

Trauma + Grace

Theology in a Ruptured World

Second Edition

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Foreword

When I opened *Trauma and Grace* I expected to find a story of persons struggling with personal trauma and pain, and a theological treatise on the meaning of grace. What I didn't expect to find was insight into an unrelenting violence in this country that is often overlooked and ignored in our society—a violence that was not overlooked by Serene Jones. This violence has impacted a body of people across generations—namely, black people. It is the violence of white supremacy, which Jones describes as “the entrenched horror of state violence against black bodies.”

White supremacy rests on the notion that white people are intrinsically better than nonwhite persons, while those who are nonwhite are innately inferior beings—in some instances closer to beasts than humans. It is in this way that the ideology of white supremacy is inherently violent.

As Jones recognizes, violence must be understood not simply as the physical brutality meant to harm bodies of people but also as systems of thought that objectify or negate the humanity of another. Indeed, narratives and ideologies of violence foster a cycle of violence in which people become entrapped. Such has been the case with the narrative of white supremacy. It has spawned racist and discriminatory systems and structures that have wreaked untold violence on nonwhite bodies—namely, the black body as blackness is viewed in stark opposition to whiteness. Hence, black people are disproportionately entrapped in the complex web of violence that is a poverty-to-prison-to-death pipeline. The point of the matter is, the black collective body has endured generational violence

of white supremacy, and with this comes the inevitable reality of collective trauma.

Trauma, as Jones points out, is “a wound or an injury [be it physical, psychic, emotional, or spiritual] inflicted upon the body by an act of violence.” What does this traumatic wound look like for a body of people who have experienced unrelenting violence across generations? What is the traumatic impact of chattel slavery, Jim Crow, lynching, and a poverty-to-prison-to-death pipeline on a people? How does it manifest not only in individual bodies but also in the collective body? Most important, how does one become free from such deep and lingering trauma?

These are the questions that Jones addresses. In so doing, she suggests that those who have experienced a long pattern of violence and its concomitant trauma find it “hard to let in things from outside which could potentially be salvific,” that is, freeing. Put simply, it is hard to “let in” the loving grace of God. It is here that Jones turns to the “alluring cross.”

There is no doubt that the cross reflects the depth and scope of the reprehensible violence that can be inflicted on a human being. On the cross, therefore, Jesus suffers the depth of human trauma experienced by those most victimized by profound violence. He endures the excruciating physical trauma of nails piercing his hands and feet. He also endures the agonizing spiritual trauma of feeling abandoned by God—“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” he cries out.

It is no wonder, therefore, that the cross is at the center of black faith. That Jesus was crucified indicates his absolute solidarity with victims of unspeakable violence, like that of white supremacy. Jesus makes this solidarity clear in his absolute refusal to save himself from the fate of crucifixion. “If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!” the soldiers shout. By remaining silent, Jesus does nothing to save himself at the same time that he forsakes any privilege—human or divine—that would compromise his steadfast identification with victims of crucifying violence.

It is because of Jesus' death on the cross that black faith testifies to Jesus' "deep and personal" identification with black people as they bear the trauma that is exacted by the legacy of white supremacist violence. Howard Thurman explains it this way, as he describes the significance of Jesus' death on the cross for the enslaved: The "death of Jesus took on a deep and personal poignancy." There was, he says, "a quality of identification in the experience."¹ Put simply, just as black people have been sure that Jesus identifies with their realities of violence and trauma, they identify with his. Thus, as black people sing "Were You There When They Crucified My Lord?" the boundaries of time are crossed. For it testifies not only that they are on the cross with Jesus, but also that Jesus is with them in their crucifying realities. And, despite the fact that, as Jones says, "we are not supposed . . . to find any sort of comfort in the pain suffered [on the cross]," for a people whose lives have been consistently marked by violence, 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. It is the connection between the cross and the resurrection that has enabled black people to know not only that God, through Jesus, deeply feels their pain and suffering, but also that God can help them to overcome it. And so it was that black people could testify in song, "He arose, he arose from the dead. An' de Lord shall bear my spirit home."

