>170</sup> to approach and stay on the cross in order to bear the suffering of both the survivors and the abuser. On the cross, the full scope of debt of the entire humanity was recognized, repaid, and cancelled. Jesus' crucifixion is not just to "satisfy the wrath of God" but to fill the void of infinite debt caused by all the abuse and violence that stole life out of both the perpetrators and victims. Paradoxically, as Jesus was *taking on all the suffering* of the world, he was also *pouring out his life* which is the ultimate restorative agent in all abusers and survivors' lives. God allowed Godself to be robbed by humans who did not know what they were doing. God willingly gave away every goodness in Godself through the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. That is what makes forgiveness possible both between divine and mortals and among mortals here is no longer a lack of life but everyone who has had life stolen from them can receive life for free. The Source of Life was hung on the cross so that life never-ending may be offered to anyone who wants it.

J. Edward Ellis draws attention to the power dynamic in forgiveness as proposed by Frederick W. Keene: "forgiveness flows down from the more powerful to the less powerful."<sup>171</sup> If the abuser refuses to relinquish power and continues to use their power to abuse the victim, there is no context for forgiveness. However, if the survivor gained power either by escaping the abusive situation or environment or by growing old enough to be of equal power status as the abuser, then the survivor can decide if he/she wants to forgive. Forgiveness will put the survivor

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<sup>170</sup> John 10:17-18, Matt 26:53.

<sup>171</sup> Ellis, "Experiencing God's Healing Power," 162.

in the creditor position and increase their power. Ellis suggests the reason why Jesus asked the Father to forgive instead of forgiving the crucifiers himself is because Jesus willingly gave up all the power, even the power to forgive debts.<sup>172</sup> This thesis proposes another explanation for Jesus' request for the Father to forgive; during crucifixion, the Father was the One being robbed of his Son, and thus the Father was the one suffering insurmountable loss and was in the position to forgive all his debtors, all humanity. Humanity suffers from loss of life because of their choice to sin against God and against each other. Out of love, God compensated for their loss even though God did not cause any of it. On the cross, Jesus asked for forgiveness from the Father on behalf of those who were crucifying him. Jesus himself on the cross was paying for this newly incurred debt, all the while when the people were crying, 'crucify him! crucify him!' and murdering the Only Son of God.

### **Forgiveness and Justice**

Seamands maintains that forgiveness and demand for justice do not counteract each other. Forgiveness has to do with our attitude towards the offender and seeking justice is an action. "Practicing forgiveness and promoting justice goes hand in hand."<sup>173</sup> Seamands proposed a seven-step forgiveness model to unlock "the door to healing restoration, freedom and renewal"<sup>174</sup>: (1) facing the facts (2) feeling the hurt (3) confronting our hate (4) bearing the pain (5) releasing those who have wronged us (6) assuming responsibilities for ourselves (7) longing for reconciliation. SA survivors are not asked to forgive with their own strength. Rather, Jesus who

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<sup>172</sup> Ellis, "Experiencing God's Healing Power," 162-163.

<sup>173</sup> Seamands, *Wounds That Heal*, 140.

<sup>174</sup> Seamands, *Wounds That Heal*, 132.

“bore both the wrongs done to Him as the wrongs done to us”<sup>175</sup> imparts strength onto us so that the words of forgiveness spoken by Christ on the cross can be spoken within us through Him dwelling in us.<sup>176</sup> As Hein suggested, “our forgiveness is only possible through Christ’s forgiveness...Christ – who dared to love his enemies, and who alone brings divine forgiveness – is carefully at work. In time, we may join in that work too.”<sup>177</sup> When SA survivors stop looking to their abusers for debt repayment but instead look to Christ for restoration and healing, they are already forgiving their debtors, putting their hope in the One who will never run out of goodness, and setting themselves free.

## **Reconciliation**

Forgiveness can be one-sided cancellation of debt but reconciliation requires at least two parties. Those entities might be God, survivor, friends and family of the survivor, society, and perpetrator. The majority of the time, reconciliation between survivor and perpetrator is not possible or not recommended due to danger of continual or future abuse. Over 90% of perpetrators are trusted adults in the victim’s life. Evidence that shows reconciliation is not appropriate may include lack of remorse or repentance from the offender or other potential danger. Safety is always the higher if not highest priority and concern for the survivors. At times there might need to be reconciliation between survivors and their circle of family and friends who have not been supportive of them or did not believe them when they sought help.<sup>178</sup> There is

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<sup>175</sup> Seamands, *Wounds That Heal*, 144.

