

# Mapping Doctrinal Drift in Biblical Counseling: From Classical Christology to Trauma-Bound Theology

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Christology stands at the center of the Christian message. Classical/orthodox Christology has been passed hand to hand through the centuries, shaped by the outcomes of theological discussions and ecumenical councils. The Councils of Nicaea (325), Chalcedon (451), and those that followed provided the early church with classic formulations that have long served to safeguard the faith against heresy. While these conciliar definitions have historically functioned as a doctrinal tether, they have not been without critique. In our contemporary context, one significant line of challenge emerges from the perspective of trauma theology.

Trauma theologians understand the human experience of trauma to be so profoundly disruptive that traditional readings of Scripture are rendered insufficient for facilitating comprehension or healing. To the trauma theologian, the effects of trauma are so far reaching that even extensive explorations into the field of theodicy are inadequate. From this perspective, a new theology must be imagined to account for trauma and its effects. Trauma theologian Shelly Rambo describes it this way: “Trauma forces us beyond a familiar theological paradigm of life and death,

and places us, instead, on the razed terrain of what remains. Trauma presses theologians to seek new language to express God's relationship to the world."<sup>1</sup> And so, trauma theologians labor to re-imagine theology, and Christology in particular, in order to make them more palatable and potent for trauma survivors.

This article will be developed in four parts with four goals: (1) make a general presentation of trauma theology; (2) contrast it with classical Christology; (3) describe the historical path from classical Christology to trauma theology; (4) and introduce the subsequent effects of trauma theology in biblical counseling. These four aims are presented in support of this article's thesis: Emerging from the divergent traditions of liberation and feminist theology, the developing field of trauma theology represents a significant departure from classical Christianity and, while it may inform biblical counseling on trauma, it should be critically engaged and not allowed to supplant classical Christology. In other words, I will argue for theologians and biblical counselors alike to remain committed to classical theology despite the sympathetic contributions of trauma theology.

### **SHIFTING GROUND: A SURVEY OF TRAUMA THEOLOGY**

Trauma theology has emerged as a developing discipline within contemporary theological scholarship. Based in interdisciplinary engagement with psychology, philosophy, and lived experience, trauma theologians seek to critically examine and reconstruct traditional theological frameworks in light of the realities of traumatic suffering.<sup>2</sup> As a discipline, it possesses its own methodologies, theoretical concerns, and constructive aims, thus distinguishing itself from pastoral practice or psychological counseling alone.<sup>3</sup> Over the last two decades, trauma theology's prominence has expanded considerably, evidenced not only by its growing presence in peer-reviewed theological publications but also by its increasing incorporation into popular religious discourse and biblical counseling contexts.<sup>4</sup> This dual visibility underscores the field's significance and its growing influence. Further, institutions such as Baylor University, the University of Aberdeen, Boston University, Princeton Theological Seminary, and Union Theological Seminary host faculty and offer courses that contribute to the ongoing development of the field of trauma theology.<sup>5</sup> This section will provide some

introductory comments on three interrelated subjects: (1) trauma, (2) trauma theology, and (3) trauma theology in literature and counseling.

### ***1. What is Trauma?***

If trauma is the lens by which trauma theologians read and reinterpret Scripture, a basic understanding of trauma is essential. Generally, trauma may be described in a medical or a psychological sense. The medical usage relates to physical injuries or wounds involving observable organic damage. By contrast, the psychological use of trauma indicates mental, emotional, behavioral, and physical effects arising from the experience of terror and horror.<sup>6</sup> A person's body is always involved in psychological trauma as the body mediates the experience of the soul.<sup>7</sup> This article refers to the psychological use of the word.

#### *Defining Trauma<sup>8</sup>*

Serene Jones describes a traumatic event as, "one in which a person or persons perceives themselves or others as threatened by an external force that seeks to annihilate them and against which they are unable to resist and which overwhelms their capacity to cope."<sup>9</sup> The inability to cope manifests in involuntarily reliving the event through intrusive memories, flashbacks, nightmares, and disturbed emotional states. In sum, trauma has four elements: (1) the experience of a life-threatening event; (2) the inability to adequately fight back or escape; (3) the threat overwhelming personal resources; (4) the initial experience being relived in life-distressing forms.<sup>10</sup> In essence trauma refers to the experience of overwhelming events that results in a specific range of disturbing and persistent effects.<sup>11</sup> Two questions naturally follow; what makes an event overwhelming? And what are the disturbing and persistent effects of trauma?

#### *What Makes an Event Overwhelming?*

Psychiatrist Judith Herman summarizes, "the salient characteristic of the traumatic event is its power to inspire helplessness and terror."<sup>12</sup> In other words, "Trauma is the response to a deeply distressing or disturbing event that overwhelms an individual's ability to cope, causes feelings of helplessness, diminishes their sense of self and their ability to feel the full range of emotions and experiences."<sup>13</sup> Events may overwhelm a person

because of the magnitude of the danger, the powerlessness of the person, and the lack of resources for restoration.<sup>14</sup> The experience of trouble largely depends on a person's own interpretation of the danger. When a person feels that he no longer has the capacity to endure or recover, traumatic effect is likely.

### *What are the Disturbing and Persistent Effects of Trauma?*

Events become traumatic because they “produce profound and lasting changes in physiological arousal, emotion, cognition, and memory.”<sup>15</sup> Herman describes the “lasting changes” with “two contradictory responses of intrusion and constriction.”<sup>16</sup> Intrusion indicates reliving the original overwhelming event in flashbacks and nightmares. Constriction points to paralyzing effects like freezing, numbed emotions, and hopelessness.<sup>17</sup> Often, the lasting effects of trauma are diagnosed by psychologists and psychiatrists as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders Fifth Edition (DSM-5) provides a set of criteria for PTSD that list four key enduring responses after exposure to an overwhelming event. The persistent responses include (1) presence of at least one intrusive symptom associated with the traumatic event, (2) “persistent avoidance of stimuli associated with the traumatic event,” (3) “negative alterations in cognitions and mood associated with the traumatic event,” and (4) “marked alterations in arousal and reactivity associated with the traumatic event.”<sup>18</sup> The DSM-5 requires that the traumatic event cause significant sequelae and endure over time.<sup>19</sup>

## **2. What is Trauma Theology?**

Trauma theology, then, may be defined as, “a theological discipline that seeks to both do theological justice to traumatic experiences and also to reimagine theologies in the light of such experiences.”<sup>20</sup> Trauma theology is a discipline constituted by particular goals and methodologies. The trauma theologian's primary goal is to construct reimaged theologies in the wake of traumatic experiences.<sup>21</sup> This differs from a systematic theologian's goal, which might be present a work that “answer[s] the question: What are Christians to believe, do, and be today, in light of all that Scripture affirms regarding any particular doctrine?”<sup>22</sup> Trauma theology answers the question: How can

I reimagine Scripture to answer the questions that trauma raises for the Christian? This section notes key contributions of three trauma theologians.

*Serene Jones*

In her book, *Trauma and Grace*, Serene Jones, former Yale University professor and current president of Union Theological Seminary, reflects on the way her extended engagement with trauma literature has shaped her interpretation of Scripture.<sup>23</sup> She now conceives of the Bible as “one long series of traumatic events and accounts of how people struggle to speak about God in the face of them.”<sup>24</sup> Beyond mere reading, Jones seeks to apply the biblical text in ways that are sensitive to the presence and impact of trauma. While she affirms the grace present in Scripture, she devotes significant attention to helping others recognize both the trauma embedded in biblical narratives and the potential harm of engaging Scripture without trauma sensitivity. Jones aims to equip the church in reaching suffering people “in the cold space of [their] distress,” helping those “whose hearts and minds have been wounded by violence” to “feel and know the redeeming power of God’s grace.”<sup>25</sup> In sum, Jones aims to explore the ways personal and communal trauma challenges one’s theological understandings, especially in light of the disruptive effects of trauma.