Essentially, because God overcame the trauma of crucifying violence, the black faithful are confident that the trauma of white supremacy will not have the last word over their lives. As Jones points out, the cross reveals at once "the horror of the

1. Howard Thurman, *Deep River and the Negro Spiritual Speaks of Life and Death* (Richmond, IN: Friends United Press, 1975), 27.

[crucifying] violence and persistence of [God's] love." Such a grace that comes through the violence of the cross, she concedes, does not make "logical sense": still she recognizes that it is in understanding crucifying grace that perhaps we can all become free from the traumatic realities of crucifying violence that shapes our lives—like that of white supremacy. And this is what makes *Trauma and Grace* a must read.

In *Trauma and Grace* Jones takes us beyond simply understanding the complexities of trauma and what theologians have said about God's grace. Rather, through the stories of violence and trauma that she shares, even from her own life, she calls us all to a new way of being in a world that is saturated with crucifying violence. She reminds us that God's grace frees us to see and to respond to the realities of crucifying violence in our very midst.

In the end, I encountered yet another unexpected aspect of this book. It is more than a theological treatise. It is a call to join God in breaking the cycle of violence that traumatizes the bodies, minds, and souls of people—especially that violence that is most overlooked and ignored in our society—especially white supremacy. *Trauma and Grace* is a book of subtle power as it speaks a timeless truth to all those yearning for a future when violence is no more.

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Introduction to the Second Edition

TRAUMA

When I began writing this book twenty years ago, there was only one other book that had attempted to bring together theology and a massive amount of material in literary studies and psychology on trauma. I began with the literary material on trauma that focuses on how violence is manifested in the art and writings of victims and communities. I was fascinated with work coming out of a group at Yale, where I was teaching at the time, studying literature from the Holocaust. In terms of trauma, they were just as interested in what was said as in what couldn't be said. They discussed how violence is manifested in people's memories. Sometimes people can verbalize it, but often they cannot find the words. It seems that when we experience the possibility of annihilation, our brains simply can't take it in and process it as they do everyday events. A space gets created, but it isn't blank. That space holds horrendous things that affect people's entire bodies, the way they move and exist in the world. The issue becomes how to bring this blank space into verbal expression and public awareness.

Reading so much literature on trauma certainly affected the way I read the Bible. The Bible is one long series of traumatic events and accounts of how people struggle to speak about God in the face of them. Two traumatic biblical events jumped out at me immediately—the crucifixion and the resulting trauma of those Christians who experienced it. It's hard to imagine anywhere in literature or in the annals of human experience a more traumatic event than the torture and execution of this man Jesus, and the event was supported by the whole

surrounding culture. James Cone's descriptions of what lynchings did to the black community in the United States aptly capture what the cross did in the first century. It was designed to terrorize the people who watched it and to humiliate, shame, and utterly destroy the person experiencing it. So, for Christianity, understanding trauma is not just a kind of secondary issue—it is rather the most central event of our faith.

What does it mean for God to be present in that event? And why did God choose this? I don't think God orchestrated Jesus' death, but why is it so powerful to say that God was on the cross in Jesus Christ? Just what is the power of the cross? It's not about valorizing trauma, which the church has too often done, but actually about exposing trauma.

The second biblical event that arose from a traumatic event is what happened in early Christianity after Jesus was violently killed. The disciples witnessed their leader torn to pieces, and then they were the ones who were told to go out and spread the word. Here they are, completely fragmented and undone by trauma. In the story of Emmaus, the people don't recognize Jesus walking with them. That's sort of like the blank of trauma. And take doubting Thomas. What if his doubt was the doubt of disassociation rather than the doubt of someone interpreted by some European philosopher as a man questioning the existence of God? Two very different versions of doubt.