<sup>176</sup> Seamands, *Wounds That Heal*, 144-145.

<sup>177</sup> Hein, *Understanding Sexual Abuse*, 111.

<sup>178</sup> Jim Sells and Emily G. Hervey, "Forgiveness in Sexual Abuse: Defining Our Identity in the Journey Toward Wholeness," in *The Long Journey Home: Understanding and Ministering to the Sexually Abused: A Collaborative*

precedence for the extension of forgiveness without reconciliation. After all, God extends grace and forgiveness, but not all receive it due to unwillingness to repent, so reconciliation is not always possible. But through the person and work of Jesus Christ, multiple levels of reconciliation were made possible, namely, ontological, relational, internal, and communal reconciliation.

### **Ontological Reconciliation**

The first level is the ontological reconciliation between the Creator and humanity. When the Word of God became flesh, God and humanity co-exists in the man Jesus through incarnation. This is made possible because the second person of the trinity willingly laid down the equality he has with God and took on human likeness (Phil 2:5-11). God's loving acceptance of humanity is fully demonstrated as God becomes one of them and one with them. The Creator, the Son of God, humbled himself to enter the world he created so that humanity and God can be reconciled within the person of Jesus. This is as close as God can come to humanity where the two literally became one. For SA survivors, ontological reconciliation speaks a loud and clear message of acceptance, affirmation and valuing.

### **Relational Reconciliation**

The second level is the relational reconciliation between the Creator and humanity through the establishment of a new covenant as Jesus died for all (2 Cor 5:14) and sealed the new

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*Address from Psychology, Theology, and Pastoral Care*, ed. Andrew J. Schmutzer (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2011), 180.

covenant with his blood for the forgiveness of sins (Matt 26:28, Mark 14:24, Luke 22:20). Here, Jesus' crucifixion and death "for all" set a number of significant things into motion. Paul maintained that because of Christ's death, "all have died." (2 Cor 5:14). It is important to note, therefore, that when Paul talks about salvation, he does not interpret it as an act of God that excused humanity from death but rather relocates death on the timeline as a past event that has been done. This view of death and salvation not only recognizes the reality of death and allows one to lament over it, it also gives us hope because death is in the past and it cannot harass us or threaten us anymore.<sup>179</sup> For SA survivors whose bodies were "crucified" by their abusers, Christ's death has put their death in the past, giving them a new hope that they need not be harassed by their past anymore.

In the new covenant God is reconciling the world to Godself and making everything new (2 Cor 5:17-19). When we read 2 Cor 5:19 and pay attention to how God reconciles the world to Godself and does not count the world's trespasses against them, we acknowledge that (1) it is the whole world that God is reconciling with, which includes both the victimizer and the victim, and (2) God does not minimize or dismiss the existence of sin. God has decided to not count the world's sins against it. In Jesus' death, he took the survivor's suffering and the abuser's sins and brought them to hell to leave them there. God does not exclude anyone from this ministry of reconciliation, meaning anyone and everyone is welcome, but they must acknowledge their sins

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<sup>179</sup> Sandra Hack Polaski, "2 Corinthians," in *The IVP Women's Bible Commentary*, ed. Catherine C. Kroger and Mary J. Evans (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 669-670.

before they can be told that those sins will not be held against them. God entrusted this ministry of reconciliation to all of humanity and urged us to be reconciled to God first and foremost.

Being reconciled to God is especially important because that could be the only option of reconciliation feasible. Again, in the case of SA it is almost impossible for reconciliation to happen between the victimizer and the victim most of the time. SA offenders may never fully acknowledge the scope of the evil they have done or have the opportunity to confess their sins in the presence of the survivor even if they are willing to. Equally impossible is for the survivors to communicate to their abusers that they do not count their sins against them and be open to repair of any kind of relationship, because survivors are still living in a reality where they suffer daily from the repercussion of the abuse. A continuation of any form of connection between perpetrator and victim can potentially be doing more harm than good to both sides. But because God first reconciled both to Godself, even though SA survivors and perpetrators may never see each other again, reconciliation can still happen vertically to God instead of horizontally with each other. As long as the abuser is willing to confess his/her sins and accept Jesus's forgiveness and as long as the abused is willing to lay down all his/her burden and accept the life that Jesus poured out for him/her, through Christ they are offered the invitation to be reconciled to God.