*Shelly Rambo*

In the 1990’s at Yale University, Shelly Rambo studied with other scholars whose work took place at the intersection of psychology and literature, namely around post-World War II suffering. Interested in the connection between literature and theology, Rambo determined that theology “needed to pay attention to these dimensions of human experience.”<sup>26</sup> Now Assistant Professor of Theology at Boston University, Rambo works as a trauma theologian to create new theological categories and language to meet the challenge trauma brings to theology. She expresses this challenge in her book, *Spirit and Trauma*, as she writes, “Trauma forces us beyond a familiar theological paradigm of life and death, and places us, instead, on the razed terrain of what remains. Trauma presses theologians to seek new language to express God’s relationship to the world.”<sup>27</sup> In this, she advocates for trauma theology, which does the shared theological work of answering questions of theological suffering yet calls for “a distinctive theological

articulation.”<sup>28</sup> Trauma theologians argue “that trauma poses unique challenges, transforming the discourse about suffering, God, redemption, and theological anthropology in significant ways.”<sup>29</sup> In other words, trauma challenges theological categories and cannot be confined to the fields of counseling or psychology. This line of thinking is why Rambo argues for trauma studies, because trauma studies “had broadened to present profound challenges to epistemology, constructions of the self, and theological understandings of time.”<sup>30</sup> In sum, Rambo argues that trauma is so disruptive to individuals and to theological constructs that a new discipline of constructive theology, namely trauma theology, must be employed.<sup>31</sup>

### *Karen O'Donnell*

Personal tragedy led trauma theologian Karen O'Donnell to develop her thinking in this field.<sup>32</sup> In the wake of loss, O'Donnell pled for answers.<sup>33</sup> “Why did God let this happen to me? The theology I knew gave me no answers,” she determined.<sup>34</sup> “Her experience of surviving and healing from trauma led O'Donnell to examine theologies of trauma and prompted her to write her own trauma theology as a ‘survivor’s gift that is offered as both a comfort and a challenge.’”<sup>35</sup> For O'Donnell, trauma theology helped her to answer the difficult questions that arose from her trauma, for trauma theology deals in lived experience.

As discussed in the previous section, trauma refers to the experience of overwhelming events that results in a specific range of disturbing and persistent effects.<sup>36</sup> One of the most common effects of trauma is reliving the traumatic event. In interacting with a story of a woman named Leah who struggled to be in church due to the effects of trauma, O'Donnell writes, “as trauma theologians, we recognise Leah’s story as one that is all too common. What is needed here is a clearer understanding that the church can often be a difficult place for traumatised people to navigate.”<sup>37</sup> Further, trauma theology seeks to reimagine theology in such a way that it is acceptable and applicable to trauma survivors. Many trauma theologians consider trauma theology a form of practical theology, which, “seeks to engage critically with the dissonance between theology and lived reality.”<sup>38</sup> In other words, trauma ruptures experience, including one’s experience with theology in such a way that new, sufficient answers must be found.

In sum, O'Donnell defines trauma theology as:

a theological discipline that seeks to both do theological justice to traumatic experiences and also to reimagine theologies in the light of such experiences. Whilst suffering has always been of interest to Christian theology, trauma theology distinguishes between suffering and trauma, noting the specific impact trauma has on the embodied life of trauma survivors. Envisioning trauma experience as an earthquake that shatters theological landscapes, trauma theology sees its work as that of construction of reimagined theologies in the wake of these experiences.<sup>39</sup>

### *Trauma Theology Differs from Trauma-informed Theology*

While trauma theology is constructive and doctrinal, trauma-informed theology is pastoral and practical. Trauma-informed theologians do not seek to reimagine traditional Christian doctrines but rather work to ensure that the application of theology and the presentation of biblical texts are safe for trauma survivors. In other words, trauma-informed theologians, pastors, and counselors aim to adapt Christian teaching to make it more palatable for those who will be unable to bear a typical presentation. In this, “a trauma-informed church will, by necessity, produce trauma-informed pastoral care that is sensitive to the experiences and needs of trauma survivors.”<sup>40</sup>

While the aims and scope of trauma-informed theology differ from trauma theology, the former is firmly rooted in the latter. As O'Donnell observes, “such pastoral care will *need* to be grounded in accessible trauma-sensitive theology and in congregational attitudes that are willing to reflect critically on beliefs and undertake the work of reimagining them in the light of trauma experiences.”<sup>41</sup> In this sense, trauma-informed theology represents the practical extension of trauma theology. Without conceptual categories and theological grounding, the practical applications of trauma-informed theology would be untethered from theory and too abstract to be useful. This paper treats trauma theology and trauma-informed theology together, despite their differences, because both recognize the ways trauma disrupts an individual's understanding of God and Scripture, and both aim to establish new pathways for engaging Christianity that do not retraumatize survivors.

### ***3. Trauma Theology in Literature and Counseling***

As review, trauma theologians call for “a distinctive theological articulation” of trauma’s relationship to the Bible.<sup>42</sup> Trauma theologians read the Bible as trauma literature.<sup>43</sup> Further, biblical counselors informed by trauma theology see trauma all over the Bible.<sup>44</sup> From Genesis to Revelation, the biblical volumes have been read and expositied through a trauma lens.<sup>45</sup> Perhaps the most common reference to trauma in Scripture is the cross of Christ. Rather than seeing the cross of Christ as the redemption of souls and the finished work of Christ, trauma theologians and trauma informed theologians use the cross as the primary link between God and human suffering.

#### *Jesus as Traumatized*<sup>46</sup>

Both academic and popular pieces identify the cross as trauma in order to advocate for a trauma-sensitive reading of scripture. More importantly, those who read the cross as trauma want to present Jesus Christ as the sympathetic high priest who can relate to his people in their trauma.

Theological sources from trauma theologians promote the Bible as trauma literature and employ a trauma hermeneutic as the authors interpret Christ’s cross as trauma. OT scholar David Carr calls the cross is “Christianity’s founding trauma” and “a sign of trauma.” This trauma is “faced by God alongside us.”<sup>47</sup> Carr reads trauma throughout the Scripture and concludes that “the Jewish and Christian Bibles both emerged as responses to suffering, particularly group suffering.”<sup>48</sup> Carr notes that “the cross of Jesus, of course, is just one of many painful episodes that fed into the Bible.”<sup>49</sup> According to Carr, both the Jewish and Christian texts call followers to “catastrophe as a path forward.” Jesus’s call to “take up your cross and follow me,” epitomizes the call to a path of suffering for Christians.