I think the subject of trauma affects the entire way we read the whole of the New Testament and the whole of the Hebrew Bible. My thinking on the early work on trauma hasn't changed, but I have become more aware of three things. First, I am aware of the impact of collective traumas that get passed down from generation to generation. Trauma lives in our bodies and our unconscious minds and actions. Exposing and verbalizing that trauma is so important. It is so helpful to expose these entrenched horrors of life in America that keep replicating themselves—for example, white supremacy and the entrenched horror of state violence against black bodies, and relentless attacks on the physical integrity of women. Why does this keep happening over and over again and we can't

interrupt it, even though we can write all sorts of books on an intellectual level about why it's wrong? Why can't it stop? So, I have become more aware of collective trauma that lingers and what it means to understand trauma at that level.

Second, I've become more aware of secondary trauma, or the effects of trauma on the lives of those who haven't directly undergone the trauma. A trauma that happens to one person in the community can terrorize an entire community, even those to whom the violence doesn't happen directly. Consider the long-reaching trauma of the deadly attacks of 9/11 and how many people were traumatized who were not physically present. Following 9/11 there was a rush of literature about the effects of secondary trauma. We heard a lot about compassion fatigue and about the trauma of frontline caregivers who were caring for people who had experienced the violence. The caregivers themselves began to experience the effects of it. Most recently, it's so clear to me that the figure of Donald Trump is terrorizing so many people in this country who have either directly or collectively or because of a loved one experienced events of horrific violence. His person, his speech, his actions, embody white supremacy, patriarchy, entitlement, and brutality. Just his presence has a traumatic impact on the lives and bodies of people; even hearing him speak triggers memories of their horrific history. It also helps explain the collective trauma of our country right now. And I think when you begin to understand trauma and what it does to people, like the real physical impacts it has, it helps you begin to understand why progressive people in this country who are committed to social change, and particularly communities who have undergone long histories of violence and oppression, are so difficult to organize and why there's so much infighting. It's because the violence that's happened leaves scar tissue that must be worked through in order to get to the place where there can be collective action. Until progressive people begin to more clearly name these harms, the left will continue fracturing. Where we go politically at this moment is impacted by this.

A third way my thinking has changed that I didn't appreciate when I first wrote this book is the degree to which the different forms of violence I was describing have also been perpetrated against the earth itself. We are witnessing the violation of the integrity of creation. It's as if we're living in a traumatized physical environment. I know how to name that as a trauma, but I don't know how to talk about this trauma. Most of the literature of trauma focuses on its psychological effects and bodily effects, but I don't know how to talk about it in nature, which we don't personify. Nature is a complex system. There is so much more work that can be done in theology and religious communities about where we're going as a human species, which can be aided by understanding trauma.

Since I wrote this book, I have become convinced that understanding trauma not only helps deepen our understanding of Scripture, but also is essential to the task of theology today. When you look at the Christian and Hebrew Scriptures, the Qur'an, the Upanishads, they are narrating histories of horrendous violence and how people and God respond to it. And yet, often in Christianity we have not focused on that history, but rather we've lifted out of it and abstracted from it belief statements that hover above the reality of what these stories are narrating. So you get something like the doctrine of the Trinity, which hovers above as if the doctrine is the truth. But the doctrine of the Trinity arose from how we think about the fact that this Jesus who died on the cross is also God and yet God didn't die, but Jesus died, so who is God? Those are real questions about how God is present to us in violence, in the midst of violence. It changes the way we think about the endeavor of theology.

GRACE

I was raised in a very progressive, loving, Disciples of Christ community among loving people who were all universalists

and believed that everyone is saved. God loves everybody, and that is God's grace. We don't have to earn God's love, although we can respond to God's grace by being loving ourselves in the world. We're not being loving in order to earn God's love. It's just there.

