

**Jesus Christ, Trauma Survivor:
Exploring Whether a Nurturant Parent Model for God
Helps Abused Catholic Women Feel Safe and Connected to the Divine**

By

Nicole Sotelo

Submitted to the Faculty of
The Catholic Theological Union at Chicago
in partial fulfillment of the requirement for
the degree of
Doctor of Ministry

May, 2026

Christina R. Zaker, D.Min.
Thesis-Project Director

Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION	1
AN INVITATION FOR CATHOLICS IN MINISTRY	3
ANTICIPATED OUTCOMES: GOALS, LIMITATIONS, AND POTENTIAL BROADER MINISTERIAL IMPORT	4
<i>Goals</i>	4
<i>Limitations</i>	4
<i>Potential Broader Ministerial Import</i>	5
QUALITATIVE RESEARCH METHOD.....	6
COMMITMENT	7
META-METHOD AND OUTLINE OF CHAPTERS.....	8
<i>Contextualization</i>	8
<i>Stage 1: Safety</i>	10
<i>Stage 2: Remembrance and Mourning</i>	11
<i>Stage 3: Reconnection</i>	13
<i>Stage 4: Justice</i>	14
<i>A Note on the Stages of the Meta-Method: Healing as a Spiral Journey</i>	15
A CLOSING REFLECTION	16
CHAPTER ONE: COGNITIVE MODELS	18
LAKOFF’S COGNITIVE MODELS.....	19
THE MORAL PRIORITIES OF EACH COGNITIVE MODEL	25
COGNITIVE MODELS IN THE*LOGY AND CONCEPTIONS OF GOD.....	30
LAKOFF’S REASONS FOR A PREFERRED COGNITIVE MODEL	48
<i>Reason 1: Childrearing/Parenting</i>	48
<i>Reason 2: How the Mind Works</i>	52
<i>Reason 3: Harm</i>	55
<i>“Do no harm”: A note about the role of ministers in relation to cognitive models</i>	62
CONCLUSION	63
CHAPTER TWO: RESEARCH DESIGN	66
WHY SAFETY? JUDITH HERMAN’S FIRST STAGE OF HEALING	66
TRAUMA-INFORMED RESEARCH DESIGN.....	69
<i>Principle #1</i>	71
<i>Principle #2:</i>	72
<i>Principle #3</i>	73
<i>Principle #4</i>	73
<i>Principle #5</i>	74
<i>Principle #6</i>	74
<i>Principle #7</i>	75
<i>Principle #8</i>	76
THE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS.....	80
<i>Opening Section</i>	80
<i>Safe Participation and Names for the Divine Section</i>	81
<i>Safe-Making Characteristics for the Divine Section</i>	83
<i>Safe-Making Roles for the Divine Section</i>	85
<i>Safe-Making Concepts for the Divine Section</i>	86
<i>Jesus Christ as Trauma Survivor Section</i>	88
<i>Family and Parenting Beliefs for Cognitive Models Section</i>	93
<i>Closing Section</i>	97
CONCLUSION	98

CHAPTER THREE: THE INTERVIEWS	100
JUDITH HERMAN’S SECOND STAGE OF HEALING: REMEMBRANCE AND MOURNING	100
JUDITH HERMAN’S THIRD STAGE OF HEALING: RECONNECTION.....	103
INTERVIEW SECTION: FAMILY AND PARENTING BELIEFS FOR COGNITIVE MODELS	104
INTERVIEW SECTION: SAFE PARTICIPATION AND NAMES FOR THE DIVINE	107
<i>Question 1: To start, in a sentence or a few sentences, please share how you currently practice your Catholic faith, if you do? If you don’t, what causes you not to?</i>	<i>108</i>
<i>Question 2: Are there things that make you feel safe in church? (or did make you feel safe in church?)</i>	<i>109</i>
<i>Question 3: Are there things that make you feel unsafe in church? (or made you feel unsafe in church?).....</i>	<i>110</i>
<i>Question 4: People give the Divine many names, what name for the Divine feels most comfortable and safe to you? For example, God, Jesus, Spirit, or perhaps another descriptive or non-descriptive name for the Divine? And why?</i>	<i>115</i>
<i>Question 5: Is there a name for the Divine that I mentioned – God, Jesus, or Spirit – that makes you feel less comfortable or less safe? And if so, why?</i>	<i>118</i>
<i>Question 6: In your own words, how would you describe ____ and how ____ interacts with you? ..</i>	<i>120</i>
INTERVIEW SECTION: SAFE-MAKING CHARACTERISTICS FOR THE DIVINE	126
<i>Question 1: What are one or two characteristics that you associate with ____? And tell me what they mean to you. And if you can’t think of any at this moment, that’s fine. In the next screen, I will offer some examples.....</i>	<i>126</i>
<i>Question 2: Looking at this list of possible characteristics for ____, what would you select as two characteristics that you closely associate with ____?</i>	<i>129</i>
<i>Question 3: What do each of your selections mean to you?</i>	<i>130</i>
INTERVIEW SECTION: SAFE-MAKING ROLES FOR THE DIVINE.....	133
<i>Question 1: In addition to characteristics, many people also associate different roles with ____ . What roles do you associate with ____? And tell me what they mean to you. And if you can’t think of any at this moment, that’s fine. In the next screen I will offer some examples.....</i>	<i>133</i>
<i>Question 2: Looking at this list of roles for ____, what would you select as two roles that you most closely associate with ____?</i>	<i>135</i>
<i>Question 3: What do each of your selections mean to you?</i>	<i>137</i>
INTERVIEW SECTION: SAFE-MAKING CONCEPTS FOR THE DIVINE.....	140
<i>Question: People believe many things about the Divine and these beliefs are put into concepts that you may hear people say in everyday conversation, read in spirituality books, or sing about in church. I invite you to imagine being at church and a minister says the following statements. Tell me if the following statements help you to feel more safe or less safe.....</i>	<i>140</i>
INTERVIEW SECTION: JESUS CHRIST AS TRAUMA SURVIVOR	143
<i>Question 1: Is it comforting or not comforting to know that Jesus is a trauma survivor?.....</i>	<i>144</i>
<i>Question 2: Whether or not it is helpful for you, do you think that the idea of Jesus as a trauma survivor could help other survivors?</i>	<i>146</i>
<i>Question 3: Do you think that the idea could be useful for the wider church, for those who minister in the church and/or other Catholics?</i>	<i>149</i>
CONCLUSION.....	153
CHAPTER FOUR: INSIGHTS AND PASTORAL IMPLICATIONS	156
JUDITH HERMAN’S FOURTH STAGE OF HEALING: JUSTICE	157
THESIS PROJECT INSIGHTS AND POTENTIAL PASTORAL IMPLICATIONS.....	159
<i>Insight #1 – Pastoral Implication related to Cognitive Models</i>	<i>160</i>
<i>Insight #2 – Pastoral Implication related to Safety</i>	<i>163</i>
<i>Insight #3 – Pastoral Implications related to both Cognitive Models and Safety.....</i>	<i>166</i>
<i>Insight #4 – Pastoral Implications related to Jesus Christ as Trauma Survivor</i>	<i>168</i>
JESUS CHRIST AS TRAUMA SURVIVOR: COGNITIVE MODELS, THE*LOGICAL CONCEPTS, AND SAFETY....	170
SURVIVOR THE*LOGY: A TRAUMA-INFORMED THE*LOGY OF GOD IN A NURTURANT PARENT MODEL ..	182
<i>God as Presencing Love</i>	<i>184</i>
<i>Jesus as Incarnational Love.....</i>	<i>188</i>

<i>Holy Spirit as Resilient Love</i>	195
CONCLUSION	198
CONCLUSION	201
A REVIEW OF THE THESIS PROJECT	201
POTENTIAL BROADER IMPLICATIONS.....	205
CONCLUSION	209
APPENDIX A: OUTLINE OF COGNITIVE MODELS AND DESCRIPTIONS OF GOD	212
APPENDIX B: FLYER USED IN RECRUITMENT*	215
APPENDIX C: CONSENT AND ELIGIBILITY FORM	216
APPENDIX D: PROJECT SCRIPT FOR INTERVIEWS	220
APPENDIX E: RESOURCES FOR HEALING FROM ABUSE	230
BIBLIOGRAPHY	233

Abstract

Based on insights from the fields of cognitive linguistics, trauma psychology, and feminist theologies, as well as interviews with Catholic women relational abuse survivors, this thesis project explores whether Nurturant Parent conceptions for God may help Catholic women relational abuse survivors who lean toward a Nurturant Parent cognitive model to feel safe and whether Strict Father conceptions for God may impede their ability to feel safe. Having found this to be true in some cases, four research insights and pastoral implications for ministry are highlighted, along with a brief sketch of a survivor theology.

Introduction

“True, there is a growing exchange of ideas, but the very words by which key concepts are expressed take on quite different meanings in diverse ideological systems.”
-*Gaudium et spes*¹

Within any Catholic parish in the United States, and among the Catholic population as a whole, it is likely that nearly half of the women have experienced some form of psychological aggression, contact sexual violence, physical violence, and/or stalking.² Research in the last few decades has begun to show that faith may be a source of support for some abuse survivors.³ Among those survivors for whom faith is a beneficial resource for their post-traumatic healing, a connection with the divine is a key component of the healing.⁴ But what conceptions of God—and thus what type of connection—may be most helpful for survivors?⁵

The field of cognitive linguistics, in particular the work on family-based cognitive models by George Lakoff, may be a helpful interdisciplinary partner with which to

¹ Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et spes* (1965), no. 4
https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html.

² The most recent CDC report separates out “psychological aggression” as a category from “contact sexual violence, physical violence, and/or stalking.” According to the survey, “Almost half of all women (49.4% or 61.7 million) reported any psychological aggression by an intimate partner in their lifetime...” and “Almost 1 in 2 women (47.3% or 59 million) in the United States reported any contact sexual violence, physical violence, and/or stalking victimization by an intimate partner at some point in their lifetime...” Kathleen C. Basile, Sharon G. Smith, Marcie-jo Kresnow, Srijana, Khatiwada, and Ruth W. Leemis, “The National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey: 2016/2017 Report on Intimate Partner Violence,” *National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*, June 2022, https://www.cdc.gov/nisvs/documentation/NISVSReportonIPV_2022.pdf, 6, 4

³ A helpful overview of research related to spirituality and healing from sexual violence may be found in Gregory P. Knapik, Donna S. Martsof, Claire B. Draucker, “Being delivered: spirituality in survivors of sexual violence” in *Issues in Mental Health Nursing* 29, no. 4 (April 2008): 335-350.

⁴ For a study showing the importance of God in a survivor’s healing journey, see the study referenced above by Knapik, et. al. “Being delivered: spirituality in survivors of sexual violence,” 335-350.

⁵ For the remainder of this paper, I will predominantly use the term “God” to speak of the divine. I recognize that multiple terms could be used to speak of the “ultimate point of reference” of our existence, and have chosen to use the commonly used term, “God,” for ease of reading. Gordon D. Kaufman, *In Face of Mystery: A Constructive Theology* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 9.

explore this question in conversation with practical the*logy.⁶ Lakoff has found that most humans subconsciously lean toward one of two cognitive models that shape their worldviews and behaviors.⁷ He names these models the Strict Father model and the Nurturant Parent model.⁸ While the majority of his work has focused on how these cognitive models affect people's politics, he also recognizes that the models impact people's the*logy.⁹ For example, someone who leans toward a Strict Father cognitive model may subconsciously conceive of God as a strong disciplinarian whereas someone who leans toward a Nurturant Parent cognitive model may subconsciously conceive of God as an empathic guide.

In my ministry, I have witnessed that Catholic women relational abuse survivors, like the general population, also tend to lean toward one of these two cognitive models.¹⁰ Knowing that survivors may have different cognitive models and, thus, difference conceptions for God, how might this shape Catholic ministry with survivors? If some abuse survivors experience healing when they feel connected with God, do they benefit

⁶ I follow the example I learned from Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza of using the word "the*logy" with an asterisk for the letter that could be considered to denote God's gender. I do so in order not to perpetuate an alignment of God with the male gender. I believe God can be found within gender and beyond gender, and certainly is not confined to a male gender. That being said, for ease of reading I will primarily limit this use of the asterisk to the word the*logy and not other words where the same pattern may be found.

⁷ See George Lakoff, *Moral Politics: How Liberals and Conservatives Think*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2002).

⁸ As will become clearer in chapter 1, the term "Nurturant Parent" is purposefully gender-neutral to denote a lack of hierarchy in relation to gender and parenting in its model and the term "Strict Father" is intentionally used to reference the male-dominant gender hierarchy in its model. That being said, based on the fact that the terms are used in contrast with one another, they may have the unintended consequence of either erasing women from the models or implying that all fathers are inherently prone to the Strict Father model. That is not the intention of Lakoff nor of this author.

⁹ As will become clear in this project, cognitive models not only impact one's views such as the*logy, but also, in turn, inform one's behaviors, including one's spirituality and religious practices. As Lakoff writes, "Because we reason in terms of metaphor, the metaphors we use determine a great deal about how we live our lives." George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1980), 244.

¹⁰ I use the term "relational abuse survivors" to denote trauma survivors who have suffered abuse in relationships, be those relationships of family, church, domestic partnerships, marriage, etc.

when those ministering to them use conceptions for God that match their cognitive models or use conceptions for God based in one cognitive model that may be empirically better for survivors?

Based on insights from the fields of cognitive linguistics, trauma psychology, and feminist the*logies, as well as interviews with Catholic women who are relational abuse survivors, **this thesis project will posit that Nurturant Parent conceptions for God may help Catholic women relational abuse survivors who lean toward a Nurturant Parent cognitive model to feel safe and that Strict Father conceptions for God may impede their ability to feel safe.**¹¹ If that is the case, how might Catholic ministers better help such survivors? This thesis project will conclude with four insights from the research and their accompanying pastoral implications for ministry, along with a brief sketch of a trinitarian-based survivor the*logy, grounded in a Nurturant Parent model, that takes seriously the experience of abuse survivors and may be helpful for use in ministry with Catholic women relational abuse survivors.¹²

An Invitation for Catholics in Ministry

Due to the prominence of abuse in Catholic populations, those in ministry should consider how their ministry could help, and not cause further harm or hinder, the healing process of survivors. As such, this project may assist spiritual companions/directors, pastoral workers, priests, and others who minister to Catholic women relational abuse

¹¹ I will be using the term “women” to identify those who self-identify as women. That being said, I want to acknowledge that gender is fluid and not static. It is culture-based and changes over time.

¹² I hope to use the trinitarian survivor the*logy that is proposed in this paper, over time, to develop a spirituality of resilient love for relational abuse survivors. The concept of resilient love will be explored further in chapter four.

survivors.¹³ Catholic communication ministers may also benefit from understanding how language and cognitive models affect survivors and, in turn, may communicate in ways that are helpful to these members, and potentially even those beyond them. Finally, while not being the intended audience for this project, there may be Catholic theologians who will find the insights of this project helpful for their work.

Anticipated Outcomes: Goals, Limitations, and Potential Broader Ministerial Import

Goals

This thesis project will make a case for the importance of understanding cognitive linguistics, particularly George Lakoff's Strict Father and Nurturant Parent models, for Catholic ministry in service of Catholic women relational abuse survivors who hold Nurturant Parent models. It will test this hypothesis by:

- exploring whether Nurturant Parent conceptions for God help Catholic women relational abuse survivors with Nurturant Parent cognitive models feel safe;
- exploring whether Strict Father conceptions for God hinder Catholic women relational abuse survivors with Nurturant Parent cognitive models from feeling safe.

Limitations

This research had parameters that limited its scope and prevented statistically-based results. First, it should be stated that the focus was on Catholic women relational

¹³ While there are multiple terms used for those who engage in spiritual companionship, for consistency within this paper, the term "spiritual companion" will be used rather than "spiritual director" or other similar titles.

abuse survivors who leaned toward a Nurturant Parent model and did not look at conceptions for God that may benefit those who hold Strict Father models. Moreover, this project used Trauma and Resilience Informed Research Principles and Practice (TRIRPP) which took time and necessarily limited how many women were able to be reached and interviewed in an in-depth and trauma-informed manner within the timeframe of the degree program. In order to be trauma-informed, there needed to be one-on-one interviews with the participants rather than a larger group interview in order to reduce potential exposure to comments from fellow participants that may cause triggers. Wide-scale questionnaires would also not have been trauma-informed because the researcher would not be able to attend to each woman and watch for potential triggers. Because one-on-one interviews are time-intensive and the research timeline was limited based on the degree requirements, the participant size was kept small. As such, the focus was on the trauma-informed preparations, interviews, and follow-up, rather than a quantitative focus. While this limits any widespread conclusions that may be drawn from the research, it provides a preliminary analysis on which future research may be built.

Potential Broader Ministerial Import

Despite these limitations, this thesis project has the potential to be beneficial for spiritual companions, pastoral workers, priests, and communication ministers who minister to and/or communicate with Catholic women relational abuse survivors, particularly survivors who lean toward a Nurturant Parent model. It may help these spiritual caregivers to better minister to countless survivors, both those whose stories they may personally come to know as well as those whose abuse may not be known to the ministers but who will be impacted by the ministers' preaching or teaching in ways that

they may never know. Moreover, the thesis project may point the way forward for future research related to cognitive models, the*logy, spirituality, and ministry, both for the sake of Catholic women relational abuse survivors as well as the general Catholic population.

Qualitative Research Method

The qualitative research method that is used within this project is that of phenomenology. Researcher John Creswell notes that “phenomenological study describes the common meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or a phenomenon.”¹⁴ Indeed, the research for this thesis project will explore the “common meaning” of the participants’ “lived experiences” of God. In particular, it will explore whether those with Nurturant Parent cognitive models feel safer with Nurturant Parent conceptions of God rather than Strict Father conceptions of God. The work of the trauma psychologist Judith Herman has shown that psychological safety is essential to a survivor’s healing journey and, as such, conceptions of God that promote a felt sense of safety are an important part of the healing journey.¹⁵

While phenomenology is generally the most suitable method for this research, it must be noted that the research also diverges from a key concept within phenomenology. Creswell writes that most phenomenological research assumes that “experiences are conscious ones.”¹⁶ Since the research focuses on the interplay between lived experience, cognitive models, and conceptions of God, it must be noted that for the majority of people cognitive models are not “conscious.” As such, while the research will adhere to

¹⁴ John W. Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches*, Third Edition, (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2013), 76.

¹⁵ Judith Lewis Herman, M.D., *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence-From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror* (New York: Basic Books, 1992), 155-174.

¹⁶ Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design*, 77.

phenomenology's focus on description of lived experience, it will rely on the women's description of the phenomenon of their conception of God but the cognitive model on which those conceptions are constructed will likely be subconscious for them.

Commitment

Since this project is focused on Catholic women relational abuse survivors, I believe it is important to name my commitment to feminist the*logies that seek to promote women's well-being and flourishing within the church and beyond it. While sex refers to biological traits, gender describes socially-informed roles and norms. Some hierarchies, such as patriarchies or kyriarchies, have ordered gender and placed men in dominant positions over women in secular and religious spheres, both ideologically and institutionally.¹⁷ The social sciences have noted the damage that patriarchy/kyriarchy does to all people, regardless of gender identification.¹⁸ The harm of patriarchy/kyriarchy has also been noted by feminist the*logians and their feminist the*logies, particularly over the last half-century. They have begun to elucidate the ways that it has impacted the*logy, ecclesiology, biblical interpretation, and more. For purposes of this thesis project, I will refer to feminist the*logies, in particular those of feminist the*logians Elizabeth Johnson, Sallie McFague, and Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza who have done extensive work related to the intersection of Christianity, metaphors/models of God, and

¹⁷ "Kyriarchy" is a term used by biblical scholar and the*logian Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza to describe the intersecting domination of patriarchy in both society and religion. She writes: "Kyriarchy as a socio-cultural and religious system of domination is constituted by intersecting multiplicative structures of oppression." Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Wisdom Ways: Introducing Feminist Biblical Interpretation* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2001), 118.