Likewise, Serene Jones identifies the cross a “horribly torturous, traumatic death.” Jesus “doesn’t protect himself in some supernatural way so that he doesn’t experience the trauma. He’s totally traumatized by it.”<sup>50</sup> And yet, Jones argues that love helps Christ on the cross. She continues, “On the cross, Jesus is consumed by violence, sin, and yet he (Jesus and God) does not let it conquer love ... Jesus wasn’t up there saying, ‘torture me; I’m going to endure this and still be faithful to God.’ No, it’s more about the horror of the violence and persistence of love.”<sup>51</sup> Jones draws out the theme of Jesus’ love for his people in order to “make theological sense of what



happened on the cross in a way that speaks to the experience of traumatized victims without glorifying violence.”<sup>52</sup> Jones draws her readers eyes off of their own broken selves to “gaze up at this dying body.” She asks survivors to “find comfort in it, to desire its goodness, to embrace its hope. We are compelled deep within to believe that in the throes of this traumatic event, God uniquely meets humanity in the fullness of love and offers to us the grace of life abundant.”<sup>53</sup>

Several popular authors writing for counselors and those serving trauma survivors also read the cross as trauma. Diane Langberg, a counselor who has studied trauma and worked with trauma survivors for more than forty years, wrote an oft-quoted book on trauma and theology, *Suffering and the Heart of God*. In it Langberg twice says, “The Crucified is the One most traumatized.”<sup>54</sup> Both times she repeats this sentence, she aims to communicate the sympathetic nature of Christ. Langberg knows and has seen the horrific effects of trauma on countless lives. She writes that Jesus continues to be traumatized in order to make sure her readers know that Jesus himself understands human suffering.

Todd Stryd writes so that traumatized people might reject trauma as their identity and find comfort in Christ.<sup>55</sup> Traumatized people can fully connect with Jesus, whom he calls Jesus both “trauma victim” and “trauma survivor.”<sup>56</sup> Because Jesus was “made like his brothers and sisters in every way,” Stryd argues that “Jesus’s incarnation was an incarnation into a traumatizing existence.” Stryd grounds his argument in the cross as Jesus was “betrayed, forsaken, brutalized, violated, mocked, and exploited.” Yet, Stryd looks beyond the cross to the resurrection calling Jesus “the consummate trauma survivor.” He then calls trauma survivors to follow Christ in healing as they “follow his path of righteous defiance.”<sup>57</sup>

Other popular level authors reference the cross as trauma calling for survivors hope in Christ and to call those who care for survivors to do so with care.<sup>58</sup> Steve Midgely asserts that though “all the traumas of the Bible climax here,” and that Jesus “experienced traumatic events” “beyond doubt.”<sup>59</sup> He calls sufferers to see a suffering, yet victorious savior. Kelly Simpson points to Jesus as the best example of “trauma stewardship,” because he never despaired or lost hope. Though he “struggled through his own trauma” Simpson asserts that Jesus was a good steward of his pain. She calls Christians to follow Jesus in trauma stewardship.<sup>60</sup>

This section has provided groundwork for the rest of the paper by offering a framework for understanding trauma, introducing trauma theology and its key contributors, and demonstrating how trauma theology appears in “cross as trauma” literature. Next, I will explore classical Christianity by particularly addressing areas that trauma theology critiques.

### **SOLID GROUND: THE CLASSICAL CONFESSION OF THE PERSON AND WORK OF CHRIST**

Theology is the work of Christians. Theology coheres as Christians put together all that the Bible teaches “in terms of application, logical coherence, and metaphysical entailments in light of the church’s tradition and contemporary questions, as it draws out theological judgments for today, consistent with the bible’s own presentation across the entire Canon.”<sup>61</sup> Christology, the theology about Jesus Christ, was largely developed by the early church at the Councils of Nicaea and Chalcedon. This section will pick up and expand on three key components of the Chalcedonian definition that are called into question by trauma theology. These Christological anchors are Jesus as (1) “truly God and truly man,” (2) “for us men and for our salvation,” (3) “recognized in two natures ... not as parted or separated into two persons, but one and the same Son and Only-begotten God the Word, Lord Jesus Christ.”<sup>62</sup> These three foundational pieces will be discussed in light of the cross-as-trauma rhetoric.

#### ***Truly God***

Jesus Christ is truly man, but not merely man.<sup>63</sup> The one Person of the divine Son is not a mere man, but the person of the divine Son who takes on a true human nature “consisting of reasonable body and soul.”<sup>64</sup> This point serves as the crucial, foundational basis of the person and work of Christ. In every moment of Jesus’ life, he acted in his human nature, yet he remained truly God. This means that the person of the divine Son suffered, bled, and died as a man. When trauma theologians look at the cross, they see an event that throws theology into question. For Serene Jones, trinitarian formulation is edited by the cross. “The doctrine of the Trinity rose from how we think about the fact that this Jesus who died on the cross is also God and God didn’t die, but Jesus died, so who is God?”<sup>65</sup> Elsewhere she explains, “the

Trinitarian God, who eternally loves this world, comes into this world as a person ... [but] this one who comes, Jesus Christ, is hung upon a cross to die.”<sup>66</sup> Jones then points out the implications of such a statement with a question. “What happens when this one who exists eternally in the Godhead and yet occupies our humanness dies a very human death? God refuses to turn from us, even in the most brutal grip of tortured death and divine abandonment, and instead takes death into Godself.”<sup>67</sup> Jones’ question and answer indicates a trauma theology constructed from a human view of what happens on the cross rather than a view of the cross beginning with an understanding of *who* hangs there. The divine Person of the Son suffers on the cross according to his human nature. Steven Duby explains that texts like Acts 20:28 ground the “efficacy of Christ’s suffering ... in it belonging to a person who is both human and divine.”<sup>68</sup> Biblical Christology seeks to understand the cross considering the person and work of Christ, not the human interpretation of the cross. A Wellum notes, “a biblical Christology, then, will stand in direct contrast to most contemporary Christologies that view Christ primarily in human terms, reducing and denuding his uniqueness and making him more congenial to our postmodern and religiously pluralistic age.”<sup>69</sup> The doctrine of God and the identity of the God-man must govern one’s understanding of the cross in order to arrive at biblical conclusions.

### ***And Truly Man***

Jesus was truly God and truly man. Though Jesus’ humanity is totally like ours, he remains different than other humans as the human nature assumed by the divine Son is fully human, unfallen, and sinless.<sup>70</sup> So, though Jesus is fully human, it is still the person of the divine Son who acts humanly. Aaron Riches explains, “Jesus is fully human in the ontological and metaphysical sense, but his mode of being human is uniquely that of the divine Son.”<sup>71</sup> This means that Jesus perfectly obeys the Father throughout his life (Heb 4:15). Turretin, commenting on how Jesus suffers, reminds readers that on the cross, “he might be destitute of the ineffable consolation and joy which arises from a sense of God’s paternal love and the beatific vision of his countenance (Ps. 16); but not as to “the affection of righteousness” because he felt nothing inordinate in himself which would tend to desperation, impatience or blasphemy against God.”<sup>72</sup> In synthesizing Jesus’ experience of

the cross, trauma theologians assume Jesus' reactions to be like ours. David Wells argues against this idea.