### **Internal Reconciliation**

After being reconciled to God through Christ and declared free of debt and condemnation, a third miracle of reconciliation happens. It is the internal reconciliation between conflicting parts within the survivor and the perpetrator respectively. For the survivor, the

internal conflict they experience may look like a shameful part that wants to isolate, a raging part that demands justice, a loving part that desires healing, a self-protective part that vows to never trust anyone, a vulnerable part that shakes in fear, a lonely part that yearns for care, a depressed part that wants to give up, and a grieving part that is mourning the loss of a safe world. For the perpetrators, the conflict within them is even more intense. Part of them try to find satisfaction in pseudo-intimacy and sexualizing their need for communion. Part of them need to convince themselves that they are not harming their victims. Part of them feel extremely empty. Part of them feel depressed. Part of them use the excitement of victimizing others to mask their depression. Part of them rationalizes their behavior. Their true self was dying and they created a delusional self. They alternate between control and chaos. Part of them feels worthless. Part of them judge themselves harshly. Part of them feel defensive in order to survive the judgement. Part of them feel despair and are suicidal. The internal conflict is so strong that it could cause them to harm themselves or others.

A fragmented self needs to be made whole again and the seemingly incompatible parts of good and evil within oneself needs to find a stronger holding agent: Jesus. Poling talks about the ability of Christ Jesus to hold hatred and love, grace and despair, hurt and compassion within himself while maintaining integrity as he was hanging on the cross.<sup>180</sup> Christ's resilience and power of his love is able to carry all the different parts of the survivor and abuser. For the parts that are too difficult to process, too painful to look at, or too shameful to accept, Jesus is there to embrace and hold for the survivor or the perpetrator. They no longer need to rely on their own

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<sup>180</sup> James N. Poling, "Ambiguity in God and Humans: A Retirement Lecture," *Journal of Pastoral Theology* 22.1 (Summer 2012): 7-6.



strength to try to run away or hide from their unacceptable parts and can be reconciled to their whole self.

### **Communal Reconciliation**

No matter where we live, we will find both survivors and abusers in our midst. Naming Jesus as a survivor of SA not only restores the truth about crucifixion and acknowledges all levels of Jesus' sacrificial death, but also helps survivors name their suffering as they witness their pain being taken on by their Redeemer on the cross. In the past, churches have been unaware, inadequate, or even silent about the reality of SA both inside and outside of the congregation. Church is not a safe haven. We have seen the clergy SA epidemic uncovered in both Catholic and Protestant churches through the #churchtoo movement.<sup>181</sup> Fellow believers share the deepest shame and heartbreak seeing shepherds abusing their own helpless flock. If we want to see justice roll on like a river, then we desperately need a fundamental change in our hearts and attitude around SA as well as practical reformation of church policies with regard to education and accountability. Practices must be put in place to prevent abuse and give voice to survivors as well as help us identify those who need help around us. None of us shall be silent about SA. There is a lot more that needs to be said as abuse thrives in secrecy. Unless they are uncovered, the abusers will only perpetuate. For Christians in the community, we are called to "reveal the unconditional love of God to both victim and perpetrator alike."<sup>182</sup> Unconditional

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<sup>181</sup> Jeanne Choy Tate, "Living by the Word: Reflections on the Lectionary [June 10, 2018]," *The Christian Century* 135.11 (2018): 22.

<sup>182</sup> Keree Louise Casey, "What Part of 'No' Don't You Understand? Talking the Tough Stuff of the Bible: A Creative Reading of the Rape of Tamar: 2 Sam. 13:1-22," *Feminist Theology* 18 (2010): 170.

love can look very different for different people. For survivors, it can look like support and compassion. For abusers, it can look like holding them accountable for their actions as we journey alongside them.<sup>183</sup>

## **Remembering and Mourning**

As a SA survivor struggling with remembering his own trauma, Hein wrote:

Many survivors suppress some or all memory of what was done to them as children. Those who do not forget the actual incidents may forget how they felt at the time or may not fully realize how much the experience has affected them. Remembering is the process of getting back both memory and feeling, and understanding the impact abuse has had on your life.<sup>184</sup>

For many SA survivors, discovering, processing, accepting, and making peace with one's memory is a long and painful process. The temptation to want a different life or to deny the past is real. Hein encourages us by pointing out that to wish we can change our past is to wish ourselves out of existence. It is the present me that God loves and God's acceptance teaches me to accept myself for who I am.<sup>185</sup> The way God makes all things new is not to command the victims to "forgive and forget" as some common clichés teach. There is a new way of remembering made possible by Jesus' cross and resurrection. Jesus becomes vulnerable "not only to our capacity for forgiveness and love and joy but also to the manifold ways in which people diminish, betray, oppress, abandon, and kill one another."<sup>186</sup> However, Jesus did not

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<sup>183</sup> Casey, "What Part of 'No' Don't You Understand?" 170.