¹⁸ For an introduction to this concept, see Carol Gilligan and David A.J. Richards, *The Deepening Darkness: Patriarchy, Resistance, and Democracy's Future* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); or for a specific example, consider Katarzyna Wojnicka, "His body, his choice? Patriarchy, discrimination against men and protective masculinity at war" in *NORMA: International Journal for Masculinity Studies* 18, no. 1 (2023): 1-4.

language. Being grounded in feminist the*logies that put women’s well-being as a non-negotiable assumption will help keep my focus on the lived experience of Catholic women relational abuse survivors and help ensure that I am not reinscribing women’s harm, but hopefully participating in research that will aid in their healing.

Meta-Method and Outline of Chapters

The meta-method for this project is a method informed and constructed around the contextualization of trauma and four phases of healing by trauma psychologist Judith Herman. These are derived from Herman’s book, *Trauma and Recovery*, published in 1992, that is considered a classic text in the field of trauma psychology. It is in this book that she both contextualizes the problem of trauma and offers a diagnosis.¹⁹ Based on her decades of work with survivors and research, she then outlines three stages in healing from trauma: safety, remembrance and mourning, and reconnection. In her follow-up book, *Truth and Repair*, published in 2023, she describes a fourth stage in the healing path: justice. Together, her contextualization of the problem along with her four stages of healing will serve as this project’s meta-method, informing both the project’s process and the unfolding of the chapters.

Contextualization

Herman extensively contextualizes the problem of trauma. First, she defines trauma in the following way:

Psychological trauma is an affliction of the powerless. At the moment of trauma, the victim is rendered helpless by overwhelming force. When the force is that of nature, we speak of disasters. When the force is that of other human beings, we

¹⁹ While the Greek word for trauma means “wound,” and referred primarily to a physical wound, contemporary understandings of trauma refer to the wounding that occurs to the whole person, including their mental, emotional, physical, sexual, and spiritual selves.

speaking of atrocities. Traumatic events overwhelm the ordinary systems of care that give people a sense of control, connection, and meaning.²⁰

In Part I of *Trauma and Recovery*, she looks at the history of the field of trauma psychology and also proposes a new diagnosis: “complex post-traumatic stress disorder.”²¹ She names prior diagnoses that had been given to those suffering from relational abuse and others exposed to prolonged terror, but she notes that none of these prior diagnoses adequately reflected the experiences of these trauma survivors. Into the breach, she offers a name to the syndrome that plagues those with significant trauma. Being able to name the syndrome and better identify its impact, in turn, enables her to identify the population of survivors more clearly and create a consensus around what may aid in their care.

Following the way that Herman contextualizes trauma, this thesis project also elects to contextualize the problem under study in its first chapter. The first chapter provides an overview of cognitive models and how they relate to Christian the*logy, particularly with regards to women and abuse. It begins with a comprehensive overview of the work of George Lakoff as it relates to family-based cognitive models and their accompanying moral priorities. It then explores how these models apply to the*logy and conceptions of God and also draws on the work of the*logian John Sanders who has done groundbreaking work in this area. The chapter also weaves in scholarship by Christian feminist the*logians who have not named Lakoff as an interlocutor but have expressed similar perspectives about metaphors, the*logy, and their impact on women. It also contains a brief look at recent research that shows that faith can be of benefit to some

²⁰ Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 33.

²¹ Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 119.

survivors in their healing and other studies that show that certain conceptions of God may be more beneficial than others. Chapter one concludes by raising the possibility that the Nurturant Parent model of God may be more beneficial for use with some relational abuse survivors.

Stage 1: Safety

Herman's early decades of work with trauma survivors informed her recognition of the tasks required to promote healing after trauma.²² She recognizes that the first stage in a survivor's healing must be to establish safety. She remarks that survivors feel "unsafe in their bodies," as well as in their thinking, emotions, and environment.²³ Survivors are not able to begin the second stage of remembrance and mourning until there is a felt sense of safety. Recent research adds even more evidence to her conclusion that the body is not capable of processing trauma until safety in its various manifestations is generally secured.²⁴

Following Herman's model, this thesis project also made safety an essential component to its research. Chapter two reflects this focus on safety with an explanation of the research design and how it was intentionally constructed to be trauma-informed in order to make the interview experience as safe as possible for the participants. It looks at Trauma and Resilience Informed Research Principles and Practice (TRIRPP) and show how the principles were applied to the research process, including how participants were

²² I use the term "healing" with "-ing" specifically to denote the ongoing nature of healing work, rather than its expected conclusion.

²³ Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 160. While Herman cites the need for safety in these categories, in my own work I also note the need for a survivor's *spiritual* safety. See Nicole Sotelo, *Women Healing from Abuse: Meditations for Finding Peace* (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 2006).

²⁴ For a sample of this research, see Bessel A. van der Kolk, M.D., *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma* (New York: Penguin Books, 2014).

recruited and selected, how the interviews proceeded, and what follow-up was done; all with a focus to try to ensure that participants felt safe and were not triggered. The chapter will also share the script and questions from the interviews and describe the reasons behind certain choices in what questions were asked, in what order they were asked, etc. The project proposal and the script for the interviews were reviewed by the psychologist Kevin McClone, M.Div. Psy.D. to ensure they adhered to trauma-informed principles and the project was approved by the Institutional Review Board at Catholic Theological Union. Safety was of primary importance in the development of the research design, process, and sharing of results.

Stage 2: Remembrance and Mourning

Herman calls the second phase of healing “remembrance and mourning.” It is in this stage that a survivor is able to recall and process what she has experienced. Key to this process is grieving. For some, the grieving may be over a loss of a relationship or an ability. Other times, it is grieving for a lost childhood or a diminished capacity for forming relationships. Herman notes, that the “work of reconstruction actually transforms the traumatic memory, so that it can be integrated into the survivor’s life story.”²⁵ When a survivor is able to express and integrate the truth of the trauma, she can begin to stitch together the trauma as part of her life’s story, rather than letting the trauma be the only story. This is thanks to the “restorative power of truth-telling.”²⁶ Being able to give testimony to what was endured and to give expression to how it impacts a survivor is central to healing. Survivors may use different techniques to express their truth—from

²⁵ Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 175.

²⁶ Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 181.

words to art to dance. In turn, those who receive a survivor's story are an important part of the healing process. A survivor needs to know that her story is being believed and responded to. Herman is clear to nuance the purpose of trauma's expression, saying "The goal of recounting the trauma story is integration, not exorcism."²⁷ This is not a process of speaking one's truth in order to leave it behind. Importantly, it is not about "removing it from memory," "getting over it," or "just moving on." Rather, it is a process of facing what took place and acknowledging the way that trauma repeatedly shows up and impedes one's present life. It is a process of integrating the trauma into the whole of a life story. Poignantly, Herman writes, "She will never forget. She will think of the trauma every day as long as she lives. She will grieve every day. But the time comes when the trauma no longer commands the central place in her life."²⁸

In this thesis project, the stage of remembrance and mourning is represented by the interview phase and is represented in chapter three. Despite the fact that there were not interview questions about a participant's experience of abuse during the interview, it was anticipated that the participants would likely be mindful of abuse, even if briefly, because each participant had self-identified as a relational abuse survivor in order to participate. In fact, every participant ended up sharing some reference to her experience of abuse as part of her responses to the questions. It was hoped that the interview process could be a time of integration, as it is in Herman's remembrance and mourning stage, as the participants gave voice to their spirituality; their experiences of church and God.

²⁷ Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 181.

²⁸ Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 195. In this and other quotes, Herman uses gendered pronouns in her descriptions to reflect the work she has done with women survivors. When a pronoun is required, I will also be doing the same to reflect this paper's main focus on women survivors. That being said, it is important to acknowledge the fact that abuse can happen to and be perpetrated by all genders; anyone along the gender spectrum.

Stage 3: Reconnection

Herman describes the third stage of recovery as “reconnection.” With an almost spiritual vision, she writes:

Having come to terms with the traumatic past, the survivor faces the task of creating a future. She has mourned the old self that the trauma destroyed; now she must develop a new self. Her relationships have been tested and forever changed by the trauma; now she must develop new relationships. The old beliefs that gave meaning to her life have been challenged; now she must find anew a sustaining faith.²⁹

In this third stage of recovery, a survivor picks up the shattered threads of her canopy of meaning and begins to imagine what a new canopy might look like if she were to stitch together patches of the old with patches of the new. Can she envision a new canopy that is held up with new or renewed relationships? New or renewed beliefs? New or renewed dreams? Moreover, in this third stage, some survivors are not only able to recreate new meanings and connections, but they also discover a desire to help others. Herman calls this a “survivor mission.”³⁰ She notes that a survivor may turn to engage the broader world, to “...transform the meaning of their personal tragedy by making it the basis for social action...by making it a gift for others.”³¹

In terms of this thesis project, this stage of reconnection is represented in chapter three where the participant’s responses are shared and analyzed for common themes or “connections.” It is hoped that the responses and common themes may serve as a sort of “survivor mission,” enabling the experiences of the participants to potentially help other women through this thesis project.

²⁹ Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 196.

³⁰ Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 207.

³¹ Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 207.

Stage 4: Justice

In Herman's most recent book, *Truth and Repair*, she adds "justice" as a fourth stage of healing. She writes, "If trauma is truly a social problem, and indeed it is, then recovery cannot be simply a private, individual matter."³² When a survivor's story is known by her and others, systems of unequal power and subordination become exposed. People who acted—or did not act—become known. Some people believe what they hear or see, others deny not only the specific trauma but its roots in the very foundations of communities and/or institutions. As a survivor and her community become aware of the experience of harm, they also become aware of its replication in multiple other areas of religion and society. A woman who is experiencing trauma is forced to face that same trauma in different manifestations again and again because experiences of violence are connected to systemic injustices.³³ For example, a woman who is healing from an experience of domestic violence may also begin to see the patterns of her own experience in the systemic injustice against women ranging in everything from gender inequalities in the economic system to sexism and clericalism in religion. Her healing is not her sole responsibility. It is also the responsibility of leaders and communities to be willing to hear her truth and to transform in response. If a survivor is to heal, her moral communities need to take up the mantle of justice with her in order to transform religion and society.

³² Judith L. Herman, *Truth and Repair: How Trauma Survivors Envision Justice* (New York: Basic Books, 2023), 2.

³³ In spiritual terms, it could be said that a survivor's wounds make her aware of the "original wound," the pattern of human harm that some call original sin. A woman's healing journey, her Paschal Mystery, her journey of crucifixion, death, and rising that takes place throughout her life is not only her work to do. It is communal work. It is the work to which Jesus has called all people: to transform society and faith communities toward healed and loving relations.

With regards to this thesis project, this stage of justice is reflected in chapter four where insights from the research and their accompanying pastoral implications are shared. Moreover, this chapter includes a brief sketch of a trinitarian survivor the*logy that recognizes Jesus Christ as trauma survivor and is rooted in a Nurturant Parent cognitive model. The project's insights and survivor the*logy arise from the responses of the survivors who shared their truth in the interviews and it will be up to those who hear this truth to choose to minister in new ways. Catholic ministers can participate in the fourth stage of justice by promoting conceptions of God that help abuse survivors feel safe within the church and with God.

A Note on the Stages of the Meta-Method: Healing as a Spiral Journey

In describing these four stages, it is important to note that healing is not linear. Herman writes, "Oscillating and dialectical in nature, the traumatic syndromes defy any attempt to impose such simpleminded order."³⁴ It is tempting to imagine that a survivor can proceed through the four stages of healing and come out the other side completely healed. This is not the case. Healing from trauma is a lifelong path, similar to the Christian journey. Herman mentions the concept of a spiral, that she received from another therapist, which provides a visual image of the healing journey. Rather than a line, one may imagine a spiral "in which earlier issues are continually revisited on a higher level of integration."³⁵ While Herman's contextualization and four stages of healing will be used step-by-step as this project's meta-method, it is important to remember that the healing journey is not a linear one. Similarly, this understanding of the

³⁴ Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 155.

³⁵ Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 155

non-linear cycle may also be reflected in the fact that there is much more research to be done and the results of this thesis project are just one part of a wider, ongoing conversation to address how Catholic ministers may better support abuse survivors.

This is reflected, in part, in the conclusion that will point toward potential broader implications of the research. While the research portion of this thesis focuses on Catholic women relational abuse survivors, the underlying concepts of cognitive models and their relation to the*logy, spirituality, and ministry may have broader application.

A Closing Reflection

This introduction began with a quote from *Gaudium et spes*, the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World: “True, there is a growing exchange of ideas, but the very words by which key concepts are expressed take on quite different meanings in diverse ideological systems.”³⁶ Vatican II recognized that words and concepts with which the*logical ideas may be expressed are understood in different ways. Cognitive linguistics, particularly Lakoff’s work on cognitive models, provides another tool to understand how words and concepts are understood; how the*logy, God-talk, is informed, constructed, interpreted, and, most importantly, how it impacts human lives. The*logian Gordon D. Kaufman notes the need for such conversation partners, like Lakoff, from the social sciences that will help humans become clearer about words and concepts such as God and how they impact people’s lives. He shares his belief from a faith perspective of God’s existence while recognizing that the word ‘God’ contains different meanings for diverse people and communities:

³⁶ Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et spes* (1965), no. 4
https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html.

It is clear that the word ‘God,’ like all other words, grew up in and through a history, its use and meaning changing and developing in accord with the needs, interests, and practices of many different peoples. The question of the meaning of this word, then, cannot be answered simply through abstract philosophical or theological argument; it must be explored with the aid of modern sociological and psychological and linguistic tools. Such explorations, we today understand, should not be directed primarily toward the discovery of some unchanging ‘eternal form’ or some ‘authoritatively revealed’ dogma. They must be directed, rather, to what the word ‘God’ has actually meant in human discourse. ...What range of social functions does ‘God-talk’ perform? What are its political and economic uses—and misuses or abuses?³⁷

Like Kaufman, this thesis project recognizes the value of the social sciences and other interlocutors as conversation partners with the*logy, spirituality, and ministry. This project will weave together the insights of those from the social sciences, such as Lakoff (cognitive linguistics) and Herman (psychology), with the insights of feminist the*logians and the research participants.

The hope for this thesis project, through these combined voices and insights, is to add another paragraph to the conversation happening in some areas of the Catholic Church today on how to better minister to those suffering the effects of trauma. Jesus Christ, God’s incarnational revelation to humanity, suffered significant harm and trauma. As such, this thesis project—this conversation—is also undertaken in dialogue with what is known of Christ through the scriptures. In turn, this conversation is not only undertaken as one in practical the*logy and ministry, but also as a spiritual one for the benefit of survivors who believe in Jesus Christ, trauma survivor.³⁸

³⁷ Kaufman, *In Face of Mystery*, 11.

³⁸ Wendy Farley writes, “...theology is not primarily texts but a kind of desire that employs thought as a religious practice.” Wendy Farley, *The Wounding and Healing of Desire: Weaving Heaven and Earth* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), xii.

Chapter One: Cognitive Models

A 2008 study, “Being Delivered: Spirituality in Survivors of Sexual Violence,” was conducted to explore the spirituality of survivors of sexual abuse who found faith helpful in their healing.³⁹ While not the focus of the study, the survivors expressed varying conceptions for God⁴⁰ and God’s behavior towards the survivors. One survivor envisioned God in the following way:

If I’m going to talk about a higher power that’s what it is, it’s a good orderly direction. It’s not leading me someplace bad, it’s loving and it’s caring and it wants to bring me into a new world, a new life, it wants to hold my hand like I’m a little kid and say here, this is the way to go, here is the sunshine, here’s the rainbow, here’s the flowers. You know that type of setting, it’s not dark, gloomy, the path I usually walk is the dark gloomy path by myself, so right now it’s with a higher power by my side. I have a higher power holding my hand and He’s leading me down this path that’s real sunny and real bright and cheerful. And you know I’m not all the way in there yet.⁴¹

This survivor describes God’s behavior as “loving” and “caring.” The survivor twice notes God’s nearness, saying God “wants to hold my hand” and is “holding my hand.”

There appears to be a nurturing quality to this survivor’s conception of God. This contrasts with another survivor who described God in the following way:

I look at it like this, God tests us, you know. The Israelites you know going out of Egypt and stuff, and a lot of us have failed, whether it’s Christians or whatever denomination you happen to be ... God tests us, you know, tests our resolve and puts little trials and tribulations upon us to see, first of all, to see how strong our faith is and how committed we are and, um, you know, I honestly feel you know it says somewhere in the Bible, what we go through for his sake you know to make us stronger [persons].⁴²

³⁹ Gregory P. Knapik, Donna S. Martsolf, Claire B. Draucker, “Being Delivered: Spirituality in Survivors of Sexual Violence” *Issues in Mental Health Nursing* 29, no. 4 (April 2008): 335-350.

⁴⁰ While the survivors in this case, as well as the survivors in the interviews for this project, use different words for the Divine, for consistency, I will be using the term “God.”

⁴¹ Knapik et. al., “Being Delivered: Spirituality in Survivors of Sexual Violence,” 6.

⁴² Knapik et. al., “Being Delivered: Spirituality in Survivors of Sexual Violence,” 6.

This survivor describes God’s behavior as challenging. The survivor three times uses the word “tests” and follows it up with the language of “trials and tribulations.” Ultimately, the survivor says God is making humans “stronger.” There appears to be a strengthening quality to this survivor’s conception of God. Both survivors feel that their faith in God has helped them in their healing from abuse, but their conceptions of God are significantly different.

Lakoff’s Cognitive Models⁴³

What accounts for the variance in these two survivors’ testimonies?

Subconsciously, these two survivors are likely drawing upon two different cognitive models that affect their conception of God in their journey of healing from abuse. George Lakoff, professor emeritus in the Department of Linguistics at the University of California, Berkely, has shed light on the way that conceptual metaphors arise from cognitive models that impact divergent human beliefs and meaning making, including within Christianity.⁴⁴ He notes that “most of our ordinary conceptual system is metaphorical in nature.”⁴⁵ The way that we conceive of ideas or phenomena is often rooted in subconscious metaphors and models that help us better grasp complex concepts. These metaphors are drawn from our embodied and cultural experiences and provide a rich array of language to describe a concept. An example that Lakoff and his collaborator Mark Johnson explore is the concept ARGUMENT and the way one understands this

⁴³ Parts of this section were explored in my final research paper for the course *God and the Mystery of Suffering*, Spring 2024, taught by Professor Robin Ryan at Catholic Theological Union.

⁴⁴ George Lakoff, *Moral Politics: How Liberals and Conservatives Think* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996), 245-262. While Lakoff has brief references to his theory’s implications on Christianity in various writings, an excellent overview may be found in this book.