It is then assumed that to be human, Christ must be as fallible as we are, as confused, as filled with doubts, as unsure about the future, as agnostic about the purposes and plans of God, as diffident and about the possibilities of knowing God, and as baffled about ethical norms and the possibility of absolutes period to present a Christ who is the exegesis of God's character and plans, who acts and speaks as God, who knows from whence he came and why, and who did on the cross what only God could do is, it is argued, to present a Christ who is not human!<sup>73</sup>

The Christ who suffered and died on the cross suffered and died as a true man. Scripture makes this very clear, for only the God-man could redeem a sinful race.<sup>74</sup>

### ***For Us Men and For Our Salvation***

Just as the doctrine of God grounds a biblical understanding of the cross, the storyline of Scripture serves as the foundational reason *for* the cross. Traditionally, the storyline of the Bible is explained in four plot movements: creation, fall, redemption, and new creation.<sup>75</sup> These four elements form a plot arc with inherent tension. God created man in his image to know and glorify him. Yet, man rebels against God and sins and “the wages of sin is death,” (Rom 6:23). No man is able to save himself from sin or death. With this question asked, “we can now take the Bible’s covenantal storyline and see how it identifies who Christ is. If we step back and ask, Who is able to fulfill all God’s promises, inaugurate his saving rule in this world, and achieve the full forgiveness of sin? The answer: *God alone*.”<sup>76</sup> Trauma theologians see the cross as Jesus’ expressions of divine sympathy, forgetting the primary purpose of the cross: to redeem sinners.<sup>77</sup>

These and other truths serve as the biblical foundations that trauma theology tends to overlook.<sup>78</sup> Classical Christology, by contrast, maintains a close connection to the doctrine of the person and work of Christ, emphasizing the continuity preserved through the Chalcedonian definition. Nevertheless, deviations from this tradition have emerged, with trauma theology representing one such development.

## **DETOURS AND DEVIATIONS: THEOLOGICAL MOVEMENTS TOWARD DISLOCATION**

As discussed, theological views shift over time as theologians interact with the world around them. Stephen Wellum explains, “Beginning with the Enlightenment and continuing through modernism and now postmodernism, the intellectual rules that determine how people think the world works and what is possible have shifted away from historic Christianity to deny its basic theological convictions.”<sup>79</sup> In this way, many divergent theologies have arisen in the centuries between Chalcedon and today. Trauma theology is one such derivative. But, what are the roots of trauma theology? This section will trace the movement towards trauma theology from the post-World War II suffering theology of Jürgen Moltmann, through the rise of feminist theology in the 1970’s-1990’s, to the trauma theology of today.

### ***Post-World War II Theology***

Jürgen Moltmann lived as a prisoner of war in European camps throughout 1945–1947.<sup>80</sup> After he was released, he returned his country left to deal with the physical and spiritual aftermath. Moltmann relates his experience, “shattered and broken, the survivors of my generation were then returning from camps and hospitals to the lecture room.”<sup>81</sup> What would the academics and theologians say in the wake of their experiences? Moltmann concludes, “A theology which did not speak of God in the sight of the one who was abandoned and crucified would have had nothing to say to us then.”<sup>82</sup> In light of Moltmann’s suffering, he wants a God who both witnesses suffering and suffers himself. According to Moltmann, God does suffer. He argues, “God is, God is in us, God suffers in us, where love suffers. We participate in the trinitarian process of God’s history. Just as we participate actively and passively in the suffering of God, so too we will participate in the joy of God wherever we love and pray and hope. In this sense God is the great companion — the fellow-sufferer, who understands.”<sup>83</sup> Though Moltmann’s portrayal of God is sympathetic, it also discloses a panentheistic theology.<sup>84</sup> A panentheistic God contains everything within himself, but only in his experience, not his essence.<sup>85</sup> Panentheism represents theological lines of reasoning that collapse distinctions between God as Creator and his

creation. Panentheism implies a passible God who can suffer along with his creation, as his creation is within him.

This suffering God appeals to Shelly Rambo, who cites post-World War II theology as the beginning of her experience with trauma theology.

I remember as a master's student going to these brown-bag lunches hosted by the Yale Psychiatric Institute, at which ... clinicians were offering open sessions to the public to discuss their clinical work with Holocaust survivors ... If you look at the history of trauma studies, that time at Yale University was very pivotal ... Trauma studies were expanding to include different mediums (clinical discourse, video), as well as different forms of writing (poetry, literature, theory) ... Adding something about trauma studies, I think the history of trauma studies is so interesting, because it is only about one hundred years old. Suffering has always been around. The question is how we attend to it. The discourse of trauma emerges in psychoanalytic theory in the nineteenth century and is connected to the study of war (much of the data grows from a study of combat victims and their symptoms).<sup>86</sup>

In other words, trauma's link with war and the effects of war created an environment with amenable conditions for the rise of trauma theology after World War II.<sup>87</sup> Moltmann and other theologians of the 20<sup>th</sup> century shared an inclination to require rethinking of theological categories considering catastrophic suffering. Their work led to an increased willingness to let trauma alter theological frameworks.

### ***Feminist Theology***

Trauma theology follows feminist theology through the open door of post-World War II suffering theology. As post-war theologians attempted to answer the questions of historic and collective evil, emerging feminist theologians followed close behind, seeking to get answers to their own questions about collective and systemic wrongs. "One can summarise the definition of feminist theology as the critical, contextual, constructive, and creative re-reading and re-writing of Christian theology."<sup>88</sup> Like post-war theology, feminist theology seeks "re-read" and "re-write" theology in light of personal experiences. As post-war theologian saw catastrophic, historical suffering as grounds to re-interpret Scripture. Similarly, "The uniqueness

of feminist theology, according to most feminists, is in claiming women's experience as the foundation of theological reflection."<sup>89</sup> Significant experience, seemingly under-represented by Scripture, have called these theologians to revise classical doctrine.

Trauma would be the next significant area of experience seemingly underrepresented by Scripture. "The lineage of 'trauma theology' is deeply feminist," explains Rambo. "There was no stated break from one to pursue the other. While we were gathered around trauma, it was our shared feminist commitments that made us think that theology shaped women's lives in particular ways, and not always for the better."<sup>90</sup> These shared experiences called for a re-thinking of doctrine that would allow sufferers to account for their experiences. "Trauma theories" like feminist theologies, "track the undertow of traditions and their impact on those who are afforded less representation. Analysis of trauma offers a way of accounting."<sup>91</sup>

The genealogy of trauma theology can be traced with reasonable clarity. In the aftermath of World War II, theologians such as Jürgen Moltmann, sought to reconfigure theology in light of the horrific suffering of the Holocaust. Their work was followed by feminist theologians, who sought liberation from systemic forms of oppression. Trauma theology emerges at the intersection of these movements. In this sense, it represents the convergence of two theologies grounded in human experience. As with most historical studies of theology, tracing such origins inevitably risks oversimplification by overlooking the diverse figures and dynamics involved. Nevertheless, the effort remains valuable insofar as it equips future Christians to remain doctrinally grounded.

### **THE RETURN PATH: AWAY FROM TRAUMA CHRISTOLOGY, TOWARD ORTHODOX CHRISTOLOGY**

How should those influenced by trauma theology find their way back to solid ground? Wellum provides an answer in the categories of "Christology from above" and "Christology from below." He explains, "Christology *from above* starts with the triune God of Scripture and *his* word, and it seeks to identify Jesus's person and work from within the truth of Scripture."<sup>92</sup> On the other hand, Christology from below attempts "to do Christology from the vantage point of historical-critical research, independent of a commitment to the full

authority of Scripture and a Christian-theistic worldview.”<sup>93</sup> This distinction helps readers to identify the problems with Christology from below, which is a distinctive of trauma theology. Christology from below “fails to ground the uniqueness and universal significance of Jesus because it removes him from the Bible’s storyline and interpretive framework.”<sup>94</sup> This is key for understanding trauma. This final section will respond to trauma theologians’ claim that Jesus was traumatized by presenting the NT’s presentation of the cross. Though simple, this example is a model of Christology from above as it clearly situates the cross within the NT’s own interpretation of the cross. After all, “to know *who* Jesus is and to speak rightly of him, the church, from its first days, has done Christology *from above*, namely, from the vantage point of Scripture.”<sup>95</sup>

The Bible presents the cross of Christ as the means by which God redeems his people through the work of his Son. The cross is described in the NT as redemption, obedience, sacrifice, reconciliation, justification, victory, moral example, and the glory and wisdom of God.<sup>96</sup> Though there are more views of the cross presented in Scripture, there are six that are specifically relevant to this discussion.