<sup>184</sup> Hein, *Understanding Sexual Abuse*, 83.

<sup>185</sup> Hein, *Understanding Sexual Abuse*, 127.

<sup>186</sup> Gregory L. Jones, "Behold, I Make All Things New," in *God and the Victim: Theological Reflections on Evil, Victimization, Justice, and Forgiveness*, ed. Lisa Barnes Lampman (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), 164.

allow himself or those who believe in Him to be defined by violence. Jesus broke the cycle of destruction by “offering us new and renewed ways of living together.”<sup>187</sup>

### **New Way of Remembering**

There is a new way of remembering and living together in which violence can no longer define the victims. Since traumatic memories are intrusive and they return again and again, Jones maintains that the issue at the heart of healing is arriving at a place where the return of those memories is “no longer a resource to be drawn upon for the possibility of vengeance.”<sup>188</sup> Jones points out that memory is an important shield against sin while we wait for justice and truth to be forever taken care of by God and it is safe for forgetting to take place when perpetrators have been named, judged, and transformed or condemned eternally. Jones believes that when New Heaven and New Earth arrives from God, memories will become healed histories and victims “need not remember them as sin”<sup>189</sup> anymore. Jones offers a very consoling view on forgiveness and healing as he wrote, “We are given the eschatological divine gift of non-remembrance precisely through being ‘remembered’ as the Body of Christ.”<sup>190</sup>

### **In Remembrance of Me**

Jesus also established the Lord’s table and commanded all the believers to do this in remembrance of his body broken for us and bloodshed for us. Breaking bread in remembrance of

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<sup>187</sup> Jones, “Behold, I Make All Things New,” 164.

<sup>188</sup> Jones, “Behold, I Make All Things New,” 175.

<sup>189</sup> Jones, “Behold, I Make All Things New,” 178.

<sup>190</sup> Jones, “Behold, I Make All Things New,” 178.

Christ's crucifixion helps us remember and recount the story while continuing to find new meaning in it. We are to preserve the memory of the suffering, death, and resurrection of Christ because this memory "carries the eschatological promise of God that death will not triumph in human history."<sup>191</sup> Remember Christ's solidaristic suffering and sacrificial death is parallel to the healing process of SA survivors from trauma where one needs to remember the trauma and retell it calmly to incorporate the trauma into one's own story. Telling their story helps survivors regain and maintain cohesiveness, preserve memory, and refuse to use forgetting as an escape. Jennifer Beste discussed the role of the church in relation to SA survivor's memories, writing:

By sharing their stories with the community and laying their abusive memories in the hands of God, there is hope that abuse survivors' stories of violence and affliction will be transformed within the context of Jesus' own experiences of crucifixion and resurrection.<sup>58</sup> Just as Christian churches preserve and uphold the memories of Jesus' experiences of betrayal and abandonment, his crucifixion, and his resurrection, so too can they validate survivors' memories of violation and traumatization.<sup>192</sup>

## **Mourning**

Going hand-in-hand with remembering is grieving and mourning. "Mourning acknowledges that the trauma has brought great loss...The loss of innocence, the loss of childhood, perhaps the loss of a proper and safe father or grandfather."<sup>193</sup> Jesus himself cried out

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<sup>191</sup> Johann M. Vento, "Violence, Trauma, and Resistance: A Feminist Appraisal of Metz's Mysticism of Suffering unto God," *Horizons* 29 (2002): 9.

<sup>192</sup> Jennifer Erin Beste, "Recovery from Sexual Violence and Socially Mediated Dimensions of God's Grace: Implications for Christian Communities," *Studies in Christian Ethics* 18 (2005): 106.