⁴⁵ George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1980, 2003 edition), 4.

concept through the conceptual metaphor of ARGUMENT IS WAR.⁴⁶ They provide examples of the language people use to express the concept of argument in words related to war such as “I’ve never *won* an argument with him.” or “He *shot down* all of my arguments.” or “Your claims are *indefensible*.”⁴⁷ With these examples, one can understand how a source domain, such as *war*, may help humans explain a target domain, such as the concept of *argument*. Similarly, in Christian history, humans have used source domains to try to explain target domains, or concepts, such as sin, holiness, or the Holy Spirit.⁴⁸

Moreover, humans have used a wide variety of source domains to understand the concept of God.⁴⁹ Those familiar with Hebrew and Christian scriptures will recognize conceptual metaphors for God such as God is Rock, God is Hen, God is King, God is Father, or God is Shepherd. Humans describe religious concepts, including God, from source domains that are more easily known to us such as rock or father. The source domains rendered in conceptual metaphors provide a way to talk about ideas and phenomena that may otherwise be difficult to understand. Aquinas recognized that “words are signs” and, in order to try to understand God, “we know and name God from creatures.”⁵⁰ While God is Rock may be helpful to a point, the majority of conceptual metaphors for God derive from more relational source domains. John Sanders, a

⁴⁶ Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, 4. Capitalization is theirs.

⁴⁷ Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, 4. Italics is theirs.

⁴⁸ A good example relating to the Holy Spirit may be found in Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, 40.

⁴⁹ For a comprehensive overview, see the chapter “Conceiving God” in John Sanders, *Theology in the Flesh: How Embodiment and Culture Shape the Way We Think about Truth, Morality, and God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2016), 243-275.

⁵⁰ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica, Vol. 1* (New York: Benziger Brothers, Inc., 1947), 1, q. 13, a. 1.

professor emeritus of religious studies at Hendrix College whose work is among the first to look at cognitive linguistics and Christian the*logy, remarks that:

biblical authors preferred source domains drawn from interpersonal relations such as family life because these had richer entailments than the domains of rocks and animals. Metaphors such as GOD IS FATHER and GOD IS KING were capable of systematic development, with many inferences for how to live in relation to God. Though GOD IS ROCK has important entailments, this source domain is rather limited regarding expected behaviors and attitudes compared to the source domain of Parent.⁵¹

The idea of Parent or Family is a fertile conceptual metaphor to help humans understand a variety of ideas and phenomenon.

In fact, the conceptual metaphor of family is one of the most pervasive conceptual metaphors that impacts our cognitive processing of ideas and phenomenon. Researchers Matthew Feinberg, Elisabeth Wehling, and their colleagues note that:

when reasoning about larger social groups and their authorities, the mind automatically resorts to our first and primary experience with social groups and authority—the family. This theorizing builds on the cognitive sciences’ well-established notion that people frequently process abstract concepts in terms of knowledge they derived from direct interactions with the world.⁵²

However, when humans subconsciously draw upon the family as a conceptual metaphor to understand the world around them, it bears noting that there is not a monolithic understanding of what “family” means. Rather, there are underlying ideas of one’s *ideal* family, along with the ideal family’s accompanying moral priorities, that end up shaping the type of family that someone subconsciously envisions and uses as a map to reality.

Thus, when people use the word “family,” “father,” “mother,” or “parent,” or attribute the

⁵¹ Sanders, *Theology in the Flesh*, 268.

⁵² Matthew Feinberg, Elisabeth Wehling, Joanne M. Chung, Laura R. Saslow, and Ingrid Melvaer Paulin, “Measuring Moral Politics: How Strict and Nurturant Family Values Explain Individual Differences in Conservatism, Liberalism, and the Political Middle,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* Advance Online Publication (June 27, 2019). Shared with this author by Matthew Feinberg via email.

idea of “parent” toward another concept such as God, they are often thinking about what is called an ideal case prototype.⁵³ It is one’s ideal of what a parent, family, or larger system of belonging should be.

Lakoff has identified that there are two common ideals of family that people within the United States and elsewhere subconsciously draw upon to understand complex ideas and phenomenon, such as a nation or religion.⁵⁴ Lakoff argues that “[d]eeply embedded in conservative and liberal politics are different models of the family” that give rise to different moral reasoning.⁵⁵ Lakoff calls one of the ideal family prototypes the “Strict Father” model and describes it as:

A traditional nuclear family, with the father having primary responsibility for supporting and protecting the family as well as the authority to set overall family policy. He teaches children right from wrong by setting strict rules for their behavior and enforcing them through punishment.... He also gains their cooperation by showing love and appreciation when they do follow the rules. But children must never be coddled, lest they become spoiled; a spoiled child will be dependent for life and will not learn proper morals.

The mother has day-to-day responsibility for the care of the house, raising the children, and upholding the father’s authority. Children must respect and obey their parents, partly for their own safety and partly because by doing so they build character, that is, self-discipline and self-reliance. Love and nurturance are a vital part of family life, but they should never outweigh parental authority, which is itself an expression of love and nurturance—tough love. Self-discipline, self-reliance, and respect for legitimate authority are the crucial things that a child must learn.⁵⁶

In this ideal family model, the father is the one vested with the most power. He has the authority to set the rules and enforce them. The mother, who is below the father in the family hierarchy, upholds the father’s power and authority. The children obey the father

⁵³ For a discussion on prototypes, see George Lakoff, *Moral Politics*, 8-11.

⁵⁴ For an overview, see George Lakoff, *Don’t Think of an Elephant! Know Your Values and Frame the Debate* (White River Junction, VT: Chelsea Green Publishing, 2004).

⁵⁵ Lakoff, *Moral Politics*, 12.

⁵⁶ Lakoff, *Moral Politics*, 65-66.

and his rules, with punishment being the consequence for disobedience and love being the reward for obedience. In this parenting style, children obey their parents in order to avoid punishment.

Lakoff also outlines another ideal family prototype that he terms the “Nurturant Parent” model and describes as:

A family of preferably two parents, but perhaps only one. If two, the parents share household responsibilities....

...Children develop best through their positive relationships to others, through their contribution to their community, and through the ways in which they realize their potential and find joy in life. Children become responsible, self-disciplined, and self-reliant through being cared for and respected, and through caring for others. Support and protection are part of nurturance, and they require strength and courage on the part of parents. The obedience of children comes out of their love and respect for their parents, not out of the fear of punishment.

Open, two-way, mutually respectful communication is crucial. If parents’ authority is to be legitimate, they must tell children why their decisions serve the cause of protection and nurturance. The questioning of parents by children is positive, since children need to learn why their parents do what they do, since children often have good ideas that should be taken seriously, and since all family members should participate in important decisions. Responsible parents, of course, have to make the ultimate decisions and that must be clear.⁵⁷

In this ideal family model, the gender-neutral word of “parent” is used, rather than “father” as was used in the Strict Father model. This intentional use of the word “parent” leaves open the possibility that the parent who guides the family may be male or female, a Nurturant Father or Nurturant Mother or both.⁵⁸ Additionally, in this model if there are two parents they share authority and hold mutual responsibility. Like the first model, the children follow the parents’ standards. However, in this model children are able to communicate with the parents about those standards in order to understand them, not

⁵⁷ Lakoff, *Moral Politics*, 108-109.

⁵⁸ The Nurturant Parent model also leaves open the possibility that a parent may not identify with one of the culturally common genders.

merely to obey them. In this parenting style, children follow their parents out of love from their secure attachment.

While the field of psychology has identified four general parenting styles, the Strict Father model and Nurturant Parent model tend to be the most predominant in the general population of the United States, as well as in the field of research studies.⁵⁹ Sanders affirms that of the four general parenting styles identified by researchers, “researchers who focus on political and social issues focus on the Nurturant and Authoritative types rather than on the Permissive and Disengaged.”⁶⁰ While the Strict Father and Nurturant Parent models are different, it should be noted that there is a common element to both family models. Each of them “assume[s] that the system of childrearing will be reproduced in the child.”⁶¹ The Strict Father model assumes that the child will grow up to replicate the discipline that was received. The child as an adult will be able to practice self-discipline and discipline others. The Nurturant Parent model assumes the child will grow up to replicate the nurturance that was received. The child as an adult will be able to practice self-nurturance and nurture others. Beyond the common linkage of the two models arising from parenting styles, the models otherwise generate different sets of moral priorities that, in turn, shape how people understand what is moral in the world around them, including in politics and religion.⁶²

⁵⁹ Lakoff notes that while those in the social sciences often use other terms for these parenting models, such as “Authoritarian” and “Authoritative,” he elects to use the terms “Strict Father” and “Nurturant Parent.” Lakoff, *Moral Politics*, 352.

⁶⁰ John Sanders, *Embracing Prodigals: Overcoming Authoritative Religion by Embodying Jesus’ Nurturing Grace* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2020), 3. Note that in his book, Sanders elects to use the word “Authoritative” to refer to the parenting style that Lakoff would term the Strict Father model.

⁶¹ Lakoff, *Moral Politics*, 110.

⁶² While it is beyond the scope of this paper to go into a more detailed explanation of the metaphors, see Lakoff, *Moral Politics*, 65-140.

The Moral Priorities of Each Cognitive Model

Each family model has numerous moral priorities that Lakoff addresses in detail. However, for purposes of this project, this section will focus on the top four moral priorities within each family model. Lakoff identifies the top moral priorities of the Strict Father model as being: strength, authority, order, and boundaries. He names the top moral priorities of the Nurturant Parent model as: empathy, nurturance, self-nurturance, and nurturance of social ties.⁶³

The following charts share the top four moral priorities within each family model in their prioritized order, along with a brief description drawn from Lakoff’s work and an example of how the priority may be evidenced in political concepts.⁶⁴

Strict Father Model’s Moral Priorities

MORAL	BRIEF DESCRIPTION	POLITICAL EXAMPLE
Moral Strength	<p>“The world is divided into good and evil. To remain good in the face of evil...one must be morally strong. One becomes morally strong through self-discipline and self-denial. Someone who is morally weak cannot stand up to evil and so will eventually commit evil. Therefore, moral weakness is a form of immorality. Self-indulgence...and lack of self-control are therefore forms of immorality.”⁶⁵</p>	<p>From a Strict Father <i>moral strength</i> perspective, hard work is valued and those who are on welfare and do not exhibit that they are trying to work are less-moral human beings.</p>

⁶³ It should be noted that these moral priorities of the Strict Father model (strength, authority, order, boundaries) and Nurturant Parent model (empathy, nurturance, self-nurturance, nurturance of social ties) have meaning in relation to Lakoff’s framework and are not universal moral evaluations of these virtues nor are the moral priorities exclusive to each model. For example, the Nurturant Parent model does have “authority” as one of its moral priorities (albeit not in the top four). However, instead of moral authority being about “legitimate and illegitimate moral authority” within hierarchical relations as it is in the Strict Father model, in the Nurturant Parent model moral authority “arises from your track record as a nurturer.” Lakoff, *Moral Politics*, 99, 136.

⁶⁴ The content of the first two columns, “Moral” and “Brief Description,” are gathered from Lakoff, *Moral Politics*, 65-140. The content of the “Political Example” column is from the author of this thesis project.

⁶⁵ Lakoff, *Moral Politics*, 73.

Moral Authority	<p>“...the parent (typically the father) sets standards of behavior and punishes the child if the standards are not met. Moral behavior by the child is obedience to the parent’s authority. But just as importantly, the exertion of authority is moral behavior on the part of the parent, and it is immoral for the parent to fail to exert authority, that is, to fail to set standards of behavior and to enforce them through punishment.”⁶⁶</p>	<p>From a Strict Father <i>moral authority</i> perspective, the government and its immigration laws are to be followed and if someone does not follow those laws, for whatever reason, they should be arrested and removed from the country as punishment. The authorities who do not punish those who break the law are failing as authorities.</p>
Moral Order	<p>“This metaphor transforms the folk hierarchy of ‘natural’ power relations into a hierarchy of moral authority: God has moral authority over people. People have moral authority over nature (animals, plants, and natural objects). Adults have moral authority over children. Men have moral authority over women.”⁶⁷</p>	<p>From a Strict Father <i>moral order</i> perspective, men have moral authority over women and therefore can restrict whether or not they have access to abortion or contraception.</p>
Moral Boundaries	<p>“Metaphorically, someone who deviates from a tried and true path is creating a new path that others will feel safe to travel on. Hence, those who transgress boundaries or deviate from a prescribed path may ‘lead others astray’ by going off in a new direction and creating a new path.... People who ‘deviate’ from the tried and true path arouse enormous anger because they threaten the identities of those who follow traditional ‘straight and narrow’ moral paths, but also because they are seen as threats to the community. For the protection of the community, they need to be isolated and made outcasts.”⁶⁸</p>	<p>From a Strict Father <i>moral boundaries</i> perspective, prisons are an important part of society because they punish those who have deviated from a country’s laws. Prisons help isolate these individuals from the wider society.</p>

⁶⁶ Lakoff, *Moral Politics*, 76-77.

⁶⁷ Lakoff, *Moral Politics*, 81.

⁶⁸ Lakoff, *Moral Politics*, 85-86.

Nurturant Parent Model's Moral Priorities

MORAL	BRIEF DESCRIPTION	POLITICAL EXAMPLE
Moral Empathy	“Empathy is a projection of your capacity to feel onto another person. An empathetic person will therefore not want others to experience a lack of well-being. And a truly empathic person will be able to feel what it is like to have another person’s values and to see the world from their perspective. According to this metaphor, this is a moral activity and should lead one to be nurturant.” ⁶⁹	From a Nurturant Parent <i>moral empathy</i> perspective, even though a citizen may not self-identify as LGBTQIA, one can imagine the discrimination they face and thus want to promote laws that protect them from discrimination.
Moral Nurturance	“...to care <i>for</i> a child adequately, you have to care <i>about</i> a child. You have to project your capacity for feeling onto a child accurately enough to have a sense of what that child needs. This not only requires empathy, it requires constant empathy. It also requires, to a significant extent, putting the child’s needs before your own, making sacrifices for your child—though not so much that it prevents one from nurturing adequately.” ⁷⁰	From a Nurturant Parent <i>moral nurturance</i> perspective, it is important to fully fund early childhood education and daycare to care for all children, even if it means higher taxes.
Moral Self-Nurturance	“You can’t care for others adequately if you don’t care for yourself. An important part of the morality of nurturance is the requirement of self-nurturance, taking care of one’s own basic needs: maintaining one’s health, making a living.... It is important to distinguish self-nurturance and self-interest. Self-nurturance is necessary for any adequate moral functioning. Self-interest goes considerably further to the satisfaction of desire, most typically the desire for money and power.” ⁷¹	From a Nurturant Parent <i>moral self-nurturance</i> perspective, all people should be given health care because they need to be able to care for their health in order to care for others.

⁶⁹ Lakoff, *Moral Politics*, 136-137.

⁷⁰ Lakoff, *Moral Politics*, 116.

⁷¹ Lakoff, *Moral Politics*, 119.

Moral Nurturance of Social Ties	“When disputes arise or when one person acts unfairly or harms another, social ties can be disrupted or broken. If community members are to empathize with one another and be nurturant toward one another, those social ties must be constantly mended and maintained.... To act morally, one must attend constantly to social ties. One may have to make sacrifices to maintain social ties.” ⁷²	From a Nurturant Parent <i>moral nurturance of social ties</i> perspective, mediation and restorative justice should be key components of any justice system in order to maintain the community.
---------------------------------	---	--

The above charts give a glimpse of how a particular family model and its moral priorities, in turn, may inform a person’s political views. Each family model “constitute[s] a distinct moral system.”⁷³ Most people tend toward one or the other family model and, thus, hold to a set of morally-informed political views that are internally consistent for that model.⁷⁴ These family models subconsciously undergird much of our contemporary political views with those holding a Strict Father model being what today is often labeled “conservative” and those holding a Nurturant Parent model being what today is often labeled “liberal.” For example, someone who subconsciously holds a Strict Father model that contains moral priorities such as strength and authority is likely to support government funding for more prisons and immigrant detention centers, but may *not* be likely to support government funding for universal healthcare and daycare. Whereas, someone who subconsciously holds a Nurturant Parent model that contains moral priorities such as empathy and nurturance is likely to support government funding for universal healthcare and daycare, but may *not* be likely to support government funding for more prisons and immigrant detention centers. Essentially, each model

⁷² Lakoff, *Moral Politics*, 120.

⁷³ Lakoff, *Moral Politics*, 65.

⁷⁴ For the research to support this statement, see the following paragraph.

creates a coherent cognitive worldview that provides a cognitive map for people to process ideas and phenomenon. Some individuals may use different models in different systems of belonging, such as applying one model to their family and religious views and one model to their political views, but the majority of people hold a single model fairly consistently as a way to avoid cognitive dissonance.⁷⁵

Lakoff's theories, known as moral politics theory, have been empirically tested in a series of studies. Matthew Feinberg, Elisabeth Wehling, and their research colleagues, have proven "that political attitudes arise from moral worldviews that are conceptually anchored in contrasting family models—the strict-father and nurturant-parent models—while the political middle is morally 'biconceptual,' endorsing both models simultaneously."⁷⁶ They created a study that resulted in evidence that the "strict-father and nurturant-parent models are unified and independent belief systems that each uniquely predict conservatism and liberalism."⁷⁷ The researchers also verified that the results were consistent not only in the United States political system where there are two dominant political parties, but were consistent in three other countries abroad whose countries have multiple dominant political parties.⁷⁸ Also of note, an additional series of studies looked at what some consider the "political middle," what Lakoff calls "bi-

⁷⁵ Lakoff, *Moral Politics*, 14-16, 159-160.

⁷⁶ Feinberg, Wehling, et al. "Measuring Moral Politics," 1. While there are two other general parenting styles that have been identified in the social sciences as noted above, Permissive and Disengaged, the research points to the fact that these two parenting styles are generally not reflective of the predominant family-based cognitive models that are subconscious within the general population. This author wonders if that is because cognitive models tend to be those that the individual subconsciously believes to be the *ideal* relational model and, as a society, people generally assume that the Strict Father or Nurturant Parent models of parenting are better than the Permissive or Disengaged.

⁷⁷ Feinberg, Wehling, et al. "Measuring Moral Politics," 10.

⁷⁸ Feinberg, Wehling, et al. "Measuring Moral Politics," 14-15.

conceptuals.”⁷⁹ In turn, it was shown that this group “consists of individuals espousing two sets of strong moral convictions that, together, results in their moderate policy stances” and that “these morally biconceptual individuals are susceptible to persuasion based on the moral framing, either strict or nurturant, presented to them.”⁸⁰ The researchers also note that they found a subgroup of “nonendorsers,” those who score low on both the Strict Father and Nurturant Parent models. They recognize that additional research is needed to understand what models and moral priorities undergird this group.⁸¹

Cognitive Models in The*logy and Conceptions of God

If family-based cognitive models and their accompanying moral priorities inform political views, might these family models also inform theological views, including views about God? Lakoff notes that the field of cognitive science recognizes “that we use unconscious cognitive models to comprehend politics, just as we use them in all other areas of our lives.”⁸² The Strict Father and Nurturant Parent models not only shape the way humans process politics, but also in other areas, including religion. Lakoff is clear that, “If you’re going to even think or talk about God, you’re going to have to use human experience as your basis and have an extensive collection of metaphors at your disposal.”⁸³ In fact, Lakoff regularly makes connections between the two family models and Christianity.⁸⁴

⁷⁹ I use “bi-conceptuals” to reflect Lakoff’s use of the hyphen in that term, but use “biconceptuals” when that is used by Feinberg, Wehling, et al.

⁸⁰ Feinberg, Wehling, et al. “Measuring Moral Politics,” 22.