First, the cross of Christ is the way God redeems his people. In salvation, we understand that Jesus gave himself as a ransom for us all (1 Tim 2:5–6). Galatians 3:13 states that, “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us.” Jesus redeemed us by paying the penalty for our sin. It was on the cross that he bought back his people with his own blood. Remember that the redemption was necessary because of sin. Wellum also asks, “How could God remain just and the justifier of the ungodly? In Scripture, *this* question drives the Bible’s redemptive story.”<sup>97</sup> The answer to this question is found in the person of Jesus Christ who acts to redeem his people.

Second, the cross of Christ is presented as an act of Christ’s obedience. Romans 5:19 compares Adam’s disobedience, which made all men sinners, with Jesus’ obedience, which by his obedience to God the Father on the cross makes many righteous. Philippians 2 extols the obedience of Jesus as it says, “he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross” (Phil 2:8). Where man failed, Jesus succeeded in obeying God for his people. Jesus demonstrated his will, or volition, in going to the cross, for it was an act of true obedience. “This death and this suffering, unlike all



of our human examples of death and suffering, is *uniquely and freely willed* in order to destroy humanity's servitude to sin."<sup>98</sup> Jesus chose the woeful cross in perfect obedience to his Father.

Third, Jesus' cross was an act of sacrifice. The price for human sin has always been death (Rom 3:23). Set against the backdrop of the OT and the Levitical Priesthood, Jesus offers himself as the sacrifice that would cleanse his people once and for all. The OT Israelite priests had to continually make sacrifices for themselves and the people they represented. "But as it is, he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself" (Heb 9:26b). In love, Jesus sacrificed himself to save his people. He knew what he was doing as he died on the cross, "having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end" (John 13:1b).

Fourth, Jesus' cross was an act of reconciliation, which made peace between God and man (Rom 5:1–5). Reconciliation is a Pauline concept that encompasses other relational aspects like making peace, granting access, and being brought near.<sup>99</sup> Reconciliation implies a prior relationship that has been broken and is now restored. Jesus makes peace between God and man, and between people, by the blood of his cross (Col 1:19–20).

Fifth, the cross stands as the reason for justification. Justification is "a mighty act of God by which he declares sinful people not guilty but righteous instead. He does so by imputing, or crediting, the perfect righteousness of Christ to them."<sup>100</sup> First, God thinks of our sins as forgiven. When Jesus took our sins on himself, our very sins and their legal ramifications left us and rested on his shoulders (1 Peter 2:24). However, we also need a declaration of righteousness, which comes through the cross. Paul, in 2 Corinthians 5:21 proclaims, "For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." Justification is the legal action of God where Christians are both forgiven and declared righteous.

Sixth, the cross is victory over evil. The cross fulfills the crushing of Satan foreshadowed in Genesis 3:15. Though not all elements of Christ's victory are fully realized, the cross of Christ secures triumph over evil. Truly, "what the New Testament affirms, in its own uninhibited way, is that at the cross Jesus disarmed and triumphed over the devil, and all the "principalities and powers" at his command."<sup>101</sup> Jesus' cross did not look like victory to onlookers. Indeed, some still see his cross as trauma because of

its horrific nature.<sup>102</sup> It is likely that most readers of the crucifixion account would have been traumatized by the event. But John Stott sees the cross of Christ another way. “Look at him there ... What looks like (and indeed was) the defeat of goodness by evil is also, and more certainly, the defeat of evil by goodness. Crushed by the ruthless power of Rome, he was himself crushing the serpent’s head (Gen 3:15).”<sup>103</sup> As Colossians 2:15 affirms, God disarmed the evil powers of this world by triumphing over them in Christ. Jesus secured victory over evil at the cross.

Lastly, the Bible sees the cross as the glory of Christ and the wisdom of God. The gospel writer John refers to Jesus as both lifted up and glorified (John 3:14, 12:23). “The lifting up and the glorification both refer to the cross. The positive terms used for Jesus’ death indicate that it is the pathway to his exaltation and glorification. Jesus is exalted not despite the cross, but precisely because of it.”<sup>104</sup> Further, Paul writes about Christ crucified as the wisdom and power of God in 1 Corinthians 1. He does this because in God’s immense power and wisdom, he determined that the crucified Christ would be the means by which he saves his people. In all these descriptions of the cross, not one of them highlights the negative impacts of the cross. To be sure, Jesus suffered and died on the cross, but reading the narratives of the cross event in light of a broader biblical theology of God’s plan of redemption prevents readers from bifurcating the cross and its life-giving effects. Christ’s work on the cross must be viewed not simply from a human standpoint, but from the point of view of Scripture.<sup>105</sup>

The church knows that she can correctly identify *who* Jesus is only by placing him in the context of the Bible’s storyline, teaching, and worldview. In fact, any attempt to do Christology by some other means leads only to a Jesus of our own imagination.<sup>106</sup>

## CONCLUSION

I have argued that trauma theology, emerging from the divergent traditions of liberation and feminist theology, represents a significant departure from classical Christianity and, while it may inform biblical counseling on trauma, it should be critically engaged and not allowed to supplant classical Christology. The thesis was advanced through four movements: (1) make a general presentation of trauma theology (2) contrasted with

classical Christology (3) and to describe the historical path from classical Christology to trauma theology (4) and the subsequent effects of trauma theology in biblical counseling.

Trauma theology seeks to present a sympathetic savior to those who suffer, portraying Jesus as kind, loving, and compassionate. Yet, in this framework, Jesus lacks the power to deliver his followers from sin and suffering. By contrast, the Jesus of Scripture not only offers compassion but also possesses the authority to end suffering itself. As sufferers, we require more than consolation; we need deliverance. Indeed, “the true power of divine compassion is inextricably linked to the cross, where the suffering servant defeats the sources that first introduced suffering to the world.”<sup>107</sup> Christian hope rests in the finished work of Christ on the cross, which secures victory over sin and death. Trauma survivors need not merely a sympathetic companion but the incarnate Son of God who demonstrates both authority and power to deliver his people.

<sup>1</sup> Shelly Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma: A Theology of Remaining* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), 14.

<sup>2</sup> Trauma theology is an interdisciplinary endeavor just as much as the subject of trauma itself is interdisciplinary. Scott Harrower, *God of All Comfort: A Trinitarian Response to the Horrors of This World* (Bellingham: Lexham Press, 2019), 38; Shelly Rambo, “‘Theologians Engaging Trauma’ Transcript,” *Theology Today* 68, no. 3 (2011): 229, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0040573611416539>.