<sup>193</sup> Hein, *Understanding Sexual Abuse*, 89.

a psalm of lament (Psalm 22:1-2) when he was nailed on the cross, which invites Jesus' followers to lament and grief the pain that crucifies us. "Lament helps us speak truth to God about our deepest feelings"<sup>194</sup> and allow those parts of us to be seen by God and embraced by God as we rely on God.<sup>195</sup> Sometimes we hear survivors or those surrounding them ask "when can we get over sexual abuse? When can we find closure?" Somehow our culture maintains that grief is something we "get over with" but in reality, there is no "we will become okay with the abuse". Just as Jesus never went back to the pre-crucified form, our loss changes us forever and we are transformed with it with acceptance and a hope in the resurrected life. "We cannot become the person we would have been if the abuse had never happened. We can't go back...But we can heal and grow. We can recover our mind, our body, and our life. We can become whole."<sup>196</sup>

#### **Subsection 4 – Resurrection and Eschatological Hope**

"Resurrection" and "Eschatological Hope" sections are combined in this thesis due to the lack of space. These two topics are not meant to be enmeshed into one but they have certain shared elements that allow the two to dialogue with each other to form a cohesive discussion. In

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<sup>194</sup> Hein, *Understanding Sexual Abuse*, 138.

<sup>195</sup> Hein, *Understanding Sexual Abuse*, 138.

<sup>196</sup> Hein, *Understanding Sexual Abuse*, 79.

particular, I will discuss how resurrection is about new life, how Jesus' scars are still evident in his resurrected body, and how his resurrection is connected with ultimate judgment.

### **A resurrected Christ**

If crucifixion is the ultimate descension into the deepest chasm where Christ meets SA survivors in their suffering, resurrection shows us the way God has built out of the abyss. The abyss cannot captivate Christ, for “when he ascended on high, he made captivity itself a captive” (Eph 4:8). Christ gained victory over death and demonstrated God's ultimate authority over both life and death. This victory is imparted to all those who follow Christ on this journey and believe in his power to carry them out of captivity. Christ has opened the way of ascension from desolation for the sexually abused. Resurrection is the evidence of what is possible in God and is a fulfilment of the promised restoration and transformation for the hopeless. Jones commented:

the cross provides the opening for receiving God's grace. For in the end, the violence of the cross does not have the last word – there is the resurrection. Thus, the allure of the cross. Maintaining the connection between the resurrection and the cross is important. For it makes clear that the loving grace of God can indeed overcome the most poignant violence and hence heal the wounds of trauma.<sup>197</sup>

Resurrection is the beginning of a new life. The moment SA survivors meet Jesus in their suffering and put their trust in the fact that Jesus came to take on their suffering, they have already begun a new life. They continue to live into this new identity as a precious child being

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<sup>197</sup> Jones, *Trauma and Grace*, ix.

carried by Jesus into the presence of God, ascending out of the torturous memories of abuse. God has raised Jesus to the highest, sitting at the right hand of God and so will SA survivors be raised and brought to an honorable and safe place away from torture. Indeed, resurrection gave new meaning to their suffering because survivors are no longer defined by what was trying to destroy them but by the One who has redeemed them and led them into victory. Moreover, all who believe in Christ Jesus are promised resurrection to a transformed body (Matt 22:30, John 11:25). “The resurrection of the body is an affirmation that our bodies, no matter how viciously they have been violated, are valued by God and will be healed.”<sup>198</sup> In 2 Cor 5:1-5, Paul uses the metaphor of tent, building, and house to refer to our earthly body. Paul speaks of a hope for a heavenly body, that shall never be destroyed or be vulnerable to abuse and trampling. There can be continuous celebration of resurrection into eternity, with resurrection taking the center of the stage and being the core message of survivors’ stories.<sup>199</sup>

### **Scars and Judgement**

By Jesus’ scars we know that his resurrection did not erase the sign and evidence of his suffering but reaffirmed the reality of the human condition he came to redeem us from. The scars that marked Jesus’ resurrected body (John 20:20) continue to exist into eternity (Rev 5:6, 5:12, 19:13). Their existence not only proves the lasting benefits of his person and work on the cross,<sup>200</sup> but gives visual evidence that the suffering happened. “Jesus’ crucified body was resurrected and glorified, but he still bore the scars from his wounds. In fact, they have become

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<sup>198</sup> Joy A. Schroeder, “The Woman and the Dragon: Feminist Reflections on Sexual Violence, Evil, and Bodily Resurrection,” *Dialog* 33 (1994): 135.

<sup>199</sup> Much needs to be explored and said with regard to 2 Cor 5:1-5 and the meaning of Resurrection in survivors’ lives but due to limited space in this thesis, further discussion will be continued in future work.