⁸¹ Feinberg, Wehling, et al. “Measuring Moral Politics,” 24.

⁸² Lakoff, *Moral Politics*, 159.

⁸³ Lakoff, *Moral Politics*, 245-246.

⁸⁴ For example, see a comprehensive overview in Lakoff, *Moral Politics*, 245-262. Also see Lakoff, *Don’t Think of an Elephant! Know Your Values and Frame the Debate*, 102-103.

If one is familiar with Christianity, one is likely familiar with some of the many metaphors, and other figures of speech, used throughout scripture and tradition to help Christians understand their faith. In particular, there are “a wide array of metaphors to understand what God is like and what our relationship to God is.”⁸⁵ An excellent example may be found in the Gospel of John where Jesus uses a parable, an extended metaphor, to help people understand who he is and their relationship to him:

‘Amen, amen, I say to you, whoever does not enter a sheepfold through the gate but climbs over elsewhere is a thief and a robber. But whoever enters through the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. The gatekeeper opens it for him and the sheep hear his voice, as he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has driven out all his own, he walks ahead of them, and the sheep follow him, because they recognize his voice. But they will not follow a stranger; they will run away from him, because they do not recognize the voice of strangers.’ Although Jesus used this figure of speech, they did not realize what he was trying to tell them.

So Jesus said again, ‘Amen, amen, I say to you, I am the gate for the sheep. All who came [before me] are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the gate. Whoever enters through me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture. A thief comes only to steal and slaughter and destroy; I came so that they might have life and have it more abundantly. I am the good shepherd.’⁸⁶

The gospel author decides to overtly call out that Jesus is using a “figure of speech.”

Indeed, Jesus uses figures of speech, such as similes and metaphors, repeatedly throughout his ministry. For example, “The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed” (simile) or “The kingdom of heaven may be likened to a man who sowed good seed in his field” (simile) or “how many times I yearned to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, but you were unwilling” (metaphor).⁸⁷ Moreover, the

⁸⁵ Sanders, *Embracing Prodigals*, 11.

⁸⁶ John 10:1-11. The *New American Bible Revised Edition* will be used throughout this paper.

⁸⁷ Matthew 13:31, Matthew 13:24, Luke 13:34

use of figures of speech is replete throughout Christian tradition as a way to help people better understand the mystery that is faith.⁸⁸

In this particular parable, Jesus uses the source domain of a “shepherd” to help his listeners have a better understanding of who he is. The metaphor provides a description of Jesus as someone who leads others. Not only does it help people understand him, but the metaphor also helps Jesus’ listeners better understand who they are in relation to him. If Jesus is a shepherd, then they are the sheep who are likely to follow and trust him. They probably do not want to follow the shepherds that act like “thieves and robbers.” What is also important to note about this parable is that Jesus elects to modify what type of shepherd he is with an adjective. He could have just said that he was a “shepherd,” but it leaves open the question of what type of shepherd. Is he a “new” shepherd who doesn’t yet know the sheep? Is he a “substitute” shepherd who is only there because he has been hired? Jesus chooses to use the adjective “good” to describe the type of shepherd. But he does not stop there. He provides examples to illustrate what the idealized “good” looks like, saying, “...he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.” There is a sense of knowing and secure attachment. He also says that those who follow him will “find pasture.” Here there is a sense of his nurturing quality. Hence, Jesus is not the type of shepherd who is understood as “good” because he gets them to obey through harsh tactics or makes money from them. Rather, Jesus is the type of shepherd who is understood as “good” because he knows his sheep by name and leads them to nourishment. Jesus has used an extended metaphor and provided us with clues to the moral priorities that underlie its use. If one were to put this in Lakoffian terms, the ideal type of shepherd that

⁸⁸ For an overview of metaphors and Christian doctrine, see Sanders, *Embracing Prodigals*, 175-202.

Jesus is lifting up is sketched upon a Nurturant Parent cognitive model whose moral priorities include nurturance.⁸⁹

Just as humans process ideas about politics in family models, humans also process ideas about the*logy in family models. While Sanders recognizes that “...no single metaphor captures everything we want to say about God,”⁹⁰ he recognizes that “[p]arenting is a rich domain to draw from because it provides plenty of deep and meaningful ideas about the behaviors and values we should enact.”⁹¹ There are ways that people have described God in non-relational terms, such as “fortress” or “rock.”⁹² However, these objects do not convey a significant depth of relationality for the believer. In turn, believers tend to gravitate toward interpersonal metaphors “as they enable us to worship, struggle with, and love God.”⁹³ But what type of God do believers and seekers “worship, struggle with, and love”? This is where Lakoff’s insights into cognitive modeling become helpful. As noted above, Lakoff has identified two primary parenting models that humans subconsciously use to make sense of ideas and phenomenon, including the concept of God and God’s relationship with humans.⁹⁴

Sanders has utilized Lakoff’s Strict Father model and translated it into Christian terms in the following way to describe a Strict Father model of God (note that Sanders uses the term “Authoritative Parent” rather than “Strict Father”):

In the God Is an Authoritative Parent model, God sets out rules that humans are to obey. God wants people to develop moral strength and uphold the moral order.

⁸⁹ This is an important point. While there are multiple images and metaphors that humans use for God, underlying the relational metaphors are usually a family-based cognitive model with accompanying moral priorities.

⁹⁰ Sanders, *Theology of the Flesh*, 246.

⁹¹ Sanders, *Embracing Prodigals*, 11.

⁹² Psalm 91:2, Psalm 92:16

⁹³ Sanders, *Theology of the Flesh*, 245.

⁹⁴ For a description of God according to Lakoff’s cognitive models, a Strict Father God and a Nurturant Parent God, see Appendix A.

Respect for divine authority comes first, and then God rewards those who obey with acceptance. Each individual has failed to obey, and so must suffer the consequences in order to learn responsibility. Jesus, however, takes the punishment due each of us and is condemned in our place. In this way, the divine moral accounting between obedience and disobedience is balanced because someone pays the price and is punished for disobedience. God gives those who accept Jesus' atonement a fresh start. God wants each of us to be upstanding children who follow the instructions of those higher up in social and religious institutions. For the Authoritative God model, sin is primarily understood as breaking rules and atonement is payment for wrongdoing.⁹⁵

Similarly, Sanders has translated Lakoff's Nurturant Parent model into a theological model and described a Nurturant Parent model of God:

In the God Is a Nurturant Parent model, divine grace is seen as primary for nurturance. Divine love comes first, which results in respect for divine authority. God accepts people into the divine family, and through love, empowers them to transform sinful ways of living to loving ways. Jesus is the divine-human exemplar showing us how to live a life of love toward others and who liberates us from enslaving powers and returns us to God. God demonstrates that God is trustworthy and is, in significant ways, a model for humans to imitate. God wants to produce communities where people are nurtured in the ways of grace and love for others. For the Nurturant God model, sin is primarily understood as harming others and atonement is restoration to loving relations.⁹⁶

Like Lakoff's original Strict Father and Nurturant Parent models, these models have a common element. In Lakoff's models, both are parenting models that seek to raise children who reflect the moral priorities of the parent. One could say that there is a similar phenomenon happening in these models where God seeks to raise humans who reflect the moral priorities of God. Indeed, it is a common Christian belief that humans were made "in the image of God" and that through the example of Christ humans "might become the righteousness of God in him."⁹⁷ However, beyond the common linkage of the models arising from parenting concepts, the models otherwise create different sets of

⁹⁵ Sanders, *Theology in the Flesh*, 149.

⁹⁶ Sanders, *Theology in the Flesh*, 148-149.

⁹⁷ Genesis 1:27 and 2 Corinthians 5:21

moral priorities that, in turn, shape how people understand what is moral and how they are to act in the world.

While this brief exercise has looked at how the Strict Father model and Nurturant Parent model might be understood through Christian terms as models for God, it may also be helpful to briefly explore Lakoff’s top four moral priorities within each model, as was done above, but to see how they relate to religion instead of politics. The following charts share the top four moral priorities within each family model in their prioritized order, along with a brief description drawn from Lakoff’s work as was shared in the above charts, and an example of how the priority is evidenced in religious beliefs and practices.⁹⁸

Strict Father Model’s Moral Priorities

MORAL	BRIEF DESCRIPTION	RELIGIOUS EXAMPLE
Moral Strength	“The world is divided into good and evil. To remain good in the face of evil...one must be morally strong. One becomes morally strong through self-discipline and self-denial. Someone who is morally weak cannot stand up to evil and so will eventually commit evil. Therefore, more weakness is a form of immorality. Self-indulgence...and lack of self-control are therefore forms of immorality.” ⁹⁹	From a Strict Father <i>moral strength</i> perspective, spiritual discipline is valued and those who do not exhibit such discipline such as going to Mass, fasting, and resisting temptations are less-moral human beings. [The political comparison from above: From a Strict Father <i>moral strength</i> perspective, hard work is valued and those who are on welfare and do not exhibit that they are trying to work are less-moral human beings.]
Moral Authority	“...the parent (typically the father) sets standards of behavior and punishes the child if the standards are not met. Moral behavior by the child is obedience to the parent’s	From a Strict Father <i>moral authority</i> perspective, church authorities and laws are to be followed and if someone does not follow those laws—such as not saying the exact words of the

⁹⁸ The content of the first two columns, “Moral” and “Brief Description,” are gathered from Lakoff, *Moral Politics*, 65-140. The content of the “Religion Example” column is from the author of this thesis project.

⁹⁹ Lakoff, *Moral Politics*, 73.

	<p>authority. But just as importantly, the exertion of authority is moral behavior on the part of the parent, and it is immoral for the parent to fail to exert authority, that is, to fail to set standards of behavior and to enforce them through punishment.”¹⁰⁰</p>	<p>liturgy—they should be punished. The authorities, such as bishops, who do not sufficiently punish those who break church law are failing as authorities. [The political comparison from above: From a Strict Father <i>moral authority</i> perspective, the government and its immigration laws are to be followed and if someone does not follow those laws, for whatever reason, they should be arrested and removed from the country as punishment. The authorities who do not punish those who break the law are failing as authorities.]</p>
Moral Order	<p>“This metaphor transforms the folk hierarchy of ‘natural’ power relations into a hierarchy of moral authority: God has moral authority over people. People have moral authority over nature (animals, plants, and natural objects). Adults have moral authority over children. Men have moral authority over women.”¹⁰¹</p>	<p>From a Strict Father <i>moral order</i> perspective, men have moral authority over women and therefore can restrict women from ordination. [The political comparison from above: From a Strict Father <i>moral order</i> perspective, men have moral authority over women and therefore can restrict whether or not they have access to abortion or contraception.]</p>
Moral Boundaries	<p>“Metaphorically, someone who deviates from a tried and true path is creating a new path that others will feel safe to travel on. Hence, those who transgress boundaries or deviate from a prescribed path may ‘lead others astray’ by going off in a new direction and creating a new path.... People who ‘deviate’ from the tried and true path arouse enormous anger because they threaten the identities of those who follow traditional ‘straight and narrow’</p>	<p>From a Strict Father <i>moral boundaries</i> perspective, excommunication is an appropriate response to those who have deviated from church laws. Excommunication helps isolate these individuals from the spiritual community. [The political comparison from above: From a Strict Father <i>moral boundaries</i> perspective, prisons are an important part of society because they punish those who have deviated from a country’s laws. Prisons help isolate these</p>

¹⁰⁰ Lakoff, *Moral Politics*, 76-77.

¹⁰¹ Lakoff, *Moral Politics*, 81.

	moral paths, but also because they are seen as threats to the community. For the protection of the community, they need to be isolated and made outcasts.” ¹⁰²	individuals from the wider society.]
--	---	--------------------------------------

Nurturant Parent Model's Moral Priorities

MORAL	BRIEF DESCRIPTION	RELIGION EXAMPLE
Moral Empathy	“Empathy is a projection of your capacity to feel onto another person. An empathetic person will therefore not want others to experience a lack of well-being. And a truly empathic person will be able to feel what it is like to have another person’s values and to see the world from their perspective. According to this metaphor, this is a moral activity and should lead one to be nurturant.” ¹⁰³	From a Nurturant Parent <i>moral empathy</i> perspective, even though a Catholic may be heterosexual, that Catholic can imagine the discrimination that an LGBTQIA individual faces and therefore supports allowing them to marry in the Church. [The political comparison from above: From a Nurturant Parent <i>moral empathy</i> perspective, even though a citizen may not self-identify as LGBTQIA, one can imagine the discrimination they face and thus want to promote laws that protect them from discrimination.]
Moral Nurturance	“...to care <i>for</i> a child adequately, you have to care <i>about</i> a child. You have to project your capacity for feeling onto a child accurately enough to have a sense of what that child needs. This not only requires empathy, it requires constant empathy. It also requires, to a significant extent, putting the child’s needs before your own, making sacrifices for your child—though not so much that it prevents one from nurturing adequately.” ¹⁰⁴	From a Nurturant Parent <i>moral nurturance</i> perspective, it is important to provide a good quality education for all children, even if it means opening your Catholic school to those who are not Catholic and money from your parish goes to support the school. [The political comparison from above: From a Nurturant Parent <i>moral nurturance</i> perspective, it is important to fully fund early childhood education and daycare to care for all children, even if it means higher taxes.]

¹⁰² Lakoff, *Moral Politics*, 85-86.

¹⁰³ Lakoff, *Moral Politics*, 136-137.

¹⁰⁴ Lakoff, *Moral Politics*, 116.

Moral Self-Nurturance	<p>“You can’t care for others adequately if you don’t care for yourself. An important part of the morality of nurturance is the requirement of self-nurturance, taking care of one’s own basic needs: maintaining one’s health, making a living. . . . It is important to distinguish self-nurturance and self-interest. Self-nurturance is necessary for any adequate moral functioning. Self-interest goes considerably further to the satisfaction of desire, most typically the desire for money and power.”¹⁰⁵</p>	<p>From a Nurturant Parent <i>moral self-nurturance</i> perspective, lay ministers should have equal access to job benefits as clergy so they can care not only for themselves but also for their families and the wider community. [The political comparison from above: From a Nurturant Parent <i>moral self-nurturance</i> perspective, all people should be given health care because they need to be able to care for their health in order to care for others.]</p>
Moral Nurturance of Social Ties	<p>“When disputes arise or when one person acts unfairly or harms another, social ties can be disrupted or broken. If community members are to empathize with one another and be nurturant toward one another, those social ties must be constantly mended and maintained. . . . To act morally, one must attend constantly to social ties. One may have to make sacrifices to maintain social ties.”¹⁰⁶</p>	<p>From a Nurturant Parent <i>moral nurturance of social ties</i> perspective, there should be synodal conversation, transparency, and accountability when a situation of abuse affects a parish community. [The political comparison from above: From a Nurturant Parent <i>moral nurturance of social ties</i> perspective, mediation and restorative justice should be key components of any justice system in order to maintain the community.]</p>

The above charts help demonstrate how a particular family model and its moral priorities may inform religious views. These two ideal models of family “give rise to different moral systems and different discourse forms, that is, different choices of words and different models of reasoning.”¹⁰⁷ Catholics, like the general population, tend to lean

¹⁰⁵ Lakoff, *Moral Politics*, 119.

¹⁰⁶ Lakoff, *Moral Politics*, 120.

¹⁰⁷ Lakoff, *Moral Politics*, 12.

toward a model for God.¹⁰⁸ That model's moral priorities, in turn, tends to inform people's religious and theological views. Sanders posits that, "The cognitive models have huge explanatory power that helps us better understand why Christians disagree on fundamental issues."¹⁰⁹ Indeed, when conflict arises about theologies, ecclesiologies, ministerial practices and the like, at the heart of the conflict likely stands different cognitive models for God.¹¹⁰

Feminist The*logies and Cognitive Models

In this project that is focused on conceptions of God among Catholic women who have suffered relational abuse and what conceptions help them feel safe, I am grateful to feminist the*logies that have also explored models for God and their relation to women's well-being or harm. Sallie McFague's book, *Metaphorical Theology: Models of God in Religious Language*, maps out the connections between the concept of models from the sciences and the usefulness of models for the*logy. She writes, "...theoretical models are not constructed; rather, they are grids or screens providing a vocabulary which, while based in one field, is found appropriate to another. Thus, theoretical models are, in essence, metaphors, but their distinguishing feature is the stress on similarity of *structure*

¹⁰⁸ While Feinberg, Wheling, et. al. do not track religious polity among their researched models, for a breakdown of religious polity and Gods according to Froese and Bader's research, see Paul Froese and Christopher Bader, *America's Four Gods: What we say about God and what that Says about Us* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 178.

¹⁰⁹ Sanders, *Embracing Prodigals*, 15.

¹¹⁰ It is important to note that oftentimes both those who lean toward a Strict Father model and those who lean towards a Nurturant Parent model have similar morals. What distinguishes them, however, is the prioritization. For example, a Nurturant Parent model does believe in moral strength and moral authority, but the values of moral empathy and moral nurturance are higher in priority and, in turn, lead to different beliefs about moral strength and moral authority. For example, Lakoff notes that those who lean toward a Nurturant Parent model believe in moral authority but that moral authority "arises from your track record as a nurturer." Lakoff, *Moral Politics*, 136.

between model and modeled.”¹¹¹ While she is not a cognitive linguist, nonetheless she is pointing to the concept of models for use in the*logy in similar ways. In particular, she is interested in how humans construct the*logical models for God. Like cognitive linguists, she recognizes that “metaphorical thinking constitutes the basis of human thought and language” and, in turn, she defines a the*logical model “as a dominant metaphor, a metaphor with staying power.”¹¹² She understands that models for God are rooted in metaphorical thinking whose source domains arise out of our embodied nature, such as rock, fortress, shepherd, or parent. She also recognizes that models for God are not transitory, but rather are enduring. They are models that last over generations.

While McFague at the time did not have the insights from cognitive science that have developed over the past three decades, she nonetheless shares a similar understanding for what today one would call cognitive modeling. She posits that there is a “root-metaphor” to Christianity that relates to the “relationship between the divine and the human....”¹¹³ Indeed, at the basis of cognitive models for God is a system of interpersonal relations. Specific *idealized* family models for God then arise from this “root-metaphor” of relationality. While Lakoff and other researchers have identified the importance of interpersonal relations to models for God, they have been able to show that the primary model is based on family relations and that there are two primary *idealized* models of the family (Strict Father and Nurturant Parent) that shape how many people think today about politics, religion, the*logy, and other systems of belonging. McFague recognizes the dominance in Christianity of what she calls the “fatherhood model” that is

¹¹¹ Sallie McFague, *Metaphorical Theology: Models of God in Religious Language* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982), 83.

¹¹² McFague, *Metaphorical Theology*, 15, 23.

¹¹³ McFague, *Metaphorical Theology*, 146.

similar to what Lakoff calls the Strict Father model.¹¹⁴ She points out that fatherhood is not in and of itself value-laden and that Jesus himself seems to have utilized the model to express his relationship with God.¹¹⁵ However, she also recognizes the fatherhood model's "growth...into patriarchy, a system of fostering male superiority at all levels of personal and public life, is a serious perversion of Jesus' understanding of the father model...."¹¹⁶ McFague and other feminist theologians have analyzed the fatherhood model for God to better understand from whence it arises.