As I was studying all of this literature on trauma I was struck by what these acts of annihilating violence do to the human brain and the body. Because it is intangible, we don't know exactly how it happens, but it nonetheless drives a trench in your brain and into the patterns of your body, and it's a loop that you can't get out of that you keep going back through and experiencing over and over. It begins to dominate everything you do. Even when you're unconscious of it, you're constantly replaying these moments or this series of moments in which you almost were not. The psychological material on trauma says the hardest part of dealing with trauma is figuring out how to interrupt that pattern. Something must happen that breaks the community or the person out of the prison they're trapped in. Most people who have experienced trauma don't have the ability to break the loop alone. That's a prison. They can't free themselves. So something new has to intervene, and it's almost as though the possibility of a different kind of reality has to be made manifest. And it must come from outside of yourself, because you can't do it alone. The problem is that the reality of the world outside of yourself and the trauma that has been written into your body is a threat. So it's hard to let in things from outside that could potentially be salvific to you, because what is outside has tried to kill you.

Because trauma is like a feedback loop, you have to tell the story, and in telling the story you will eventually have to be able for your own imagination and your own body to imagine a different ending, to imagine a space beyond that story. So, for instance, if you are a woman imprisoned by the horror of having been raped, somehow you must be able to eventually get to a place where you can imagine the person you can be on the other side of that. It does not mean you repress or deny what

happened, but that you can have agency and you can experience joy in the presence of that knowledge. That's the different ending. The trauma doesn't have to be a prison for you.

The Christian tradition understands the grace of God as something that comes to us from outside. As we say in our faith traditions, we don't conjure up grace from somewhere deep inside of us. It's a gift of love that we receive from God. Our whole tradition is about people's own imprisoned stories being interrupted by a love that makes no sense intervening in their lives and having the capacity in that intervention to create a new path. Psychology talks about how therapists can help open new paths in situations of trauma. In the case of a person who has experienced childhood trauma, for example, over time the therapist helps the person interrupt the pattern by presenting possible new ways of thinking. Well, isn't the whole story of Christianity about the world imprisoned by violence being massively interrupted by the gift of God's love? We are unable to conjure up this love, but God gives it to us nonetheless. That's grace. Grace is a gift; it's a free gift from God that comes from outside, capable of breaking never-ending cycles of violence.

The resurrection is like the portrait of this grace, because it's so clear in the resurrection that the love of God comes into the midst of violence and is not undone by it but creates another story. The resurrection makes clear for us all to see what actually happens on the cross. What happens on the cross is so traumatic. Jesus, even as he's undergoing a horribly torturous, traumatic death, doesn't protect himself in some supernatural way so that he doesn't experience the trauma. He's totally traumatized by it. And yet, Jesus, in the midst of all this, doesn't stop loving us. I particularly think about the words of Jesus on the cross. He is speaking the trauma ("My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Why is this happening?) and yet he refuses to turn around and curse those who have harmed him. He continues to somehow look out from the cross at humanity and see the goodness and the possibility there, even in the midst of the trauma. He doesn't stop seeing us. In a way it's as

though trauma, the violence, tries to imprison him and fails. And that's the grace that gives all of us a glimpse of the power of God's love. On the cross Jesus is consumed by violence, sin, and yet he (Jesus and God) does not let it conquer love. I think James Cone captures this sense of grace in his book *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*, where he comes to grips with the horrific weight and terrible truth of the violence and trauma meted out on the bodies of black people, and yet, as he talks about his own family and community, experiences the persistence of love and vitality in the midst of that horror. That is grace.

This is so different from thinking of Jesus as a martyr. 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. It makes no logical sense.

Despite the frozen grip of violence and all the forced silence in our current world, I have an image that this persistent love lies just beneath the surface. The truth is breaking through the cracks of that frozen surface, and we're starting to see all of this violence. And the fact that we're seeing it and forced to deal with it—not even knowing how to fix it or answer it, but just the mere fact that stories are being told—is a huge advance in the history of the United States. You see it so clearly in the #MeToo movement against sexual assault. We are seeing an outpouring of stories that have been frozen, were silenced, or were spoken but nobody listened. In Black Lives Matters it's about the refusal to pretend the mass killing of innocent black people by the state isn't happening in this country. Yes, it's happening, and it happens every day, and we're not going to collude with the frozen silence that just buries that.