<sup>3</sup> See Karen O'Donnell's definition of trauma theology in *St. Andrews Encyclopaedia of Theology*. O'Donnell, Karen. “Trauma Theology.” In *St. Andrews Encyclopaedia of Theology*, edited by Brendan N. Wolfe. University of St. Andrews, 2023. <https://www.saet.ac.uk/Christianity/TraumaTheology>

<sup>4</sup> Uses of trauma theology will be noted in several popular works below. However, several new works have been produced in series focused on trauma theology. One such example is *New Studies in Trauma and Theology* by Wipf and Stock Publishers. Further, a simple google or amazon search for trauma and theology will produce a myriad of results. <https://wipfandstock.com/search-results/?series=new-studies-in-theology-and-trauma>.

<sup>5</sup> SCM Press issued a call for academic proposals on trauma theology in May of 2024. The series will be called “Studies in Trauma Theology,” and the editorial board is made up of faculty from these universities. The leading scholar in the field of trauma theology, Serene Jones, is the 16<sup>th</sup> president of Union Theological Seminary. Princeton Theological Seminary offers a Master of Arts in Theology focusing on Justice and Public Life. This degree program places an emphasis on trauma and related topics. “Announcing the ‘Studies in Trauma Theology’ Series,” accessed August 9, 2025, <https://scmpress.hymnsam.co.uk/blog/announcing-the-studies-in-trauma-theology-series/>; “Rev. Serene Jones, MDiv, PhD,” *Union Theological Seminary*, n.d., accessed August 9, 2025, <https://utsnyc.edu/blog/faculty/serene-jones/>; “Princeton Theological Seminary Launches New MAT Program Focusing on Justice and Public Life,” *Princeton Theological Seminary*, December 9, 2022, <https://www.ptsem.edu/about/the-quad/news/news-princeton-theological-seminary-launches-new-mat-program-focusing-on-justice-and-public-life/>.

<sup>6</sup> Harrower, *God of All Comfort*, 38–39.

<sup>7</sup> Gregg R. Allison, *Embodied: Living as Whole People in a Fractured World* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2021).

- 8 Common definitions refer to trauma as four different things: a state, an effect, an experience, and an event. Trauma is “a disordered psychic or behavioral *state*,” indicated by a “person’s *experience of emotional distress*.” The American Psychological Association defines trauma as, “any disturbing *experience* that results in significant fear, helplessness, dissociation, confusion, or other disruptive feelings intense enough to have a long-lasting negative effect on a person’s attitudes, behavior, and other aspects of functioning.” Trauma may also be referred to as an event. “Traumatic events include those caused by human behavior (e.g., rape, war, industrial accidents) as well as by nature (e.g., earthquakes) and often challenge an individual’s view of the world as a just, safe, and predictable place. The difficulty of defining trauma comes in part from the many, even contradictory uses of the word. A summary definition of trauma may incorporate each of these facets (state, effect, experience, and event) but will center on a person’s *experience* after enduring a traumatizing event. “Trauma | Psychology Today,” accessed August 1, 2025, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/basics/trauma>; “APA Dictionary of Psychology,” accessed August 1, 2025, <https://dictionary.apa.org/>.
- 9 Serene Jones, *Trauma and Grace: Theology in a Ruptured World*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2019), 13.
- 10 John Henderson, “Crisis and Trauma in Counseling,” unpublished class notes for 34830 (The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Summer Semester, 2023), 25.
- 11 Henderson, “Crisis and Trauma in Counseling,” 49.
- 12 Judith L. Herman, *Trauma and Recovery* (Basic Books, 2022), 49.
- 13 Karen Onderko, “What Is Trauma?,” *Unyte Integrated Listening*, September 13, 2018, <https://integratedlistening.com/blog/what-is-trauma/>.
- 14 Henderson, “Crisis and Trauma in Counseling,” 24.
- 15 Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 50.
- 16 Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 69.
- 17 Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 69.
- 18 American Psychiatric Association, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Text Revision Dsm-5-Tr*, 5th edition (Amer Psychiatric Pub Inc, 2022), 271. Fifth Edition, Text Revision (DSM-5-TR)
- 19 American Psychiatric Association, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*.
- 20 O’Donnell, “Trauma Theology,” 5.1.
- 21 O’Donnell, “Trauma Theology,” 5.1.
- 22 Gregg R. Allison, *The Baker Compact Dictionary of Theological Terms* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2016), 189.
- 23 Jones, *Trauma and Grace*, xi.
- 24 Jones sees two primary traumatizing events in Scripture. First, Jones cites the cross of Christ. She explains, “It’s hard to imagine anywhere in literature or in the annal of human experience a more traumatic event than the torture and execution of this man Jesus.” The second event Jones perceives is the traumatization of the early church. Jones cites the failure of the disciples to recognize Jesus on the road to Emmaus as an example of the effects of trauma in the wake of Jesus’ death. These examples from Jones illustrate her reading of Scripture through the lens of trauma studies. Jones, *Trauma and Grace*, xi.
- 25 Jones, *Trauma and Grace*, xvi; 8.
- 26 Shelly Rambo, “‘Theologians Engaging Trauma’ Transcript,” *Theology Today* 68, no. 3 (2011): 226, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0040573611416539>.
- 27 Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma*, 14.
- 28 Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma*, 5.
- 29 Jones, *Trauma and Grace*, 5.
- 30 Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma*, 5.
- 31 In fact, Rambo calls for a re-working of faith as she writes, “Trauma becomes not simply a detour on the map of faith but, rather, a significant reworking of the entire map.” Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma*, 9–10.
- 32 Karen O’Donnell, *Broken Bodies: The Eucharist, Mary and the Body in Trauma Theology* (London: SCM Press, 2018), ch. 8.