Schüssler Fiorenza explores how dominant political systems and their power interests have shaped human understanding of God and created a fatherhood model. She writes:

Scriptural and the*logical discourses about G*d have named the Divine in interaction with the political structures of their respective societies. The writings of the Hebrew Bible use the imperial languages of Near Eastern empires, whereas those of the Christian Testament are imbued with Roman imperial language. In the context of medieval feudal society, Christian the*logy celebrated G*d the Father as an all-powerful king and omniscient ruler of the universe.¹¹⁷

The fatherhood model in Christianity was shaped in the context of kyriarchal political systems. While one must be clear that the fatherhood model for God is not a one-to-one replica of the Roman Empire or European monarchies, what it does hold in common with these political systems is a similar *moral system*.

¹¹⁴ McFague, *Metaphorical Theology*, 167. McFague's description of the "fatherhood model" in Christianity has elements of Lakoff's description of the "Strict Father model" in terms of its moral priorities of authority and order. She describes the fatherhood model as "God, as transcendent being, is man's superior Other and woman in this hierarchy becomes man's inferior other.... Thus a whole series of 'orders of creation,' hierarchically arranged, developed in Christianity, a pattern of superior and inferior in which men stood below God, Jesus, and the angels but above women, children, and the beasts." McFague, *Metaphorical Theology*, 148.

¹¹⁵ Mark 14:36

¹¹⁶ McFague, *Metaphorical Theology*, 167.

¹¹⁷ Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *The Power of the Word: Scripture and the Rhetoric of Empire* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 207.

The moral system, the same as that found within the Strict Father model, has a system that is predicated on relations of obedience with reward and punishment between the “father” who is the authority figure and the other members of the family, political, or religious system who are supposed to obey his authority.¹¹⁸ This moral system also holds moral priorities which include strength, authority, order, and boundaries (see the above charts). Schüssler Fiorenza explores how the moral system of the Roman Empire became embodied in the fatherhood model for God. While she does not name Lakoff as an interlocutor nor name cognitive linguistics, she looks at the power relations and priorities of the Roman Empire, ones that have remarkable resemblance to Lakoff’s descriptions of the moral priorities of the Strict Father model. Below is a chart with Lakoff’s moral priorities and their descriptions in the first two columns and Schüssler Fiorenza’s descriptions of the Roman Empire in the third column.

Comparison of Strict Father’s Moral Priorities with Roman Empire’s Discourses of Domination

Moral Priority	Lakoff’s Descriptions of the Strict Father model’s Moral Priorities	Schüssler Fiorenza’s Descriptions of the Roman Empire’s “Discourses of Domination”¹¹⁹
Moral Strength	“The world is divided into good and evil. To remain good in the face of evil...one must be morally strong. One becomes morally strong through self-discipline and self-denial. Someone who is morally weak cannot stand up to evil and so will eventually commit evil. Therefore, more weakness is a form of immorality. Self-indulgence...and lack of self-	“Those male citizens who could not control their households risked losing control of the state. Hence the emperor, like any other elite male, had to project and maintain a firm patriarchal image and to appear in full control of his household in order to show that he was to be trusted as the ruler of the empire.” ¹²¹

¹¹⁸ Lakoff, *Moral Politics*, 66.

¹¹⁹ Schüssler Fiorenza, *The Power of the Word*, 151.

¹²¹ Schüssler Fiorenza, *The Power of the Word*, 153.

	control are therefore forms of immorality.” ¹²⁰	
Moral Authority	“...the parent (typically the father) sets standards of behavior and punishes the child if the standards are not met. Moral behavior by the child is obedience to the parent’s authority. But just as importantly, the exertion of authority is moral behavior on the part of the parent, and it is immoral for the parent to fail to exert authority, that is, to fail to set standards of behavior and to enforce them through punishment.” ¹²²	“According to Greco-Roman political ideology, a male citizen’s authority rested in his dominance over his extended household.” ¹²³ “ <i>Familia</i> did not mean ‘nuclear family’ in the Roman Empire but encompassed all those who were under the authority of the <i>pater familias</i> —the <i>mater familias</i> , children, relatives and slaves....” ¹²⁴
Moral Order	“This metaphor transforms the folk hierarchy of ‘natural’ power relations into a hierarchy of moral authority: God has moral authority over people. People have moral authority over nature (animals, plants, and natural objects). Adults have moral authority over children. Men have moral authority over women.” ¹²⁵	“According to this kyriarchal ideology, the order of subjection/subordination of the empire was mirrored in the order of submission of the kyriarchal household.” ¹²⁶
Moral Boundaries	“Metaphorically, someone who deviates from a tried and true path is creating a new path that others will feel safe to travel on. Hence, those who transgress boundaries or deviate from a prescribed path may ‘lead others astray’ by going off in a new direction and creating a new path.... People who ‘deviate’ from the tried and true path arouse enormous anger because they threaten the identities of those who follow traditional ‘straight and	“Since the word <i>kyriarchal</i> is derived from the Greek word <i>kyrios</i> , and the word <i>archein</i> , which means ‘to rule,’ to question this kyriarchal order and to destabilize the kyriarchal household was a threat to the order of the state.” ¹²⁸

¹²⁰ Lakoff, *Moral Politics*, 73.

¹²² Lakoff, *Moral Politics*, 76-77.

¹²³ Schüssler Fiorenza, *The Power of the Word*, 153.

¹²⁴ Schüssler Fiorenza, *The Power of the Word*, 152.

¹²⁵ Lakoff, *Moral Politics*, 81.

¹²⁶ Schüssler Fiorenza, *The Power of the Word*, 153. Kyriarchy, or kyriarchal, refers to “relations of domination.... constituted by intersecting multiplicative structures of oppression.” Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Wisdom Ways: Introducing Feminist Biblical Interpretation* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2001), 118.

¹²⁸ Schüssler Fiorenza, *The Power of the Word*, 153.

	<p>narrow' moral paths, but also because they are seen as threats to the community. For the protection of the community, they need to be isolated and made outcasts."¹²⁷</p>	
--	---	--

One can see that the moral priorities of the Strict Father model are richly aligned with the moral priorities of the Roman Empire. As the early Christians were coalescing their understanding of God during the time of the Roman Empire, they naturally used conceptual metaphors drawn from the world around them in order to describe God, including those of the Roman Empire. But they not only drew on metaphors from the empire around them, but subconsciously they were also drawing on the *moral system* of the Roman Empire with its moral priorities. This moral system became entwined with the moral system that was constructed for God in many areas of the church and the*logy, albeit not in every way. Schüssler Fiorenza is clear, “My uneasiness here is not simply with the Roman Empire as the historical context of the emerging early Christian movements, but with the residual, mostly unconscious, biblical inscriptions of empire and its subordinating ‘power over.’”¹²⁹ The Strict Father model for God that continues to be with Christianity today carries the vestiges of the moral system of kyriarchal political systems, including the moral priority of women’s submission to men.

As such, feminist the*logians have called for a renewed look at models and metaphors for God that are not drawn from a Strict Father/kyriarchal model, but rather ones that would be beneficial to women’s well-being. McFague calls her readers back to the root-metaphor of interpersonal relations to imagine new models that could be

¹²⁷ Lakoff, *Moral Politics*, 85-86.

¹²⁹ Schüssler Fiorenza, *The Power of the Word*, 7.

liberating for women and others.¹³⁰ One wonders what a model for God based on a Nurturant Parent model might look like; one in which the moral system is not predicated on obedience with reward and punishment, but rather on relations of nurturance.¹³¹ What might this model look like whose top moral priorities are not strength, authority, order, and boundaries, but rather empathy, nurturance, self-nurturance, and nurturance of social ties? Schüssler Fiorenza states, “The crucial question is: since Christian fundamentalisms draw on the kyriarchal language of empire inscribed in the bible, is it also possible to draw on scripture for reconstructing a radical democratic egalitarian vision which is also inscribed in Christian scriptures?”¹³² She believes that this other vision is, indeed, alive within scripture as well as the Christian tradition.

Feminist theologians have sketched out various metaphors and models for God. Some of these have included Spirit, Wisdom, Mother, and Friend.¹³³ Others have included Liberator, Revolutionary, Political Martyr, and Hope, just to name a few.¹³⁴ In chapter four, I will briefly sketch out the potential of Trauma Survivor, as another conceptual metaphor for God that could be rooted in a Nurturant Parent model. While not all of these feminist metaphors and models of God may be based on a Nurturant Parent model, what these generally have in common is a renunciation of the moral system that is

¹³⁰ McFague explores using feminine models for God but ultimately wonders if the model of friendship may be most fruitful. McFague, *Metaphorical Theology*, 177-194. For an excellent theology of friendship, see Mary Hunt, *Fierce Tenderness: A Feminist Theology of Friendship* (New York: Crossroad, 1994).

¹³¹ Lakoff, *Moral Politics*, 135.

¹³² Schüssler Fiorenza, *The Power of the Word*, 29.

¹³³ See Elizabeth Johnson, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse* (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, [1992] 2001), 82-271, and Hunt, *Fierce Tenderness*.

¹³⁴ See Chung Hyun Kyung, *Struggle to be the Sun Again: Introducing Asian Women's Theology* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1990); Ivone Gebara, *Longing for Running Water: Ecofeminism and Liberation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999).

inherent in a Strict Father model, particularly that of the moral order being one of men over women.¹³⁵

It is important to remember that it is not so much the *names* that differentiate these models for God as it is the *moral system* and the accompanying *moral priorities* that undergird them.¹³⁶ For example, the*logian Bernard Cooke nuances the difference between God as Father, with its traditional kyriarchal model, versus God as Father as Jesus understood God. He notes that Jesus “would have used the term ‘father’ metaphorically to describe the God of Israel” as other Jews of his time would have done, but “the consciousness of God to which Jesus attaches the term ‘Abba’ is radically different...”¹³⁷ Cooke notes that the use of the term “father” by other Jews would have been a “root summation of the authority structures and values system of a patriarchal theocratic culture...”¹³⁸ However, when Jesus uses the term “Abba” and describes God it becomes clear that this model of God has a different moral system and moral priorities than how God the Father was pervasively conceived at that time. *Jesus was ushering in a new model of God.* Elements of this model are previously evident, but he seeks to bring it more fully into being; *he incarnates the model more fully.* Sanders reflects on this in a powerful way, saying:

¹³⁵ I believe Mary Hunt’s model of friendship as outlined in her book cited above, *Fierce Tenderness*, is an important model that could sit among the Strict Father or Nurturant Parent models. While it does not derive from a familial model and thus does not have the same subconscious depth, it is perhaps the next relational model with which many humans are most familiar: that of friendship. As the Church takes small steps toward synodality, it is an important model to consider.

¹³⁶ I believe that feminist the*logians could benefit from Lakoff’s work on cognitive models to better understand the subconscious models that undergird human thought. Not only would it shine a greater light on how feminist the*logy is constructed, but also potentially even more clearly demonstrate its impact on pastoral ministry.

¹³⁷ Bernard Cooke, “Non-Patriarchal Salvation” in *Women’s Spirituality: Resources for Christian Development*, ed. Joann Wolski Conn (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1986), 276.

¹³⁸ Bernard Cooke, “Non-Patriarchal Salvation,” 276.

Jesus is the new Moses who leads a new exodus, establishes a new covenant, and inaugurates a new reign of the presence of God. Jesus is the authority who discloses what God is truly like: a Father who embraces a wayward son, a king who forgives those who owe him money, an employer who pays workers more than what is due them, and a master who washes feet. He told his followers to reject the negative side of moral accounting—an eye for an eye. Instead, they are to love those who harm them. He accepted the outsiders: the pagans and the sinners. He rejected the boundary markers of religious purity used by the Authoritative types of his day to identify the true tribe of God. Jesus was a Nurturant authority figure.¹³⁹

Jesus was breathing life into a Nurturant moral system and guiding people into this renewed way of living.

Some people may feel that God as Father—with a Strict Father model and its accompanying moral priorities—is the preeminent model based on its pervasive use. However, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza points to the fact that, “According to both Jewish and Christian tradition, human language about G*d must always be understood as metaphorical or analogical language” and thus is open to change.¹⁴⁰ Humans have always drawn their ideas about God from the world around them, as they did from the Roman Empire, for example. Consequently, one ought to be mindful of the metaphors and models humans use because of the life-orienting effects the models embody. The models have real-world consequences. Elizabeth Johnson sums it up this way:

In [human] speech the symbol of God functions as the primary symbol of the whole religious system, the ultimate point of reference for understanding experience, life, and the world. Hence the way in which a faith community shapes language about God implicitly represents what it takes to be the highest good, the profoundest truth, the most appealing beauty. Such speaking, in turn, powerfully molds the corporate identity of the community and directs its praxis.¹⁴¹

¹³⁹ Sanders, *Embracing Prodigals*, 24.

¹⁴⁰ Schüssler Fiorenza, *The Power of the Word*, 201.

¹⁴¹ Johnson, *She Who Is*, 4. While Elizabeth Johnson primarily uses the word “symbol,” rather than “model,” she is clear that understanding God is metaphorical and that the way we understand God shapes human behavior.

Models for God are not merely an intellectual exercise without consequences. Rather, models for God impact human behavior and have deep implications for human harm or human flourishing.¹⁴² Knowing this, what model should be used? Indeed, as McFague expressed more than 40 years ago, we “[do] not have the luxury of deciding between models and no models: the question is, which models?”¹⁴³

Lakoff’s Reasons for a Preferred Cognitive Model

While Lakoff presents his theories objectively, in his book *Moral Politics* he admits that because of his work he has “had to examine, and therefore question, every point of [his] own beliefs.”¹⁴⁴ In doing so, he arrives at the conclusion that one cognitive model is better for the general population. Toward the conclusion of his book, he provides three reasons for why he leans toward the Nurturant Parent model:

- Reason 1. The Nurturant Parent model is superior as a method of childrearing.
- Reason 2. Strict Father morality requires a view of human thought that is at odds with what we know about the way the mind works.
- Reason 3. Strict Father morality often finds morality in harm; Nurturant Parent morality does not.¹⁴⁵

Reason 1: Childrearing/Parenting

The first reason Lakoff gives for why he believes that the Nurturant Parent model is better than the Strict Father model is related to childrearing, or parenting. He goes into detail about the fact that the two predominant cognitive models are related to what is found in the field of developmental psychology regarding parenting models. Lakoff

¹⁴² I recognize that models for God also have impact on creation, but for purposes of this thesis project, I am limiting the focus to their human implications, primarily their impact on Catholic women who have experienced relational abuse.

¹⁴³ McFague, *Metaphorical Theology*, 105.

¹⁴⁴ Lakoff, *Moral Politics*, 335.

¹⁴⁵ The indented list of three reasons are quoted directly from Lakoff, *Moral Politics*, 337.

explores what psychologists have termed the authoritarian model versus authoritative model of parenting to assess whether one cognitive model is better than another.¹⁴⁶ He notes that the authoritarian model of parenting is remarkably similar to the Strict Father model. According to psychologist Diana Baumrind's description, the authoritarian model of parenting is characterized by:

1. Attempting to shape, control, and evaluate the behavior and attitudes of one's children in accordance with an absolute set of standards.
2. Valuing obedience, respect for authority, work, tradition, and preservation of order.
3. Discouraging verbal give-and-take between parent and child.¹⁴⁷

The authoritarian parenting model may be contrasted with the authoritative parenting model. The authoritative model is similar to the Nurturant Parent model. Baumrind describes the authoritative parenting model as:

1. Expectation for mature behavior from child and clear standard setting.
2. Firm enforcement of rules and standards using commands and sanctions when necessary.
3. Encouragement of the child's independence and individuality.
4. Open communication between parents and children, with parents listening to children's point of view, as well as expressing their own; encouragement of verbal give-and-take.
5. Recognition of rights of both parents and children.¹⁴⁸

Psychology's two predominant parenting models line up with Lakoff's cognitive models. Below, in the left column, are Baumrind's direct descriptions from above. Below, in the right column, are quotes from Lakoff's writings that pair with Baumrind's descriptions.

¹⁴⁶ Lakoff, *Moral Politics*, 339-365. In the psychological literature, these tend to be the two predominant parenting styles, but there are also what is known as the neglectful/indifferent parenting style and the permissive/indulgent parenting style. It is also important to note that some psychological studies use different terminology for these parenting styles. For example, instead of authoritarian and authoritative, these styles are also termed "control" (authoritarian) and "warmth" (authoritative).

¹⁴⁷ This indented list is directly quoted from Lakoff, *Moral Politics*, 352.

¹⁴⁸ This indented list is directly quoted from Lakoff, *Moral Politics*, 352.

Authoritarian Parenting Model in Comparison with the Strict Father Model

BAUMRIND'S DESCRIPTION	LAKOFF'S DESCRIPTION
Attempting to shape, control, and evaluate the behavior and attitudes of one's children in accordance with an absolute set of standards.	"Within the Strict Father model, the parent (typically the father) sets standards of behavior and punishes the child if the standards are not met." ¹⁴⁹ "There is a universal, absolute, strict set of rules specifying what is right and what is wrong for all times, all cultures, and all stages of human development." ¹⁵⁰
Valuing obedience, respect for authority, work, tradition, and preservation of order.	"Moral behavior by the child is obedience to the parent's authority." ¹⁵¹ "The consequences of the metaphor of Moral Order are enormous.... It legitimates a certain class of existing power relations as being natural and therefore moral, and thus makes social movements like feminism appear unnatural and therefore counter to the moral order." ¹⁵²
Discouraging verbal give-and-take between parent and child.	"...good parents set standards, good children obey their parents"; children do not question their parents. ¹⁵³

Authoritative Parenting Model in Comparison with the Nurturant Parent Model

BAUMRIND'S DESCRIPTION	LAKOFF'S DESCRIPTION
Expectation for mature behavior from child and clear standard setting.	"If the parents are careful about making their expectations realistic and appropriately challenging—rather than overdemanding or nondemanding—the children will be able to meet them and develop mastery." ¹⁵⁴
Firm enforcement of rules and standards using commands and sanctions when necessary.	"They [children] learn to be toward others and toward themselves what their parents are to them.... First, they follow the model of their parents' behavior. Second, through being securely attached to their parents, they become attuned to their

¹⁴⁹ Lakoff, *Moral Politics*, 76.

¹⁵⁰ Lakoff, *Moral Politics*, 366.

¹⁵¹ Lakoff, *Moral Politics*, 76.

¹⁵² Lakoff, *Moral Politics*, 82.

¹⁵³ Lakoff, *Moral Politics*, 77.

¹⁵⁴ Lakoff, *Moral Politics*, 111.

	parents' expectations and try to meet them." ¹⁵⁵
Encouragement of the child's independence and individuality.	"Raising a child to be fulfilled also requires helping that child develop his or her potential for achievement and enjoyment. That requires respecting the child's own values and allowing the child to explore the range of ideas and options that the world offers." ¹⁵⁶
Open communication between parents and children, with parents listening to children's point of view, as well as expressing their own; encouragement of verbal give-and-take.	"Open, two-way, mutually respectful communication is crucial.... The questioning of parents by children is positive, since children need to learn why their parents do what they do...." ¹⁵⁷
Recognition of rights of both parents and children.	"You can't care for others adequately if you don't care for yourself. An important part of the morality of nurturance is the requirement of self-nurturance, taking care of one's own basic needs...." ¹⁵⁸

The parenting models as described by Baumrind in the field of psychology are remarkably resonant with the family models named by Lakoff in the field of cognitive science. This leads Lakoff to wonder if one parenting model is better than another for "raising real children."¹⁵⁹ Psychologists have been studying these parenting styles over the last five decades to better understand how different styles affect children as they grow. Studies have shown that children raised with an authoritative (Nurturant Parent) parenting model seem to do better on a number of developmental outcomes as compared with children raised with an authoritarian (Strict Father) parenting model.¹⁶⁰ For example,

¹⁵⁵ Lakoff, *Moral Politics*, 110.