The cracks in the frozen surface can also be seen in stories of the trauma of immigration actions committed by the Trump administration. This also happened under Obama and Clinton; it's a long history. But somehow the truth is breaking through the surface of our frozen history that hasn't allowed those stories to be told. The violence is being exposed. It's almost as if the Band-Aid has been ripped off. The Band-Aid of white supremacy's story about reality has been ripped off.

Even though white supremacy has by no means been undone, the blood of the wounds is there for all to see. I think that, in and of itself, is helpful. It's not the end of the story, but you can't go anywhere until this exposure happens.

At Union Seminary I see new generations of students coming in. Part of learning what it means to be open to the power and spirit of God is encouraging students' voices and providing space to reckon with all the trauma they bring with them. Suddenly, instead of looking out and seeing a group of perfectly put-together future pastors, you look out and see a student body full of people who carry with them generations of harm, carried in their bodies and their souls and their minds. The students are taking responsibility for naming these violences themselves. When those begin to be spoken, at one level on the surface, it seems to create a kind of chaos, because Christianity in its traditional institutional forms doesn't know how to manage that. Ministers are supposed to be the most together people. But when I see this happening, even though it's always ripe with conflict and intense passions and emotions and oftentimes confusion, it fills me with awe. Truths are surfacing. They are very pregnant moments.

I don't think that we know, I certainly don't know, what is coming. I don't know where all of this is going to take the world. I do know it's going to take us to a different place and a new reality. The fact is we're not yet capable of imagining it from where we now stand. If we pretend we know what's coming, we're lying, but something new is emerging. I'm not going to be around to see what it is. I'm very hopeful about any kind of minor role I can play in creating the space for that emergence to be supported.

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Introduction

This book is a series of both published and new essays that explore recent works in the field of trauma studies and its critical and constructive relation to religious understandings of the nature of the self and salvation. Central to the overall theme is an investigation of the myriad ways both individual and collective violence affect a person's capacity to know, to remember, to act, and to love, and how those various circumstances potentially challenge theological understandings of how grace is experienced, how Jesus' death is remembered, and how the ethical character of Christian practice is assessed. Attention is given specifically to the long-term effects of collective violence on abuse survivors, war veterans, and marginalized populations and to the discrete ways in which grace and redemption might be articulated in each context. Materials are drawn from the social sciences, postmodern philosophy, and contemporary literature as well as from traditional theological sources and my own everyday pastoral experiences.

The essays do not offer answers—at least not in any straightforward way—to hard questions about the relationship between violence and redemption. Instead, they are a collection of epiphanic stories in which narratives of trauma, tales of grace, and the wisdom of doctrine are evocatively juxtaposed to provoke insight and stir imagination. As such, they are best viewed as a series of theological poems, albeit of a rather scholarly variety. Woven together, they exemplify the scattered, rich ways people grapple with the profound existential and moral questions raised by experiences of overwhelming violence and their long-term effects on communal and personal formation—and the reality of the grace that exists in the midst of it all. On

the more academic side, they also attend to the methodological challenges of using social, scientific, and literary material as sources for systematic theological reflection and constructive doctrine, and to the knotty doctrinal challenges they substantively raise.

I began working in the field of trauma more by accident than by careful intention. Like so many pastors and professors I know, I have spent years worrying about students, family, friends, neighbors near and far, and community members whose lives had been so dramatically undone by violence that, try as they may, they could not seem to get the existential foothold on life that they needed to become active church participants and productive theology students, to say nothing of becoming generally happy people. It is an age-old worry, to be sure, but one that grew in intensity for me as my work took me to places as diverse as a village in India, a strategic hamlet in the Philippines, a sweatshop in Seoul, a domestic violence center in New Haven, and perhaps most challenging of all, the strange world of my students' own interior lives, a place where again and again I found tales of the past experience of violence that simply would not go away. In the midst of this, a decidedly nontheological friend of mine quite nonchalantly placed a book on trauma theory in my hands, and as I moved into its pages, the world around me began to look different. It was through this friend's offering in 1992 that I found the lens I needed to think about these experiences in a more informed and intellectually productive manner.