- 33 Another such theologian is Flora Keshgegian, who seeks to revise historical Christology in light of traumatic experiences. One of the early leaders in the field of trauma theology, Keshgegian's influential view of man-centered Christianity has spread through others in the field. Keshgegian sees "theology to be a discursive practice that seeks to realize and embody in wisdom and word the transforming and liberating practice of Christianity." She continues, "The truth of theology is manifest in its effectiveness; *the word is true if it redeems*. That word is Wisdom, the agent of redemptive action. *In the beginning is not word*, but the silence and the hearing. In the beginning is the remembering, which leads to re-membering." Though it is a play on words, Keshgegian's assertion that "In the beginning is not word ..." puts her intention to re-write Christology on display. Flora A. Keshgegian, *Redeeming Memories: A Theology of Healing and Transformation* (Abingdon Press, n.d.), 24.
- 34 O'Donnell, *Broken Bodies*, ch.8.
- 35 Megan K. McCabe, "Review: When and Where Trauma and Theology Meet," *America Magazine*, September 16, 2019, <https://www.americamagazine.org/arts-culture/2019/09/16/review-when-and-where-trauma-and-theology-meet/>; O'Donnell, *Broken Bodies*.
- 36 Henderson, "Crisis and Trauma in Counseling."
- 37 Chris Greenough, "Traumatized People Are Not Your 'Mission Field,'" *The Shiloh Project*, April 1, 2021, <https://shilohproject.blog/traumatized-people-are-not-your-mission-field/>; Jones, *Trauma and Grace*, 7.
- 38 O'Donnell, *Feminist Trauma Theologies*, 23. This book seeks to articulate an explicit understanding of feminist trauma theology for the first time. Bringing together scholars from a range of disciplines, this book explores the relationship between trauma and feminist theologies, highlighting methodological, theological, and practical similarities between the two. The #MeToo and #ChurchToo movements, sexual abuse scandals, gender-based violence, pregnancy loss, and the oppression of women in Church spaces are all featured as important topics. With contributions from a diverse team of scholars, this book is an essential resource for all thinkers and practitioners who are trying to navigate the current conversations around theology, suffering, and feminism. With a foreword by Shelly Rambo, author of *Resurrecting Wounds*, "event-place." "London," "ISBN": "978-0-334-05872-4", "language": "English", "number-of-pages": "384", "publisher": "SCM Press", "publisher-place": "London", "source": "Amazon", "title": "Feminist Trauma Theologies: Body, Scripture & Church in Critical Perspective", "title-short": "Feminist Trauma Theologies", "author": [{"family": "O'Donnell", "given": "Karen"}], "issued": [{"date-parts": [{"2020"}]}]}, "schema": "https://github.com/citation-style-language/schema/raw/master/csl-citation.json"
- 39 O'Donnell, "Trauma Theology," 5.1.
- 40 O'Donnell, "Trauma Theology," 7.1.
- 41 O'Donnell, "Trauma Theology," 7.1. Italics added.
- 42 Shelly Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma*, 5.
- 43 David Carr sees the Bible as a long line of one trauma after another. He argues, "The cross of Jesus, of course, is just one of many painful episodes that fed into the Bible." David McLain Carr, *Holy Resilience: The Bible's Traumatic Origins* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), 2.
- 44 Eliza Huie writes, "It doesn't take long for traumatic events to show up in the Bible... Trauma makes an alarming entrance in the New Testament as well." Eliza Huie and Elyse Fitzpatrick, *Trauma Aware: A Christian's Guide to Providing Help and Care* (Harvest House Publishers, Inc, 2025).
- 45 Here are four key examples: Shelly Rambo on John in Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma*; David Carr on both Jewish and Christian texts in David McLain Carr, *Holy Resilience: The Bible's Traumatic Origins* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014); Kathleen O'Connor on Lamentations: "Lamentations' testimony is bitter, raw, and largely unhealed. Its poems use 'wounded words' to illumine pain and resist God's acts in the world." Kathleen H. O'Connor and Walter Brueggemann, *Lamentations and the Tears of the World* (Orbis Books, 2002); Tina Pippin, *Apocalyptic Bodies: The Biblical End of the World in Text and Image* (Routledge, 1999).
- 46 The synthesis of literature in the section was helped by Laura-Lee Alford's paper for 84950, "You Keep Using that Word. I Do Not Think It Means What You Think It Means": Hermeneutical, Theological, and Practical Problems of Calling the Cross *Trauma*."
- 47 Carr, *Holy Resilience*, 157.
- 48 Carr, *Holy Resilience*, 2.
- 49 Carr, *Holy Resilience*, 2–3.
- 50 Jones, *Trauma and Grace*, xvi.
- 51 Jones, *Trauma and Grace*, xvi, italics added.
- 52 Jones, *Trauma and Grace*, 85.
- 53 Jones, *Trauma and Grace*, 72.

- 54 Diane Langberg, *Suffering and the Heart of God: How Trauma Destroys and Christ Restores* (New Growth Press, 2015), 78; 118.
- 55 Todd Stryd, "Psalms 129, 130, and 131: A Framework for Trauma Care," *Journal of Biblical Counseling* 38, no. 1 (2024): 5–28.
- 56 Stryd, "A Framework for Trauma Care," 25–26.
- 57 Stryd, "A Framework for Trauma Care," 26.
- 58 For more examples of popular sources citing the cross as trauma, see Eliza Huie, *Trauma Aware*; Abby Perry, "Did Jesus Experience Trauma? Experts Say 'Yes,'" *Christianity Today*, December 13, 2021, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/partners/gloo/did-jesus-experience-trauma-experts-say-yes/>; Dean Bonura, "The Trauma of the Cross: A Narrative for Healing," *The Warrior's Journey*, accessed October 15, 2024, <https://thewarriorsjourney.org/challenges/trauma-cross-narrative-healing/>; and Matthew Stanford, "Five Things the Scriptures Teach Us about Trauma and Suffering," *Hope and Healing Center and Institute*, accessed August 15, 2025, <https://hopeandhealingcenter.org/five-things-the-scriptures-teach-us-about-trauma-and-suffering-by-dr-matthew-s-stanford/>.
- 59 Steve Midgley, *Understanding Trauma: A Biblical Introduction for Church Care* (Good Book Company, 2025), 67–69.
- 60 "Trauma stewardship honors the survivor, the pain, the story, and our limitations. It abides in hope and honors God, who never wastes pain." Kelly Simpson, "Helping the Traumatized," *The Gospel Coalition*, June 25, 2021, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/helping-traumatized/>.
- 61 Stephen J. Wellum, *Systematic Theology: From Canon to Concept, vol. 1* (Brentwood: B&H Academic, 2024), 135.
- 62 The Chalcedonian Creed, *The Westminster Standard*. Accessed August 1, 2025, <https://thewestminsterstandard.org/the-chalcedonian-creed/> Chalcedonian Creed.
- 63 Stephen J. Wellum, *The Person of Christ: An Introduction* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2021), 66.
- 64 The Chalcedonian Creed, *The Westminster Standard*. Accessed August 1, 2025
- 65 Jones argues that she is working from a view of the Trinity that "follows a classical logic," yet her writing may indicate a social trinitarian view. Jones, *Trauma and Grace*, xiv; 176.
- 66 Jones, *Trauma and Grace*, 147
- 67 Jones, *Trauma and Grace*, 147.
- 68 For more see Steven J. Duby, *Jesus and the God of Classical Theism: Biblical Christology in Light of the Doctrine of God* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2023), 321; Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* 3.46.12.2, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province, accessed August 10, 2025, <https://www.newadvent.org/summa/4046.htm#article2>.
- 69 Stephen J. Wellum, *God the Son Incarnate: The Doctrine of Christ* (Crossway, 2016), 190.
- 70 Wellum, *The Person of Christ*: 158.
- 71 Aaron Riches, *Ecce Homo: On the Divine Unity of Christ* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016), 135.
- 72 Francis Turretin et al., *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*. (Phillipsburg: P&R, 1992), 354.
- 73 David F. Wells, *The Person of Christ* (Westchester: Crossway, 1984), 173–74.
- 74 For more, see Wellum, *The Person of Christ*, ch. 2.
- 75 Wellum, *God the Son Incarnate*, 113.
- 76 Wellum, *The Person of Christ*, 47.
- 77 Here is a popular example of how trauma theology has impacted modern thinking. "Central to trauma theology is the crucified Christ, as in that moment, the experience of human suffering and trauma can be fully understood by God. The cross becomes a symbol of solidarity; an expression of the experiences of trauma, suffering, and abandonment Jesus suffers in the crucifixion. Rather than bypassing the suffering in the human experience, trauma theology highlights how God enters into human pain without rushing to resolve it. From this, survivors of trauma can see God within their trauma, not just as a God who understands them. Faith can now be a way to help understand trauma rather than a way to suppress and ignore it." "Trauma Theology and Pastoral Care | Student Christian Movement," accessed August 12, 2025, <https://www.movement.org.uk/blog/trauma-theology-and-pastoral-care>.
- 78 For more on the necessity of Christ's death, see Turretin, *Institutes*, Vol 2, 14.10.
- 79 Wellum, *The Person of Christ*, 22. Wellum cites Colin Brown, *Jesus in European Protestant Thought (1778–1860)* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1985).
- 80 Jürgen Moltmann, *A Broad Place: An Autobiography*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Fortress Press, 2009).
- 81 Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God* (Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 1993), 1.
- 82 Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 1.