¹⁵⁶ Lakoff, *Moral Politics*, 110.

¹⁵⁷ Lakoff, *Moral Politics*, 109.

¹⁵⁸ Lakoff, *Moral Politics*, 119.

¹⁵⁹ Lakoff, *Moral Politics*, 339-365.

¹⁶⁰ Lakoff himself reviews the research on parenting and notes that the Authoritarian/Strict Father model of parenting "is supposed to make children internally strong and self-disciplined so that they can resist temptations. But it doesn't work. Children of authoritarian parents 'do not behave differently from children of other types of parents on contrived measures of resistance to temptation.' An upbringing with strict rules and punishments for violating them is supposed to produce a strong conscience in children. But the opposite is true. Such children show lesser evidence of conscience. Getting children to follow strict rules

children raised with authoritative (Nurturant Parent) parenting have lower levels of aggressive behavior, anxiety, and substance use, and they also have higher resilience capacity.¹⁶¹ This contrasts with children raised with authoritarian (Strict Father) parenting who exhibit higher levels of aggressive behavior, anxiety, and substance use, and they also have less resilience capacity. In fact, a recent study using longitudinal data shows that authoritative (Nurturant Parent) parenting may produce better physical health outcomes in children, leading the authors to note, “This study strengthens the evidence for a public health focus on improving parenting to promote population health and well-being.”¹⁶² The research is consistent in pointing toward the authoritative (Nurturant Parent) parenting style as being the better option when raising children.¹⁶³

Reason 2: How the Mind Works

Lakoff provides a second reason for supporting the Nurturant Parent cognitive model that has to do with contemporary insights into human cognitive processing. He looks at a number of assumptions required by Strict Father morality that cannot be

through punitive enforcement is supposed to make them morally self-reliant, to create in them an inner moral sense that they can apply to new situations or moral conflict. But again the opposite is true. Such children are more likely to have to depend on the moral opinion of others, that is, they are ‘more likely to have external, rather than internal, moral orientation in discussing what is the “right” behavior in situations of moral conflict.’” Lakoff, *Moral Politics*, 355.

¹⁶¹ Hamid Masud, Muhammed Shakil Ahmad, Ki Woon Cho, Zainab Fakhr, “Parenting Styles and Aggression Among Young Adolescents: A Systematic Review of Literature,” *Community Mental Health Journal* 55, (2019): 1015–1030. Coby Gerlsma, Paul M.G. Emmelkamp, Willem A. Arrindell, “Anxiety, depression, and perception of early parenting: a meta-analysis,” *Clinical Psychology Review* 10, no. 3 (1990): 251-277. Martin Pinquart, Jana Lauk, “Associations of parenting styles with substance use in the offspring—A systematic review and meta-analysis,” *Drug Alcohol Review* 44 (2025):133-143. Katja Petrowski, Elmar Brähler, Marcus Zenger, “The relationship of parental rearing behavior and resilience as well as psychological symptoms in a representative sample,” *Health and Quality of Life Outcomes* 12, no. 95 (2014). Open access article.

¹⁶² Ying Chen ScD, Jess Haines Ph.D, MHSc, RD, Brittany M. Charlton ScD, Tyler J. VanderWeele, Ph.D, “Positive parenting improves multiple aspects of health and well-being in young adulthood,” *Nature Human Behavior* 3, no. 7 (July 2019):684-691.

¹⁶³ I have mainly referenced studies completed by researchers based in the United States and Europe, due to language and access.

justified by what we know about how the mind works, such as the assumption that “There is a universal, absolute, strict set of rules specifying what is right and what is wrong for all times, all cultures, and all stages of human development.”¹⁶⁴ This assumption undergirds the Strict Father model and leads those who lean toward this cognitive model to believe that there must be absolute rules that all people must obey. The assumption leaves little regard for contextualization or culture. In those who lean toward this model, “[t]he only possibilities they see are moral absolutism or chaos.”¹⁶⁵

This assumption rests on a belief about the mind that there is “[a]bsolute categorization,” where “[e]verything is either in or out of a category.”¹⁶⁶ However, contemporary insights into cognitive processing demonstrate that absolute categorization does not exist. Categories are not clearly defined across time, place, culture, etc. Lakoff gives the example of a rule that may appear to have fixed categories such as “the rich should help the poor.”¹⁶⁷ He reflects on the fact that the categories of “rich” and “poor” are relative, or what he calls “fuzzy categories” with unclear borders.¹⁶⁸ Who would be considered wealthy in one country or neighborhood could be far different from who is considered wealthy in another country or neighborhood. One could also look at the rule, “Do no harm.” This rule can be used to explore how categories are “radial,” that members of the category are “characterized by variations on a central model.”¹⁶⁹ Lakoff looks at the category of harm, with the “central case,” the more commonly perceived category, being physical harm.¹⁷⁰ However, he goes on to note that there are variations to the

¹⁶⁴ Lakoff, *Moral Politics*, 366.

¹⁶⁵ Lakoff, *Moral Politics*, 366.

¹⁶⁶ Lakoff, *Moral Politics*, 369.

¹⁶⁷ Lakoff, *Moral Politics*, 370.

¹⁶⁸ Lakoff, *Moral Politics*, 370.

¹⁶⁹ Lakoff, *Moral Politics*, 7-8.

¹⁷⁰ Lakoff, *Moral Politics*, 7-8.

category of harm “that includes kinds of harm that are metaphorically understood in terms of physical harm, e.g., financial harm, political harm, social harm, and psychological harm.”¹⁷¹ The category of harm has a radius of interpretations that stem from its central case and, thus, could be interpreted in different ways in different times or from different vantage points. Another rule that might be considered absolute by those who lean toward a Strict Father model is the rule, “Honor thy father and mother.” However, cognitive linguistics has demonstrated that categories have “prototypes,” including “*ideal case* prototypes” or “*anti-ideal* prototypes,” among others.¹⁷² As such, the word “father” or “mother” may have certain ideals, or anti-ideals, associated with them based on one’s cognitive model. Someone who leans toward a Strict Father model may subconsciously imagine an ideal case prototype for “father” that includes the moral priorities of strength and authority, whereas someone who leans toward a Nurturant Parent model may subconsciously imagine an ideal case prototype for “father” that includes the moral priorities of empathy and nurturance. These examples point toward the fact that the mind does not operate with *absolute categorization*. Cognitive linguistics has shown that categories can be fuzzy, radial, and contain prototypes. As such, categories and the concepts made up from them have variations and are contextual. The assumptions that undergird the Strict Father model, such as *absolute categorization*, no longer hold up to what we know about cognitive processing.¹⁷³ This contrasts with the Nurturant Parent model that is based on relative categorization which aligns with contemporary insights

¹⁷¹ Lakoff, *Moral Politics*, 8.

¹⁷² Lakoff, *Moral Politics*, 8-11. Italics his.

¹⁷³ To explore this second reason beyond what I write here, see Lakoff, *Moral Politics*, 366-378.

into how the mind works and is the second reason why Lakoff prefers the Nurturant Parent model.¹⁷⁴

Reason 3: Harm

Lakoff's third reason for preferring the Nurturant Parent model is related to the question of which model is more likely to promote harm and, thus, is perhaps most salient for this project's focus on women who have experienced relational abuse. Lakoff notes, that "Strict Father morality often finds morality in harm," meaning that if one holds a Strict Father cognitive model, one is more likely to see harm or violence as being justified.¹⁷⁵ This model "sees the world in terms of a war of good against the forces of evil, which must be fought ruthlessly...." and "[r]uthless behavior in the name of the good fight is thus seen as justified."¹⁷⁶ However, this willingness to be violent for a "higher good" not only applies to shows of force by countries or strong words by church leaders. What is considered "evil" or "immoral" to this model is anything that goes against its moral priorities, particularly its top priority of strength. For example, if someone is on welfare, it is considered a personal weakness—the opposite of strength. If someone struggles with alcohol, it is considered a personal weakness. If a person of color is passed over for a job, it is considered due to a personal weakness. The Strict Father model is more prone to believe that these individuals just need to "toughen up": be more hard-working, more self-disciplined, and more assertive. Lakoff notes that the "consequence of giving highest priority to the metaphor of Moral Strength is that it rules

¹⁷⁴ It must be noted that Lakoff is clear that there is not moral relativism. Both cognitive models contain moral priorities. Additionally, due to our incarnational nature and experiences which inform our concepts, there are inherent moral boundaries. For more information on this topic, see Lakoff, *Moral Politics*, 376-377.

¹⁷⁵ Lakoff, *Moral Politics*, 337.

¹⁷⁶ Lakoff, *Moral Politics*, 74.

out any explanation in terms of social forces or social class.”¹⁷⁷ There is little space in the Strict Father model to understand how systemic injustices and social forces—including those that result in trauma and abuse—impact the lives of women and others. Therefore, in this model there is little room in its highest priorities for empathy, which of course is the top moral priority for the Nurturant Parent model. Instead, this model is more likely to justify harm and the reasons why someone may be suffering from harm.¹⁷⁸

Not only does the Strict Father model *justify* harm, but Strict Father-like parenting also leads to more harm in the area of family violence, a concern at the heart of this thesis project. Lakoff has noted that the Strict Father model of parenting is more likely to support and use corporal punishment, and the use of corporal punishment against children has been linked to increased family violence when those children become adults.¹⁷⁹ Lakoff specifically cites the sociological research conducted by Murray A. Straus, Richard J. Gelles, and Suzanne K. Steinmetz that shows that, “The more punishment one experienced as a child, the greater the rate of violence in marriages fifteen or more years later.... Physical punishment received as a child does increase the likelihood of domestic violence when people marry.”¹⁸⁰ In another book by Gelles and Straus, they write that among other solutions to addressing the epidemic of family violence:

After nearly two decades of research on the causes and consequences of family violence, we are convinced that our society must abandon its reliance on spanking

¹⁷⁷ Lakoff, *Moral Politics*, 75.

¹⁷⁸ It should be noted that these models have significant implications when it comes to the abuse crisis in the Catholic Church. While it is outside the scope of this project to address, one could look at how these models are related to the institutional responses to the abuse crisis, i.e. why some believe that the abuse is simply a matter of “a few bad apples” and seminaries need to be stricter to identify them, while others see the abuse crisis as rooted in broader theological, systemic forces.

¹⁷⁹ Lakoff, *Moral Politics*, 353. It may be helpful to remember that the authoritative (Nurturant Parent) model does not value corporal punishment whereas the authoritarian (Strict Father) model is more likely to support it.

¹⁸⁰ Richard J. Gelles, Murray A. Straus, and Suzanne K. Steinmetz, *Behind Closed Doors: Violence in the American Family* (Garden City: Anchor Books, 1981), 109.

children if we are to prevent intimate violence. If we are ever to accomplish this goal, we must reject the belief that spanking is an effective discipline tool and we must abolish corporal punishment for all time.¹⁸¹

They are clear that if we are to prevent family violence, then society must look at the way that parents raise children. Even going beyond family violence, in looking at the causes of violence outside the home in broader society the researchers remain steadfast in their conclusion, writing that “the evidence appears to support the notion that our homes and how we raise our children are the main sources of our violent society.”¹⁸² The parenting model that is more inclined to *justify* harm is the model more likely to *produce* harm.¹⁸³

A similar insight about a particular model’s justification of harm is also found by other sociologists in the field of religion. Over the years, researchers Paul Froese, Christopher Bader, and their colleagues have done extensive studies of the U.S. population and their conceptions of God.¹⁸⁴ Their book, *America’s Four Gods*, explores what people think about God via four general categories related to how people describe God in terms of engagement with the world (or lack thereof) and judgement of the world

¹⁸¹ Richard J. Gelles and Murray A. Straus, *Intimate Violence: The Causes and Consequences of Abuse in the American Family* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1988), 197.

¹⁸² Richard J. Gelles, Murray A. Straus, and Suzanne K. Steinmetz, *Behind Closed Doors: Violence in the American Family* (Garden City: Anchor Books, 1981), 74.

¹⁸³ Interestingly, Straus, Gelles, and Steinmetz also found in their research that elements of what Lakoff would consider a Nurturant Parent model of parenting seems to help reduce violence in the home, such as shared decision-making and reduced reliance on what they call “sex-patterned allocation of roles and tasks.” See Richard J. Gelles, Murray A. Straus, and Suzanne K. Steinmetz, *Behind Closed Doors: Violence in the American Family* (Garden City: Anchor Books, 1981), 242.

¹⁸⁴ While I have not found published research on Lakoff’s models that break down cognitive models as related to demographic data on the U.S. population, I recommend the work of Froese and Bader who note how race, religion, regions of the United States, etc. may influence one’s God images (although they break God images into four categories they name Authoritative, Benevolent, Critical, and Distant). While Froese and Bader’s work does not directly align with the Lakoffian models, it is nonetheless interesting to note, for example, that, the majority of women believe in a Benevolent or Distant God (rather than an Authoritative or Critical one) and the majority of African Americans believe in an Authoritative or Critical God (rather than a Benevolent or Distant one). They write, “Women tend to picture a more Benevolent God than men, and African Americans are more likely than whites to believe that God is angry. More educated and wealthier Americans favor distant images of God. All of these patterns indicate that our image of God does not emerge at random.” Froese and Bader, *America’s Four Gods*, 55.

(or lack thereof).¹⁸⁵ There seem to be some similarities between people who believe God has higher engagement with the world and higher judgement of the world and those who have a Strict Father cognitive model. While not referencing Lakoff, Froese and Bader found that these individuals with belief in God's higher engagement and judgement, "tend to imagine a world in which evil forces lurk everywhere and we are engaged in a constant spiritual struggle between good and evil."¹⁸⁶ Additionally, these individuals "feel that evil is clearly defined and that we are obliged to eradicate it by any means necessary."¹⁸⁷ This is similar to the Strict Father model that also believes, as noted earlier, that humans live in a constant battle between good and evil and that "evil does not deserve respect, it deserves to be attacked!"¹⁸⁸ Moreover, Froese and Bader discovered that those with a conception of God, that has some characteristics similar to Lakoff's Strict Father model, apply these beliefs not only to their personal spiritual lives, but in all areas of their lives which can lead to significant harm and suffering. For example, when the government framed "the War on Terror and the Iraq War as existential fights against evil," those with this conception of God were significantly more likely to believe that "going to war in Iraq was the right decision" and that the "government should expand its authority to fight terrorism."¹⁸⁹ They seem more comfortable with justification of *human* actions that may cause harm which aligns with the model's priorities of strength, authority, order, etc. Furthermore, some of those with these God beliefs may also attribute meaning to *non-human* actions that may also cause harm, such as natural disasters. For

¹⁸⁵ Froese and Bader, *America's Four Gods*, 10.

¹⁸⁶ Froese and Bader, *America's Four Gods*, 131.

¹⁸⁷ Froese and Bader, *America's Four Gods*, 149.

¹⁸⁸ Lakoff, *Moral Politics*, 74.

¹⁸⁹ Froese and Bader, *America's Four Gods*, 136.

example, Froese and Bader note how the justification of harm mentality “leads logically to the conclusion that bad things are a sign of his [God’s] wrath.”¹⁹⁰ While the majority of people in the United States “feel that God plays no role in tragic events,” nonetheless 40% of those with a conception of God that has characteristics similar to the Strict Father model believe that God allows disasters to happen.¹⁹¹ It must be said that not everyone who leans towards a Strict Father model believes this, but those who lean toward this thinking are *more likely* to justify harm and to believe that there is divine reason for suffering. These beliefs have significant consequences.

The Strict Father model’s willingness to justify harm in reverence to its moral priority of strength and to consider those who suffer as “weak” are potentially dangerous beliefs, particularly in the context of abused women. Researchers have discovered that those who believe in a Strict Father-like God, one who “...tightly controls everything that happens and who affirm[s] ‘gender complementarianism’ (women are to be submissive to male authority) are more accepting of domestic violence and suppress its disclosure.”¹⁹² That study, cited by Sanders, also found that “belief in Divine-human hierarchical relating corresponds to expectations of hierarchical relating in interpersonal relationships.”¹⁹³ Additionally, other researchers have found that “Authoritarian God concepts” with characteristics similar to those found in Lakoff’s Strict Father God “are associated with increased aggression and decreased prosocial behavior, whereas concepts of a Benevolent God or benevolent Spirit [with elements that overlap with the Nurturant

¹⁹⁰ Froese and Bader, *America’s Four Gods*, 131.

¹⁹¹ Froese and Bader, *America’s Four Gods*, 130, 126.

¹⁹² Sanders, *Embracing Prodigals*, 44.

¹⁹³ Peter J. Jankowski, Steven J. Sandage, Miriam Whitney Cornell, Cheryl Bissonette, Andy J. Johnson, Sarah A. Crabtree, and Mary L. Jensen, “Religious Beliefs and Domestic Violence Myths,” *Psychology of Religion and Spirituality* 10, no. 4 (2018): 392.

Parent God] are shown to be associated with decreased rates of aggression and increased acts of prosociality such as forgiveness...and volunteerism or providing aid to religious out-groups.”¹⁹⁴ These studies provide more evidence that a Strict Father model of God that justifies harm, reverences strength and hierarchy, and increases aggression is more likely to lead toward more harm against women. For example, for a woman who holds a Strict Father model that justifies harm, one could imagine her thinking, “I should submit more.” For a perpetrator of violence who holds a Strict Father model, one may imagine the perpetrator thinking, “She needs to be put in her place.” For someone who holds a Strict Father model who hears a woman’s abuse story, or hears about abuse in general, one may imagine the responses being “Why didn’t she have the strength to leave?” or “Why didn’t she say ‘no’ more forcefully?” or “Why didn’t she fight back?”¹⁹⁵ Note how the responses reverence strength and justify harm, but do not question why the perpetrator was violent. Rather, the responses subconsciously justify the perpetrator’s behavior and, instead, assume that the woman’s weakness may be partly to blame.

Because the Strict Father model upholds the moral priority of strength and is predicated on a relationship of obedience with reward and punishment—punishment that justifies harm—one may imagine how taking strength and punishment to the extreme could lead to increased emotional, physical, sexual, and/or spiritual harm. It must be said that abuse happens *by* people with either cognitive model (Strict Father/Nurturant Parent)

¹⁹⁴ Katherine A. Johnson, Yexin Jessica Li, Adam B. Cohen, and Morris A. Okun, “Friends in High Places: the Influence of Authoritarian and Benevolent God-Concepts on Social Attitudes and Behaviors,” *Psychology of Religion and Spirituality* 5, no. 1 (2013): 20.

¹⁹⁵ To better understand why women do not respond in the ways a Strict Father might imagine she should, I recommend this brief article by Amanda Kippert, “16 Reasons Why She Stayed and How You Can Help,” DomesticShelters.org, December 19, 2022. <https://www.domesticshelters.org/articles/identifying-abuse/16-reasons-why-she-stayed-and-how-you-can-help>. I also recommend the following book: Bessel A. van der Kolk, M.D., *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma* (New York: Penguin Books, 2014).

and *to* those with either cognitive model. It also must be said that there are people with Strict Father or Nurturant Parent models who work to *prevent* abuse. Abuse is not limited to one cognitive model. However, as noted above, the research points to the fact that those raised with a Strict Father-leaning parenting model (Straus, Gelles, Steinmetz) or who hold elements of a Strict Father-leaning model of God (Froese and Bader) are *more inclined* to justify or perpetrate violence (Straus, Gelles, Steinmetz; Froese and Bader; Jankowski et. al., Johnson et. al.). For those who care about reducing abuse, the Nurturant Parent model appears to be the better option.