The question that drives these essays was formulated in those early days of reading trauma theory, and it has remained with me throughout the ten years it took to finish this book. It is simple in form but complex in content: *How do people, whose hearts and minds have been wounded by violence, come to feel and know the redeeming power of God's grace?* At the heart of this question sits a vexing problem: When people are traumatized, a kind of cognitive/psychic overwhelming breakdown can occur. When this happens, it becomes difficult for victims to experience the healing power of God's grace because their

internal capacities (where one knows and feels) have been broken. It is hard to know God when your knowing faculties have been disabled. It is hard to feel divine love when your capacity to feel anything at all has been shut down. Addressing this vexing challenge is the core aim of the book.

Over the decade that I worked on this material, I amassed many narratives related to trauma and grace and how they relate to one another—tales taken from Scripture, from the weekly headlines, from the lives of students and friends. When strung together, these narratives also tell the story of my own circuitous journey through this complicated, vexing terrain. As much as possible, I have tried to retain the original voice of each essay because it carries something of my own unfolding bewilderment and confusion about trauma and my own dependence upon the wisdom of the communities in which these thoughts were formulated. The stories I tell are of the very real violence experienced by people I have come into contact with, though in many cases I have rewritten details of these narratives to protect the privacy of those involved. Just as trauma/violence is always excruciatingly particular in its form, and just as grace is always vibrantly particular in its shape, so too these essays try to maintain the integrity of the moments that provoked them. And as you will see, by entering the trenches of traumatic stories and theory, my own mind was forever changed and continues even now to change.

Yet there are some things that I have not changed my mind about: at the heart of each essay stand two deeply interrelated faith claims that are central to my understanding of Christian theology. First, we live in a world profoundly broken by violence and marred by harms we inflict upon each other. Second, God loves this world and desires that suffering be met by hope, love, and grace. Across the centuries, an ongoing challenge for the church has been to discern how this divine desire to love and heal can be spoken and lived out, concretely, in the life of faith at work in the world; this is the question of how God's love might best be embodied in tangible forms that can be felt, known, and enjoyed. In these essays, I suggest that understanding these

harms as traumatic helps in this process, not only by expanding our appreciation for the complexities of human suffering, but also by deepening and enlivening our grasp of the amazing fullness and power of grace.

Helping pastors, parishioners, and students of theology understand the complexities of the human soul by helping them to think in fresh ways, not just about trauma but also about grace, is one of the larger purposes of collecting these essays and lectures in one place. By understanding in quite specific ways what trauma can do to the human person, we can better know what kind of thought patterns and bodily habits might help us to reimagine a better future. With this kind of knowledge, we might be better able to touch traumatized imaginations so that someone can rediscover old habits of imagination or reinvent new ones. It is hard to think of a task more central to Christian theology as a whole than this one: finding the language to speak grace in a form that allows it to come toward humanity in ways as gentle as they are profound and powerful.

I hope that by the end of this book, readers will have been provoked to find traces of this language in their own experiences—and in doing so, to think far beyond the borders of this book, thus to develop better ways of understanding the reality of “trauma” and “grace” in their own lives and the lives of friends and neighbors on a local and global scale. In addition to sharpened sight, I also hope that they might be inspired to think in practical ways about how grace might be concretely enacted or performed in people’s lives. Like a furnace, there is no end to the flames that violence throws out, and the stories of harm that mark our individual and collective lives are as endless in variety as they are in scope. However, I ardently believe that the reality of grace is vastly richer and far more powerful than the force of those flames. It is so strong that even when our capacity to narrate the good-news story of grace is destroyed (as it often is in situations of violence), the reality to which it witnesses, the unending love of God, remains constant and steady and ever true.