- <sup>83</sup> Another quote is representative of Moltmann's panentheistic thought. "God is unconditional love, because he takes on himself grief at the contradiction in men and does not angrily suppress this contradiction. God allows himself to be forced out. God suffers, God allows himself to be crucified and is crucified, and in this consummates his unconditional love that is so full of hope" Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 248, 255.
- <sup>84</sup> "Meaning 'all is in God,' this view equates the universe with God (like pantheism) but allows God to have a separate identity distinct from the universe (unlike pantheism). In panentheism, everything that exists is contained within God, but God is separate from and greater than everything that exists." John D. Barry et al., eds., "Panentheism," in *The Lexham Bible Dictionary* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016).
- <sup>85</sup> "The world is in God, but only in his existence, not in his essence. Hence God includes everything, but everything is not God." David Ray Griffin, *A Process Christology* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1973), 188.
- <sup>86</sup> As a leading trauma theologian, Rambo's experience with these emerging studies at Yale is indicative of the beginning as of the field in general. Rambo, "Theologians Engaging Trauma," 224–29.
- <sup>87</sup> The connection between trauma and war is well documented. Here is one such example of a study linking way and traumatic effect. Ebrahim Masoudnia and Fatemeh Rahmati Farmani, "Psychosocial Etiology of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder Caused by War Trauma among Iran–Iraq War Immigrants in Mehran, Iran," *Journal of Migration and Health* 9 (January 2024): 100225, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jmh.2024.100225>.
- <sup>88</sup> Kelebogile T. Resane, "Moltmann in Conversation with Feminist Theologians: How Does His Theology Correlate and Differ with Feminist Theology?" *Verbum et Ecclesia* 42, no. 1 (2021): 10, <https://doi.org/10.4102/ve.v42i1.2319>.
- <sup>89</sup> Carter quotes Lisa Isherwood and Dorothea McEwan, *Introducing Feminist Theology* (Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 92, as well as a first rate resource for those wishing to refresh their acquaintance with it. Despite claims in some quarters that 'feminism' has been surpassed by 'gender' this book explains how vital a feminist agenda remains, and how much is still to be done, both at the theological and the practical level, to transform Christianity from two centuries of male-gendered discourse and ecclesiastical structure into a religion that adequately reflects the life of modern women."event-place": "Sheffield", "ISBN-N": "978-1-84127-233-7", "language": "English", "number-of-pages": "158", "publisher": "Sheffield Academic Press", "publisher-place": "Sheffield", "source": "Amazon", "title": "Introducing Feminist Theology", "author": [{"family": "Isherwood", "given": "Lisa"}], [{"family": "McEwan", "given": "Dorothea"}], "issued": {"date-parts": [{"2001}]}}, "locator": "21"}, {"schema": "https://github.com/citation-style-language/schema/raw/master/csl-citation.json"} Micah Daniel Carter, "An Evangelical Analysis and Critique of Feminist Christology" (PhD Diss, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2008), 24. <https://repository.sbps.edu/handle/10392/470>.
- <sup>90</sup> O'Donnell, *Feminist Trauma Theologies*. this book seeks to articulate an explicit understanding of feminist trauma theology for the first time. Bringing together scholars from a range of disciplines, this book explores the relationship between trauma and feminist theologies, highlighting methodological, theological, and practical similarities between the two. The #MeToo and #ChurchToo movements, sexual abuse scandals, gender based violence, pregnancy loss, and the oppression of women in Church spaces are all featured as important topics. With contributions from a diverse team of scholars, this book is an essential resource for all thinkers and practitioners who are trying to navigate the current conversations around theology, suffering, and feminism. With a foreword by Shelly Rambo, author of *Resurrecting Wounds*, "event-place": "London", "ISBN": "978-0-334-05872-4", "language": "English", "number-of-pages": "384", "publisher": "SCM Press", "publisher-place": "London", "source": "Amazon", "title": "Feminist Trauma Theologies: Body, Scripture & Church in Critical Perspective", "title-short": "Feminist Trauma Theologies", "author": [{"family": "O'Donnell", "given": "Karen"}], "issued": {"date-parts": [{"2020}]}}, {"schema": "https://github.com/citation-style-language/schema/raw/master/csl-citation.json"} }

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- <sup>91</sup> O'Donnell, *Feminist Trauma Theologies*. This book seeks to articulate an explicit understanding of feminist trauma theology for the first time. Bringing together scholars from a range of disciplines, this book explores the relationship between trauma and feminist theologies, highlighting methodological, theological, and practical similarities between the two. The #MeToo and #ChurchToo movements, sexual abuse scandals, gender based violence, pregnancy loss, and the oppression of women in Church spaces are all featured as important topics. With contributions from a diverse team of scholars, this book is an essential resource for all thinkers and practitioners who are trying to navigate the current conversations around theology, suffering, and feminism. With a foreword by Shelly Rambo, author of *Resurrecting Wounds*, "event-place": "London", "ISBN": "978-0-334-05872-4", "language": "English", "number-of-pages": "384", "publisher": "SCM Press", "publisher-place": "London", "source": "Amazon", "title": "Feminist Trauma Theologies: Body, Scripture & Church in Critical Perspective", "title-short": "Feminist Trauma Theologies", "author": [{"family": "O'Donnell", "given": "Karen"}], "issued": [{"date-parts": [{"2020"}]}], "schema": "https://github.com/citation-style-language/schema/raw/master/csl-citation.json"
- <sup>92</sup> Wellum, *The Person of Christ*, 24.
- <sup>93</sup> Wellum, *The Person of Christ*, 24.
- <sup>94</sup> Wellum, *The Person of Christ*, 28.
- <sup>95</sup> Wellum, *The Person of Christ*, 21.
- <sup>96</sup> Many of these ideas came from Stephen Wellum, "The Work of Christ" (unpublished class notes for 27070, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Summer Semester, 2022), 109–16.
- <sup>97</sup> Wellum, *Systematic Theology*, 427.
- <sup>98</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Q. 46.6.
- <sup>99</sup> Wellum, "The Work of Christ," 113.
- <sup>100</sup> Allison, *The Baker Compact Dictionary*, "Justification."
- <sup>101</sup> John R. W. Stott, *The Cross of Christ* (Downers Grove: IVP Books, 2006), 226.
- <sup>102</sup> Perry, "Did Jesus Experience Trauma?"
- <sup>103</sup> Stott, *The Cross of Christ*, 223–24.
- <sup>104</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner, *New Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 227.
- <sup>105</sup> Additional views include propitiation and moral example. Scripture views the cross of Christ as an act of propitiation. Christ's death paid for our sins and in so doing, assuaged God's wrath (Rom 3:24–26). An old hymn captures the meaning of propitiation with beauty. "Death and the curse were in our cup, O Christ, 'twas full for Thee! But Thou hast drained the last dark drop — 'Tis empty now for me. That bitter cup — love drank it up; Now blessings' draught for me." (Anne Cousins) The cross of Christ also serves as a moral example for his people. At the cross, onlookers see Jesus' love, obedience, sacrifice, and power. Christians are meant to take up their crosses and to follow Jesus (Luke 9:23). This verse may not be applied literally to all believers, it exhorts Jesus' followers to live and die as he did, loving God and others.
- <sup>106</sup> Wellum, *The Person of Christ*, 21.
- <sup>107</sup> Scott Christensen, *What about Evil? A Defense of God's Sovereign Glory* (Phillipsburg: P&R, 2020), 384.