While this thesis project will look more closely at the *pastoral* implications of these models in chapter four, for now, it is perhaps worth sharing Elizabeth Johnson's impassioned theological and pastoral response to the idea of a God who justifies suffering:

These centuries have witnessed millions of people gassed, burned, tortured, bombed and shot out of existence. Millions more continue to have the life ground out of them by the misery of poverty. Within patriarchal systems, women in large numbers are the recipients of male aggression expressed in sexual assault, wife battering, and murder as well as in the institutionalized violence of sexism. Within racist societies people of color or different ethnic origin are violated in ways that kill the body and demean the spirit. . . . There is suffering, in other words, that does not simply punish or test or educate or work a greater good. Instead, it destroys.¹⁹⁶

Johnson recognizes, as does Lakoff, that a model that justifies human harm and suffering can easily become a slippery slope that takes its reward and punishment relationship too far. It may not strengthen someone, as it is intended, but rather “destroys.” In summation, Johnson proclaims, “A god who is simply a spectator at all of this suffering, who even ‘permits’ it, falls short of the modicum of decency expected even at the human level.

¹⁹⁶ Johnson, *She Who Is*, 249.

Such a God is morally intolerable.”¹⁹⁷ Following this line of thinking, if there is a type of God that justifies harm and suffering and this God is morally intolerable, then the Strict Father cognitive model from which it arises is also intolerable. A model that more easily justifies harm is not a pastoral model to perpetuate and promote, particularly in the context of abuse survivors. As such, if the Church truly cares about preventing abuse and caring for survivors, it is incumbent upon those who minister in the church—lay ministers, priests, spiritual companions, communication ministers, and others—to understand the implications of these models and to consider a preferential option for the Nurturant Parent model.

“Do no harm”: A note about the role of ministers in relation to cognitive models

While the majority of people have a cognitive model towards which they generally lean, there is some evidence that models can be swayed in various contexts. This is an important note in this chapter on cognitive models and its importance becomes clearer in chapter four as it relates to Catholic ministers and their work with abuse survivors. The way that ministers speak about God may influence how people think about a topic. The way that a topic is framed through a particular conceptual metaphor may impact the way that one thinks about that same topic. For example, Paul H. Thibodeau and Lera Boroditsky studied whether describing crime as a “virus” or a “wild beast” made a difference in how people thought crime should be managed. Sanders sums up their research by saying:

American participants were given a report about crime in a city that contained statistics along with one of the two test metaphors and were then asked what should be done about the problem. The participants who read the report in which the virus metaphor was used suggested investigating the root causes and working

¹⁹⁷ Johnson, *She Who Is*, 249.

to heal the city via social reforms. Participants who read the report in which crime was understood as a beast proposed rounding up the criminals and enacting harsher penalties. The metaphors systemically influenced what people thought should be done, regardless of whether the participants were Republican or Democrat or male or female. . . . The researchers conclude that the participants were covertly and powerfully shaped by the two metaphors.¹⁹⁸

This is an important insight for Catholic ministers to understand. While people may have cognitive models toward which they generally lean, they can also be moved toward one or the other. More studies could be done on this specifically in the Catholic context. If the research holds true for Catholic ministerial contexts, it seems that Catholic ministers may have significant influence over someone's perceptions of a topic based on the models and metaphors they use. As such, the responsibility for Catholic ministers to use a model that will help abuse survivors becomes all the more critical.

Conclusion

This thesis is looking at whether Nurturant Parent conceptions for God may help Catholic women relational abuse survivors who lean toward a Nurturant Parent cognitive model to feel safe and if Strict Father conceptions for God may impede their ability to feel safe. As such, this first chapter sought to contextualize the problem under study by introducing cognitive models as the underlying structures subconsciously used by humans for understanding complex ideas and phenomenon, including those of God and the*logy. At the beginning of this chapter, two different conceptions of God were shared from abuse survivors. One conception of God leaned toward what may be considered a Nurturant Parent model. This conception of God was described in relational terms of attachment, such as God "wants to hold my hand," and a nurturing quality. The other

¹⁹⁸ Sanders, *Theology in the Flesh*, 61.

conception of God was described in relational terms of obedience, such as “God tests us,” and a strengthening quality. While Catholic ministers may not perceive significant differences in descriptions of God, theologies and descriptions of God provide clues to the cognitive models that undergird them.

Advances in cognitive linguistics help humans better understand the way that the mind works; that humans use conceptual metaphors to understand the world around them, often rooted in family-based cognitive models. In the United States, the majority of people lean toward one of two dominant cognitive models—drawn from parenting models—to process ideas and phenomenon. George Lakoff has termed these models the Strict Father model and the Nurturant Parent model. Each of these models has its own moral system with moral priorities. The Strict Father model is predicated on relations of obedience with reward and punishment, and with moral priorities including strength, authority, order, and boundaries. The Nurturant Parent model is predicated on relations of secure attachment with moral priorities that include empathy, nurturance, self-nurturance, and nurturance of social ties. Each of these models is used when trying to make sense of the world, particularly when contemplating relationships and communities of belonging such as families, politics, religion, and the*logy.¹⁹⁹

Feminist the*logians have explored how a version of the Father God model found in Christianity was constructed on a moral system that was used by the Roman Empire and other kyriarchal political systems and, as such, participates in women’s oppression. Feminist the*logians call for different metaphors and models for God that will support

¹⁹⁹ As one continues to read this paper, the reader is invited to reference Appendix A for a quick reference guide to the two models and their moral priorities, along with their rendering through a Christian lens by Lakoff and Sanders.

women's liberation and flourishing. Using Lakoff's theory, a Nurturant Parent model for God, one that is found within scripture and Christian tradition, may be a healthier primary model for God.

Psychological and sociological research also seems to point toward the Nurturant Parent model as the preferred model based on a number of health outcomes. As a result, if Catholic ministers are to lift up a model for God that will support human flourishing, particularly for Catholic women relational abuse survivors who lean toward a Nurturant Parent model, the path seems clear: the Nurturant Parent model for God is the one to whom hearts should be directed. This is the model with which the*ologies should speak. It is the model that ministries should reflect. This thesis project seeks to explore this claim from the perspective of Catholic women who have suffered relational abuse to see how cognitive models for God may impact their ability to feel safe and heal, and why it is important to understand these cognitive models in ministry. It is to this research that chapter two will turn, providing a roadmap for how the research was designed and why.

Chapter Two: Research Design

In the previous chapter, Lakoff's cognitive models—Strict Father and Nurturant Parent—were introduced. The majority of people in the United States subconsciously lean toward either a Strict Father or Nurturant Parent cognitive model that informs the way they process ideas and phenomenon, including their conception of God. This thesis project is particularly focused on Catholic women who are relational abuse survivors who lean towards a Nurturant Parent model and explores how Nurturant Parent and Strict Father conceptions for God affect their sense of safety. Does one cognitive model more than the other help these survivors feel safer and, if so, what are the pastoral implications? This chapter will explicate how the research portion of this thesis project was designed to explore this question about safety.²⁰⁰ Following the meta-method, this chapter will utilize Judith Herman's first stage of healing which is safety and will explain why safety was a primary concern in the design of the research.

Why Safety? Judith Herman's First Stage of Healing

The heart of this project's research question revolves around *safety*. Physical, psychological, and spiritual safety are foundational steps in a survivor's healing journey. The psychologist Judith Herman has written extensively about the critical importance of safety for survivors of abuse and other trauma-inducing experiences.²⁰¹ When traumatic events take place, Herman notes that "...people spontaneously seek their first source of

²⁰⁰ This chapter will reference the ad used to recruit participants, the consent and eligibility form, the resource list that was provided to participants after each interview, and the script of the interview with its questions. All of these documents may be found in Appendix B, C, D, and E, respectively.

²⁰¹ Judith Lewis Herman, M.D., *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence-From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror* (New York: Basic Books, 1992), 155-174.

comfort and protection. Wounded soldiers and rape survivors often cry for their mothers, or for God. When this cry is not answered, the sense of basic trust is shattered.

Traumatized people feel utterly abandoned, utterly alone, cast out of the human and divine systems of care and protection that sustain life.”²⁰² An individual or community’s sense of safety is destroyed by trauma. For those born into family violence, there is little sense of safety to begin with. For those who had a modicum sense of safety before a traumatic experience, their previous sense of safety and trust may be torn apart. Trauma can destroy a sense of safety and connection not only with self and others, but also with God. Herman explains that traumatic experiences “...shatter the construction of the self that is formed and sustained in relation to others. They undermine the belief systems that give meaning to human experience. They violate the victim’s faith in a natural or divine order and cast the victim into a state of existential crisis.”²⁰³ She is clear that trauma impacts a person’s belief system, their “faith in a natural or divine order.” Indeed, abuse survivors are not only impacted physically or emotionally, but also spiritually. Their system of meaning is upended but with support they may begin a long journey to reconstruct a new narrative that will integrate the trauma they have experienced.

To begin that healing journey, survivors need to establish a sense of safety. In fact, Herman believes, “This task takes precedence over all others, for no other therapeutic work can possibly succeed if safety has not been adequately secured.”²⁰⁴ As noted in the introduction, Herman has outlined four stages of healing for trauma survivors, but safety is the most essential step. Without safety, a survivor is unable address the other healing

²⁰² Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 52.

²⁰³ Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 51.

²⁰⁴ Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 159.

stages. This observation from her clinical work and research has been affirmed by more recent insights about the brain and nervous system.²⁰⁵ Bessel van der Kolk has studied the way that when an individual is triggered, the part of the brain that “put[s] thoughts and feelings into words” shuts down.²⁰⁶ Being able to communicate and make meaning of one’s trauma is the second stage of healing, as noted by Herman. Therefore, if the part of the brain that enables a survivor to put “thoughts and feelings into words” is shut down, then healing cannot proceed. Moreover, van der Kolk has found that when “something reminds traumatized people of the past, their right brain reacts as if the traumatic event were happening in the present.”²⁰⁷ When survivors are reminded of abuse, their bodies relive the traumatic experience(s). Their brains return to the traumatic state and prevent the survivors from engaging the healing process because they are back in the moment when they urgently need to secure help, fight, flee, or freeze. “We must most of all help our patients to live fully and securely in the present,” declares van der Kolk, but he doesn’t limit his call to action to only those in the mental health fields.²⁰⁸ He believes we need to become a “trauma-conscious society” and has worked with others to create a network that runs programs to assist caregiving professions—such as teachers, child welfare workers, and others—to learn how they can support those suffering from trauma who are entrusted to their care.²⁰⁹ One may wonder that if these caregiving professions are becoming aware of how to support survivors entrusted to their care, might Catholic ministers also become equipped to better support survivors? What would it look like for

²⁰⁵ Bessel A. van der Kolk, M.D., *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma* (New York, Penguin Books, 2014), 39-88.

²⁰⁶ van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score*, 43.

²⁰⁷ van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score*, 45.

²⁰⁸ van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score*, 73.

²⁰⁹ van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score*, 349. To learn more about some of this work, see 349-358.

Catholic ministers to assist abuse survivors in engaging a sense of safety, at a minimum, or even taking the next steps of accompanying them on their healing journey of remembrance and mourning, reconnection, and justice-seeking in the capacity that they can as spiritual caregivers?²¹⁰ While the breadth of the answer to these questions is outside the scope of this project, what this project does endeavor to do is to interview a small number of Catholic women survivors of relational abuse to see whether the cognitive models that ministers use for God may impact a survivor's sense of safety, that essential first task in a survivor's healing. While the small number of interviews will not make the research statistically significant, it may provide questions and early analysis for future, broader research that could have significant pastoral implications. Catholic ministers may be able to help support a felt sense of safety in survivors by being attentive to the cognitive models the ministers use for God in spiritual direction, homilies, communications, etc.²¹¹ By using models for God that help survivors feel safe, ministers can take a small step in helping survivors continue their healing journey—physically, emotionally, and spiritually.

Trauma-Informed Research Design

Since safety is at the heart of this thesis project, the research was designed with trauma-informed principles to try to ensure a safe experience for the participants. The Journal of Health Services Research and Policy published an article in 2023 with

²¹⁰ I want to be clear that ministers could be one part of a survivor's healing journey but should not be the only part. Survivors also need the support of caregivers in other fields such as the fields of mental health, medical, etc.

²¹¹ Note that this does not mean a minister talks about a Nurturant Parent model of God at face value, for example. Rather, a minister may use elements of this model in speaking of God or relations of belonging. For example, if sharing a homily about the Samaritan woman at the well in the Gospel of John, one might lead with a description of Jesus' empathy for what she has suffered, rather than leading with a description of Jesus' instruction for how to worship.

recommendations for trauma-informed and resilience-informed approaches to research. In it, Nancy L. Edelman, writes, “The practice of research has the power to address adversity and trauma or to perpetuate it at both an individual and a societal level. It is feasible and worthwhile to integrate trauma-informed and resilience-informed approaches across research topics and designs.”²¹² She integrated previous principles from both trauma-informed (TI) approaches and resilience for social justice (RSJI) approaches. Combining these, she put forward a comprehensive guide for researchers that she terms Trauma and Resilience Informed Research Principles and Practice (TRIRPP). She notes that the aims of her work are:

1. To identify, acknowledge and address the adversity context which may underpin the lives of research participants and the research phenomenon under study.
2. To improve study accessibility, acceptability and participation from disenfranchised and/or traumatised individuals and populations.²¹³
3. To recognise and address the likelihood of trauma experiences among research participants and researchers and seek to avoid re-traumatisation.
4. To recognise and promote the resilience of research participants and researchers.²¹⁴

Edelman identifies eight comprehensive principles to shape the design of research projects to become trauma-informed and resilience-informed. Under each of the eight principles, she offers a number of suggested practices to help researchers enact those principles. These principles and their suggested practices were taken seriously as the research portion of this thesis project was designed.

²¹² Natalie L. Edelman, “Trauma and resilience informed research principles and practice: A framework to improve the inclusion and experience of disadvantaged populations in health and social care research,” *Journal of Health Services Research & Policy* 28, no.1 (2023):66-75.

²¹³ Note the British spelling of traumatised, recognise, etc. I have kept Edelman’s original spellings.

²¹⁴ Edelman, “Trauma and resilience informed research principles and practice,” 69. The full indented list is her quote.

In this project’s research, all eight principles were integrated into its design and numerous practices under each of the principles were implemented. Nevertheless, not all practices were applicable or practical for this particular research. For example, a suggested practice related to in-person interviews was not applicable to this project that utilized online interviews. The full list of practices under each principle may be found in the article.²¹⁵ See the following charts for the eight principles and the accompanying practices that were utilized for this project. In the right-hand column of each chart, you will see a brief description of how the practice was implemented in this project’s research.

Principle #1: Take active steps to seek participation from disenfranchised groups and individuals.²¹⁶

Practice	Implementation
Develop and/or validate accessible and acceptable measurement tools with disenfranchised populations ²¹⁷	While the questions were not developed or reviewed outside of the researcher, advisor, and psychological consultant, the first participant in the study was intentionally selected to be someone who was a relational abuse survivor and who has served within the field of Catholic domestic violence ministry so that she could provide meaningful feedback on the interview design and process from a survivor’s perspective.
Regardless of study population or type, question and recognise possible disenfranchisements to participation ²¹⁸	There could be numerous disenfranchisements, or potential downsides, to participation. While not all could be addressed, a lack of time or computer access could be obstacles to participating so the research’s recruitment ad made sure to mention that the interviews would take only an hour and would be completed via Zoom. As such, it would reduce the time needed for participation and would open access to those without computers as long as they had access to a smart phone. Other obstacles remained, such as whether a potential participant was able to use technology such as Zoom, was willing to identify herself as a survivor, or put her name to the consent and eligibility form, to name a few.

²¹⁵ Edelman, “Trauma and resilience informed research principles and practice,” 71-72.

²¹⁶ Edelman, “Trauma and resilience informed research principles and practice,” 71.

²¹⁷ Edelman, “Trauma and resilience informed research principles and practice,” 71.

²¹⁸ Edelman, “Trauma and resilience informed research principles and practice,” 71.

Use transparent and clear language in PPI ²¹⁹ work, study materials and study delivery with clear and honest expectations ²²⁰	The research ad, the consent and eligibility form, the interview questions, and the healing resources list that was provided after each interview were all written in a relatively clear and accessible language with brief, general descriptions about what would be covered during the interview.
Employ sampling strategies designed specifically to ensure adequate representation from disenfranchised populations such as lower socioeconomic groups, ethnic and gender minorities in quantitative as well as qualitative research ²²¹	The research ad was distributed via individual emails to a broad array of parishes across the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Chicago with intentionality to include parishes whose populations encompass a variety of ethnicities and socio-economic circumstances. The researcher reached out to 10 percent of the 216 parishes in the archdiocese: 13 parishes located on both the north and south sides of the city of Chicago, 4 parishes in the south suburbs, 4 parishes in the north suburbs, and 2 parishes in the western suburbs. Many of these parishes have multiple “worship sites” due to the recent parish mergers and enabled the researcher to broaden the reach of the ad. While some parishes confirmed that the ad would be included in the parish bulletin or another communication method, not all parishes confirmed if the ad was shared. The research ad was also distributed to leaders at the Tolten Spirituality Center for dissemination to their constituencies (a ministry in the archdiocese primarily for the flourishing of Black Catholic parishes), the Domestic Violence Ministry (the archdiocesan domestic violence network), GivingVoice (an association of young women religious), and the Institute for Pastoral Studies at Loyola University (the regular e-newsletter was on hiatus for the summer but an individual who teaches within the Institute sent it to a number of individual women). It must be noted that since the researcher only speaks fluent English, it precluded the option of offering the interview in another language.

Principle #2: Unite with social justice; tackling deprivation and health inequalities.²²²

Practice	Implementation
Include socially-transformative elements into the research where possible - methods and intended impact ²²³	While the research question was not addressing typical <i>social justice</i> topics such as health inequalities, it was nevertheless concerned with what may be considered <i>church justice</i> . The research focused on Catholic women who have less decision-making power and place in Catholic institutional structures but who are deeply impacted by institutional decisions and structures.

²¹⁹ PPI stands for Patient and Public Involvement.

²²⁰ Edelman, “Trauma and resilience informed research principles and practice,” 71.

²²¹ Edelman, “Trauma and resilience informed research principles and practice,” 71.

²²² Edelman, “Trauma and resilience informed research principles and practice,” 71.

²²³ Edelman, “Trauma and resilience informed research principles and practice,” 71.

	Moreover, the participants were also relational abuse survivors who are often not believed or well cared for by both society and the Catholic Church. The research process provided these women a place to share their conception of and experience of God. It also gave them an opportunity to participate in research that may one day help other Catholic women who are abuse survivors.
--	---

Principle #3: Frame the researcher - participant relationship as relational.²²⁴

Practice	Implementation
Emphasise the right to refuse participation or to withdraw ²²⁵	The consent and eligibility form clearly noted that the participant could refuse or withdraw from the research at any time. Additionally, in the script spoken at the start of the interview, the participant was reminded that she could stop participating at any time and, if she chose, return to the interview at a future time.
As a researcher aim to be warm, ‘real’ and not aloof. Give participants the choice to not only withdraw but also to continue to participate if distressed but wishing to ²²⁶	The researcher aimed to provide a warm welcome to each participant before starting the interview script. Additionally, as part of the preparations for the interview, the researcher prepared in advance with the psychological consultant how to respond if the participant became distressed and to remind the participant that she could stop or continue the interview.