A BRIEF SYNOPSIS OF THE CHAPTERS

The essays that follow are organized into three sections. Part 1 includes three early essays that introduce the concept of “trauma” and illustrate why it is useful to pastors and theologians who are interested in addressing the needs and concerns of people whose lives have been undone by violence. Chapter 1, “Trauma and Grace—Beginnings,” was first published in Yale Divinity School’s *Spectrum* magazine. It tells of my encounter with a young woman I call Leah; my church had appointed me to mentor her toward baptism. I discover that Leah suffers from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) as the result of an early childhood trauma, and I wrestle with what it would take for the church to engage this kind of trauma as its social problem. I suggest that such an engagement requires not just a policy response but also a dramatic rethinking of our most basic categories and rituals—a reconstruction of imagination. I also argue that nestled in the practices and passions of historic Christianity are positive resources for addressing these harms and that by actively reclaiming them, we might be better able to help Christians to speak a word of hope to the traumatic realities that haunt our congregations—and the world—still today.

Chapter 2, “9/11’s Emmaus: Gracing the Disordered Theological Imagination,” continues this line of thought by moving from the tale of an individual trauma to a large-scale, collective one: the events of 9/11. The essay was first published in the *Union Quarterly Review* after being delivered as a lecture at Saint Paul’s School of Theology the week after the devastating attacks occurred. It reflects my own disorientation amid the national disaster from which I—and the audience of my lecture—were still reeling. I show how the event disordered our collective psychic imagination by profoundly challenging our sense of safety and of orderly life. Against this backdrop, I use the story of the road to Emmaus as a tale that might usefully guide us forward. I suggest that the disciples on the road could not see Jesus walking with them because they were psychically caught in the feedback loop of the violence they had

just experienced. Because the trauma of Jesus' execution had so truncated their vision, they were unable to see the gift of grace even when it walked right beside them. In conclusion, I suggest that now, eight years after the event, we as a nation continue to hold on to the truncated vision and hence remain caught in its traumatic repetition through our military presence in Iraq and Afghanistan. Thus I ask what it might take for us to see the grace that walks right next to us—and to manifest its strength in our international policies as well as our sermons.

Chapter 3, "Soul Anatomy: The Healing Acts of Calvin's Psalms," brings together the individual trauma of chapter 1 and collective trauma of chapter 2 and pulls both of them into conversation with a classical text in Christian theology, John Calvin's *Commentary on the Psalms*. It begins with the story of my downtown New Haven church struggling with the trauma induced by a drive-by shooting and the suffering of the child who witnessed it. I reflect on the fact that wrestling with violence like this has long been a challenge for the church, and that theologians like John Calvin have resources, well honed over time, for helping us cope. I describe the traumatic character of Calvin's sixteenth-century Geneva, focusing particularly on his small church, a community where the pastors and parishioners were being burned at the stake and hanged. Against this backdrop, I introduce his *Commentary on the Psalms* as a pastorally astute meditation on God's presence amid such violence. Using Judith Herman's account of the three stages of traumatic healing—establishing safety, hearing the story, integration into everyday life—I show that Calvin follows three similar steps in working with psalms of deliverance, psalms of lament, and psalms of thanksgiving. The essay concludes with reflections on how performing the Psalms in weekly church services might be a continued source of grace bestowed in the community today.