<sup>200</sup> Schmutzer, “A Theology of Sexuality and Its Abuse,” 108-109.

his identifying marks (John 20:20-29).”<sup>201</sup> This visual and identifiable proof of Christ’s sacrifice and solidarity with SA victims can be very comforting. Christ carries his wounds and SA survivors’ wounds into eternity and they never disappear. Jesus is the one who redeems us through his suffering. This has become the core identity of Christ and the way we know and speak of who he is.<sup>202</sup>

There is a strong tie between resurrection and judgement. A particularly comforting piece of news for SA survivors is that resurrection is not just a promise of a transformed body and life in eternity with God, but that it leads to ultimate judgement. In fact, Jesus clearly pointed out that all will be resurrected before judgement (John 5: 28-29) and that Christ’s resurrection is the assurance of his power to judge (Acts 17:30-31). Resurrection proves that Christ is greater than death and thus has the authority to commend repentance and the authority to judge the world. The brokenness in our patriarchal system may continue to create more SA victims and oppression against them. Even if the corrupted and imperfect system of this world does not grant SA survivors justice, there is indeed eternal condemnation for all the perpetrators who refuse to repent.<sup>203</sup>

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<sup>201</sup> Seamands, *Wounds That Heal*, 11-12.

<sup>202</sup> There are many more implications of Jesus being our eternally scarred savior and what that means and does for sexual abuse survivors. Due to the lack of space in this thesis, those implications will be discussed in future work.

<sup>203</sup> Theological significance and Scriptural references of eschatological judgment, its relation to the person and work of Christ, and implications for redemption of the sexually abused will be discussed in future work.



## Conclusion

What gets redeemed through the person and work of Jesus Christ? The *Imago Dei* in SA survivors is restored by a new identity in Christ and their worth is reaffirmed in the process. Bodies that were violated and crucified are resurrected with the scars honored. Injustice and pain that was once ignored or hidden as a shameful secret is now exposed in anticipation of final judgement following resurrection. Repressed or silenced memories of horror are remembered and shared as stories of victory and healing. Smothered anger is given space and recognition, and is channeled to stronger conviction of God's righteousness and care. Isolation was overcome by solidarity as survivors are no longer suffering alone but God in Christ suffers with them and for them. The victimizer-victim dynamic was broken and both persons were offered opportunities to be reconciled to God. Broken metaphors for God are repaired by Jesus who came as an incarnated suffering savior walking alongside the abused. We have "a God who does not 'fix' us but gives us strength by suffering with us...sees us and is willing to embrace the uncertainty of remaining with us and identifying with us is powerful...only God himself who can move into that space, into the midst of our suffering, and bring healing."<sup>204</sup> Christ overcame death and imputed his power over death on SA survivors who once felt powerless. Jesus invited SA survivors to embark on this journey out of death. Once held captive by their trauma, survivors are now set free because Jesus came into their trauma, bore their trauma, and carried them out of the pit, showing them the way into the redemptive future.

It is indeed a journey and therefore Jesus' invitation to those who recognize that they need Him has always been 'follow me.' We are comforted by the fact that the story has not

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<sup>204</sup> Hein, *Understanding Sexual Abuse*, 79.

ended. Healing is an ongoing process unto the New Heaven and New Earth. We were given the eschatological promise of full restoration (Isa 61, Rev 23). Survivors are no longer slaves of their past or their abusers but heirs of the greatest inheritance from God - hope and redemption.

### **Reflection**

Writing this thesis certainly has enlarged my conceptions of how God redeems the sexually abused through the person and work of Jesus Christ. I gained insights particularly around the death and suffering of Christ in relation to life and healing, meaning and means of reconciliation, as well as resurrection of Christ and eschatological hope in Christ. These new findings are very enlightening and helpful for me in finding the pathway of healing for victims of abuse and violence. Yet, as I indicated in the introduction, the process of writing this thesis was a crucifying experience for me. I traveled to some of the deepest and darkest places I could ever imagine. For months I felt like I was hanging on the cross gasping for air. My soul was broken, my heart was bleeding and I was groaning in pain. The world I was looking at and trying to describe did feel like hell. The horrific statistics and reports, the many heartbreaking stories I read, and the disheartening, corrupt, and perverted system were like nails piercing through my body and spirit. Without Jesus I would have never made it through. But because Jesus has already been through crucifixion, by his grace and with his companionship I could go through mine. By Jesus's strength I am strengthened, humbled and honored to walk alongside dozens of SA survivors on their journey with a hope that we can all be resurrected and carried in Jesus's ascension from the abyss. We have this hope because Jesus has taken on all our sufferings and has invited us to lay down all our sufferings on Him. Jesus is sharing his victory over death with us in this life and the next as he continues to pour out Life into our lives abundantly. Through

Christ we have been given access to the presence of God where only God can tell us who we are:  
precious, worthy, beloved, redeemed and free.

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