In part 2, I turn from the general topic of trauma to more focused theological reflections on the cross, one of the toughest themes I have wrestled with in my work on trauma. In chapter 4, I begin with a brief meditation on "The Alluring Cross," a Lenten theme that highlights the multiple ways the

cross garners meaning in the imagination of those who behold it. In chapter 5, “The Mirrored Cross,” I put flesh on these insights by turning to a group of women from the battered women’s shelter who sat with me through the passion play in my church’s Maundy Thursday service. Asking the questions: Why did they like the crucifixion so much? How did it work in their imaginations? I sketch out two trauma-informed images of the cross: the mirrored cross and the holographic cross. Then I add one more image to my gallery of trauma crosses: in chapter 6, “The Unending Cross,” I explore the original ending of the Gospel of Mark, in which the women flee the empty tomb and tell no one. Using trauma theory, I suggest that their silence is the fractured speech of violence as it lives in their bodies and psyches, and I argue that their inability to speak parallels the experience of trauma survivors for whom speech, memory, and agency have been undone by violence. I further suggest that we resist giving Mark a cohesive ending but instead use his non-ending to remind us that, in a world filled with vast and unresolved traumas, Jesus comes to us anyway, in the midst of our faltering speech, our shattered memories, and our frayed sense of agency. This is truly what grace is, in its most radical form: not the reassuring ending of an orderly story, but the incredible insistence on love amid fragmented, unraveled human lives.

In part 3, I turn from the cross and begin to discuss more specifically the theme of grace. Chapter 7, titled “Sin, Creativity, and the Christian Life: Rachel and Mary in Traumatic Embrace,” was delivered as a shared lecture with Cindy Rigby at Princeton Theological Seminary in 2003 and then jointly authored and published in *The Princeton Seminary Bulletin* (25, no. 3 [2004]). It is an imagined conversation between two women who encounter each other on the road leading away from the scene of Christ’s crucifixion: Mary the mother of Jesus and Rachel, a woman I imagine into being whose son was executed by Roman soldiers in the slaughter of the innocents thirty years earlier. The essay explores how the tremendous loss suffered by both women not only causes them to grieve deeply, but also undoes their capacity to imagine a future and to see themselves

as effective agents in the world. In other words, it undoes their sense of self. To move forward, their realities require redress in the form of a new story of self, a story that is, at its core, an embodied tale of grace. To tell this story, we offer a systematic theological account of what grace is and how it provides for each woman, differently, a sheath that enables her traumatic experience to be embraced and perhaps even healed.

Chapter 8, “Hope Deferred: Theological Reflections on Reproductive Loss,” grew out of my participation in a group of women theologians gathered to reflect on the failure of the church to speak in theologically pertinent ways to people who have suffered the traumatic loss of a hoped-for child. The chapter centers on a painful evening I spent with a friend who asked me to help her deal with a recent miscarriage, not too long after I had suffered one. I muse on the inability of feminists to think about this loss as real because of the constraints placed on our discourse by the abortion debate and by the failure of Christian communities to face what happens to a woman’s sense of identity when her body—her womb—becomes a living grave. In the conclusion I explore how this experience gives us new eyes to understand the cross and the Trinitarian life of God as one in which death happens within God and yet does not completely kill God—when God’s body becomes a grave. Drawing on the images of the previous chapter, grace is again imagined in images of holding and beholding.

In chapter 9 I conclude with an exploration of the sin-grace theme running through this book, what it helps and how it harms; I suggest that perhaps habits of heart and imagination, rather than grand doctrinal stories, must carry the weight of our hopes for healing. I return as well to the theme of poetry, suggesting that instead of a grand narrative of redemption crafted to follow the driving-forward movement of the gospel story, we might be better served, when looking for the grace that heals, by poetry, a gappy, airy, disjunctive, associative genre well suited to the mirroring, holding, mourning, opening gestures described in earlier chapters. I also speak again of Leah, chapter 1’s central figure, and I use her speech to provoke an

exploration of the work of the French feminist Luce Irigaray, who describes the subject position of the “feminine” in Western culture as a site of violence, a traumatic self. I suggest that the story of the self undone by violence is described by her most powerfully in her reading of Teresa of Avila’s essay “La mystérique,” about the woman who crawls into the wound of Christ. I expand upon this image to suggest an alternate story of the self surprised by wonder, drawing on her reading of Descartes, and ending with a biblical reflection on the angel who asks the shepherds to “behold” the splendor of God.

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