Principle #4: Empower individuals and communities through choice and agency.²²⁷

Practice	Implementation
Where possible, give study participants control of recording devices - when to activate them and what is recorded ²²⁸	At the start of every interview, the participant was made a co-host and given the ability to start or stop the Zoom recording at any time. Additionally, participants were given the opportunity to erase their name if it was displayed at the bottom of Zoom recordings.
Revisit informed consent at different stages of the research process according to participant preference and, if practicable, actively remind participants of the	In the consent and eligibility form, participants were informed that they could withdraw from the study and were informed how the data would be kept securely. At the beginning of each interview, the participants were again reminded that they could start or stop the interview at any time. As noted above, they were also offered the ability to remove their name from the Zoom recording.

²²⁴ Edelman, “Trauma and resilience informed research principles and practice,” 71.

²²⁵ Edelman, “Trauma and resilience informed research principles and practice,” 71.

²²⁶ Edelman, “Trauma and resilience informed research principles and practice,” 71.

²²⁷ Edelman, “Trauma and resilience informed research principles and practice,” 71.

²²⁸ Edelman, “Trauma and resilience informed research principles and practice,” 71.

right to withdraw or limit data sharing ²²⁹	
--	--

Principle #5: Emphasise strengths and resilience.²³⁰

Practice	Implementation
Use active listening and validate experience and feelings surrounding trauma if disclosed ²³¹	The researcher drew upon her training in pastoral ministry to utilize active listening and to validate the experiences of the participant, including when trauma was disclosed.
Use the term ‘survivor’ rather than ‘victim’ if appropriate ²³²	This thesis project uses the term “survivor” rather than “victim,” unless it is quoting, or referring to someone or a document, that utilized the term “victim.”

Principle #6: Minimise re-traumatisation.²³³

Practice	Implementation
Avoid intrusive procedures/questioning ²³⁴	The thesis project and its research materials were reviewed by a psychologist to help the design be trauma-informed. No direct questions about the participant’s experience of abuse were asked. Additionally, the word “abuse” was kept out of the interview, except for one place when it was necessary in the second to last section. Moreover, the word “trauma” was used a few times in that section instead of the word “abuse.” While trauma may still remind the participant of her abuse, it was a step away from the more specific word of “abuse.”
Use active listening and validate experience and feelings if disclosure occurs ²³⁵	As noted above, the researcher drew upon her training in pastoral ministry to utilize active listening and to validate the experiences of the participant, including when trauma was disclosed.
Describe data protection strategies ²³⁶	Every participant was offered the ability to remove her name from the Zoom recording. Additionally, the consent and eligibility form included information that the participant’s name would not be shared and that the data would be transferred to a device not connected to the internet to protect the data to the best ability of the researcher.

²²⁹ Edelman, “Trauma and resilience informed research principles and practice,” 71.

²³⁰ Edelman, “Trauma and resilience informed research principles and practice,” 72.

²³¹ Edelman, “Trauma and resilience informed research principles and practice,” 72.

²³² Edelman, “Trauma and resilience informed research principles and practice,” 72.

²³³ Edelman, “Trauma and resilience informed research principles and practice,” 72.

²³⁴ Edelman, “Trauma and resilience informed research principles and practice,” 72.

²³⁵ Edelman, “Trauma and resilience informed research principles and practice,” 72.

²³⁶ Edelman, “Trauma and resilience informed research principles and practice,” 72.

Principle #7: Recognise potential impact of trauma and adversity in all participants.²³⁷

Practice	Implementation
Don't ask about traumatic experiences unless relevant to study ²³⁸	No direct questions were asked about an individual's experience of abuse in this study.
Give information on mental health & social support resources in Participant Information Sheet regardless of study topic ²³⁹	After every interview, each participant was emailed a list of healing resources. While participants could have been drawn from across the United States, it was decided to limit participants to the greater Chicagoland area where the researcher was located so that the healing resources list provided to each participant could include not only national resources, but also resources that were local. This enabled the resources to be potentially more accessible to some participants and also known to the researcher to be relatively dependable.
Don't assume that studies of 'non-sensitive' topics or with general populations will not exclude or traumatise some individuals/groups – assume sensitivity possible and provide generic resources with the participant information sheet ²⁴⁰	As noted above, the researcher was prepared to respond should a participant become triggered and after every interview each participant was emailed a list of healing resources should she wish to draw upon some for support.
Ensure researchers receive adequate training to support distressed participants during and after interview and survey participation ²⁴¹	As noted above, the researcher drew upon her training in pastoral ministry to utilize active listening and to validate the experiences of the participant, including when trauma was disclosed. Additionally, as part of the preparations for the interview, the researcher prepared how best to respond should the participant become distressed.
Recognise and respect participants' coping mechanisms. E.g. expressed desire to not become distressed, switching to third person description,	The researcher recognized the variability in how participants or potential participants coped. For example, one potential participant asked not to be recorded and she was informed that her participation was still welcome, even without being recorded.

²³⁷ Edelman, "Trauma and resilience informed research principles and practice," 72.

²³⁸ Edelman, "Trauma and resilience informed research principles and practice," 72.

²³⁹ Edelman, "Trauma and resilience informed research principles and practice," 72.

²⁴⁰ Edelman, "Trauma and resilience informed research principles and practice," 72.

²⁴¹ Edelman, "Trauma and resilience informed research principles and practice," 72.

completing a survey in an alternative space ²⁴²	
--	--

Principle #8: Strive to be culturally competent and promote safety.²⁴³

Practice	Implementation
Seek out and foster research environments that feel culturally safe, with careful attention to physical space, presence of different authority figures etc.; conversely, choose to have a safe person present during a research interview may be appropriate ²⁴⁴	The interviews were conducted via Zoom, not only to reduce travel time for the participants, but also to empower the participant to engage the interview in a space where she felt comfortable and safe. Additionally, the researcher made the decision to wear a light blue sweater for each interview, since light blue is used in trauma-informed design to aid in reducing stress and promoting feelings of calm.
Ensure culturally-relevant PPI to inform all study materials - avoid deceptive, vague or unintentionally offensive language ²⁴⁵	For research purposes, it may have been preferred not to mention in advance that there would be questions about family beliefs, in case it biased some responses about conceptions of God. It would likely have been preferred to separate out the family beliefs section in some way. However, due to both a lack of research capacity and time, as well as a desire not to deceive the participants, mention of the family beliefs portion of the interview questions was included in the consent and eligibility form and the family belief questions were included in the interview, albeit at the end so as to reduce potential biasing toward the conceptions of God portion.
Ensure that PPI activities are directly concerned with identifying and redressing research questions, methods and outcomes which ignore cultural factors and which otherwise disempower individuals and/or populations ²⁴⁶	While more demographic information could have been asked, it was decided to only include a question about age and specifically <i>not</i> to include questions about race, socio-economic status, and other questions that may cause the participant to feel uncomfortable or trigger other traumatic experiences. Despite few questions being asked about additional demographic information, one participant did mention her race and discussed how race factored into her journey after abuse.

²⁴² Edelman, "Trauma and resilience informed research principles and practice," 72.

²⁴³ Edelman, "Trauma and resilience informed research principles and practice," 72.

²⁴⁴ Edelman, "Trauma and resilience informed research principles and practice," 72.

²⁴⁵ Edelman, "Trauma and resilience informed research principles and practice," 72.

²⁴⁶ Edelman, "Trauma and resilience informed research principles and practice," 72.

In addition to incorporating the above trauma-informed and resilience-informed practices, the project and its materials were reviewed by Kevin McClone, M.Div., Psy.D. a trauma-informed psychologist who also has experience in working with the Catholic Church. Moreover, while no questions were to be asked about a participant's abuse, nonetheless it was recognized that a participant may be triggered, and the project was not equipped to fully address the participant's needs should that occur. Therefore, to minimize the potential for re-traumatization and further keep the study trauma-informed and resilience-informed, the decision was made to create eligibility criteria that would recruit participants who previously had time and support to process their trauma and, thus, may be less likely to be triggered. As such, the recruitment ad included mention that the study was looking for participants who had suffered relational abuse "in the past," and criteria questions on the consent and eligibility form included the following three questions:

1. Have you been outside of the abusive relationship(s) for more than five years?
2. Have you had some form of help to process the abuse experience(s) for at least a year? (i.e. spoken with a counselor, a minister, a spiritual director, etc.)
3. Are you currently under the care of a professional counselor or do you have a trusted person to speak with should emotions arise for you during or after the interview?

As a result, all participants were no longer in abusive relationships, had previously processed the abuse in some way, and currently had resources to draw upon should they find themselves triggered by the interview.

Additionally, at the outset of the project, it was determined to utilize a *phenomenological qualitative* approach that may lend itself more readily to being trauma-informed when working with participants who had suffered relational abuse. John Creswell notes that "phenomenological study describes the common meaning for several

individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or a phenomenon.”²⁴⁷ The *phenomenological* approach enabled the research to explore, in part, the “common meaning” of abused Catholic women’s experiences of God. In particular, it helped explore the question whether Nurturant Parent conceptions of God help those with Nurturant Parent cognitive models feel safer as compared with when the women were presented with Strict Father conceptions of God. The *qualitative* approach enabled the researcher to spend time with each participant’s “lived experiences” of God during the interviews and to look for warning signs of triggers during the interviews so that they could be addressed, if they arose. This individualized approach could not have been done if this project had been designed to be a large-scale quantitative study that was conducted via anonymous online surveys, for example. Additionally, the qualitative approach enabled the researcher to better accommodate some of the key practices of trauma-informed research design, such as being present to recognize and support a participant should she become triggered.

While phenomenology was the chosen qualitative method, it must be noted that the project also diverged from a key concept within phenomenology. Creswell writes that most phenomenological research assumes that “experiences are conscious ones.”²⁴⁸ Since the research focuses on the interplay between lived experience, cognitive models, and conceptions of God, it must be noted that for the majority of people cognitive models are not “conscious.” As such, while the research, in part, adhered to phenomenology’s focus on description of lived experience, it relied on the women’s description of the

²⁴⁷ John W. Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches*, Third Edition, (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2012), 76.

²⁴⁸ Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design*, 77.

phenomenon of their conception of God but the actual Lakoffian cognitive model on which those conceptions were constructed were likely subconscious for them. In order to understand the women's cognitive model, the project design included a series of questions at the end to reveal the cognitive model, as will be described later in this chapter.

While the phenomenological qualitative approach enabled this project to be trauma-informed by focusing on in-depth interviews with several survivors, in turn, it limited the number of participants. As mentioned above, in order to be trauma-informed, there needed to be one-on-one interviews with the participants rather than larger group interviews that would not have enabled privacy for the participants nor a wide-scale online survey in which the researcher would not be able to support a participant if she became triggered. As a result, due to a lack of time based on the degree requirements for which this thesis project was conducted and a lack of time and resources on the part of the researcher, only a limited number of interviews could be conducted. At the outset, it was determined to interview at least six survivors and to put time toward creating a robustly trauma-informed process with care for each participant's reception, interview, and follow-up. While the small number of participants limits any widespread conclusions that may be drawn from the project, it will provide a preliminary analysis on which future research may be built. While the project does not contain statistically significant data, it nonetheless raises awareness of cognitive models in the Catholic ministerial environment and raises questions for ministers to consider how they may better serve Catholic women survivors of relational abuse, particularly those who lean toward a Nurturant Parent model.

The Interview Questions

Opening Section

The research's interview script was created to help answer the research question at the heart of this study, but to do so in a way that was trauma-informed and resilience-informed; prioritizing safety for the participant. Each interview began with the researcher welcoming the participant on Zoom and inquiring how the participant learned of the research. The researcher then began to read from the script which is located in the box below.

I am going to read a script, so that I am sharing the same information with each participant in this study, but I invite you at any time to stop me with questions or comments. Thank you so much for being here today and helping explore this topic of conceptions of God and how these may relate to our ideas about families and parenting. I value your time and the spirit within you that prompted you to volunteer.

As you know from the consent form, this interview will take approximately one-hour. It is a mix of both open-ended questions and multiple choice.

I am going to make you a co-host of this interview and recording so that both of us can start or stop the recording at any time. You are welcome to pause the recording for a few moments or stop the interview completely should you wish. If at a later time this week you wanted to return to the interview again, you could contact me and we could reschedule a time. Additionally, I would like to offer you the opportunity to erase your name from the zoom so that it is not recorded if you wish to remain confidential. My priority is to ensure you feel comfortable and safe.

May I make you a co-host now and also begin recording, or is there anything you want to ask or say before I start the recording?

As can be viewed in the text box, the opening script sought to follow the trauma-informed and resilience-informed principles. For example, the participant was made a co-host to empower her to stop or restart the recording at any time and the participant was invited to remove her name from the Zoom recording to further safeguard her identity.

After this, the researcher would share her screen which was opened to SurveyMonkey where the questions for the interview were written out and visible to the participants. This was done to accommodate participants with different abilities and/or different ways of processing information. For those who could see and hear, participants could see the questions being asked at the same time that every question was also spoken aloud by the researcher. For those who may have visual or auditory challenges, having two ways to process the question could be of help. The researcher filled out the survey throughout the interview so that the participant could see what was being written or which question box was being checked in order to provide the participant with trust that what was being recorded was reflective of what she was saying, in addition to the audio recording. Additionally, all questions that required specific responses, such as a multiple choice or a Likert scale, were randomized. The randomizer method used for this research was Research Randomizer, a free service offered by the Social Psychology Network for researchers and students. Since this tool operates on a number-based system, every question was number-coded to enable the randomization.

Safe Participation and Names for the Divine Section

The first section of the interview focused on general, open-ended questions related to whether there were aspects of church that made the participant feel safe or less safe. Additionally, questions were asked to ascertain what name for God felt most safe for the participant and if any names felt less safe. This also enabled the researcher to use the participant's preferred name for God in further questions. The script with its questions for this section is below.

1. To start, in a sentence or a few sentences, please share how you currently practice your Catholic faith, if you do? If you don't, what causes you not to?
2. Are there things that make you feel safe in church? (or did make you feel safe in church?)
3. Are there things that make you feel unsafe in church? (or made you feel unsafe in church?)
4. People give the Divine many names, what name for the Divine feels most comfortable and safe to you? For example, God, Jesus, Spirit, or perhaps another descriptive or non-descriptive name for the Divine? And why?
5. Is there a name for the Divine that I mentioned – God, Jesus, or Spirit – that makes you feel less comfortable or less safe? And if so, why?
6. In your own words, how would you describe ____ and how ____ interacts with you?

Question #1: The first question helped the researcher to know how the participant currently related to her faith. If the participant was not currently practicing her faith, it enabled the researcher to modify the following two questions. It also enabled the interview to begin with an open-ended question to give space for the woman to engage her voice from the beginning, rather than beginning with multiple choice questions, for example.

Questions #2 and #3: These questions enabled open-ended questions about safety and faith for the woman to explore before specific questions related to God-concepts and safety arose later in the interview.

Questions #4 and #5: These questions were asked in order to discern what name for God felt safest to the participant and if any names made the participant feel unsafe. This was not only of interest to this research on conceptions of God, but it also provided the researcher the ability to use the name for God that felt safest to the participant throughout the rest of the interview.

Question #6: The final question in this section encouraged the participant to describe her concept of God before specific questions were asked about this later in the interview. The blank in this sentence, and in future sentences in this research, is where the researcher filled in the name for God that the participant previously identified as a name that felt safe to her.

Safe-Making Characteristics for the Divine Section

This second section of questions continues to open a window into understanding the participant's relationship with God. It focused on characteristics for God that may relate to a participant's cognitive model.

1. What are one or two characteristics that you associate with _____? And tell me what they mean to you. And if you can't think of any at this moment, that's fine. In the next screen, I will offer some examples.
2. Looking at this list of possible characteristics for _____, what would you select as **two** characteristics that you closely associate with _____?

Caring

Mighty

Listening

Strong

Close to Me

Empathetic

Powerful

Above Me

3. What do each of your selections mean to you?

Question #1: This question invited the participant to name characteristics for God without being presented with options so the characteristics would arise unbiased from her.

Question #2: This question offered a variety of characteristics for God from which the participant could select. Rather than being presented in a list, they were presented randomly in a word cloud in an attempt to reduce any visual or verbal prioritization. Each characteristic was selected for its potential connection with Lakoff's Strict Father and Nurturant Parent models. The words "strong," "mighty," and "powerful" could be associated with the Strict Father model with its top moral priority of strength, and the characteristic "above me" could be associated with the hierarchical order that is also a

moral priority of the Strict Father model. The words “empathic,” “caring,” and “listening” could be associated with the Nurturant Parent model with its top moral priority of empathy, and the characteristic “close to me” could be associated with the lessened hierarchical order of the Nurturant Parent model. It is important to note, however, that the words are not exclusively tied to one or another cognitive model.

Question #3: The participant was invited to say what the characteristics meant to her since while certain characteristics may *generally* be associated with a Strict Father or Nurturant Parent models, no characteristic is *only* associated with one or the other cognitive models. For example, while the characteristic of “strong” could, on the surface, be considered more closely associated with a Strict Father model due to the model’s top moral priority of “strength,” it is not necessarily the case. For example, a Nurturant Parent can be a strong protector of a child. Lakoff notes that moral strength is present in the Nurturant Parent model, but it “is in service of Moral Nurturance.”²⁴⁹ He goes on to explain, “There are external evils, dangers, and hardships and one must be strong to confront them to protect oneself and one’s family. That strength comes, not through self-denial and the imposition of discipline for discipline’s sake, but rather through the regular exercise of nurturance, which takes strength and hence builds character.”²⁵⁰ As a result, in order to have a better understanding of the potential cognitive model behind the characteristic that the participant selected, each participant was invited to describe what the selected characteristics meant to her.

²⁴⁹ Lakoff, *Moral Politics*, 126.

²⁵⁰ Lakoff, *Moral Politics*, 127.

associated with the Strict Father model with its top moral priorities of strength, authority, order, and boundaries. The words “mother,” “friend,” “community organizer,” “counselor,” and “healer,” could be loosely associated with the Nurturant Parent model with its top moral priorities of empathy, nurturance, self-nurturance, and nurturance of social ties. It is important to note, however, that the roles are not exclusively tied to one or another cognitive model.

Question #3: While the roles, as mentioned above, could be loosely associated with the Strict Father or Nurturant Parent models, they are not necessarily aligned with one or another cognitive model. John Sanders describes why roles used as source domains for God, such as “judge,” are not necessarily associated with either cognitive model, but rather rely more on what the individual believes about the role. He writes, “. . .much depends on the identity of the judge, the cultural expectations about why the judgment is occurring, and the goals the judge seeks to achieve. Is the judge the father of the household seeking to restore the honor of the family or is the judge an impartial authority whose job is to ascertain the guilt of the individual accused of a crime?”²⁵¹ To have a better understanding of the potential cognitive model behind the role that the participant selected, each participant was invited to describe what the selected roles meant to her.

Safe-Making Concepts for the Divine Section

This fourth section of the interview brought forward concepts related to God that may cause a survivor to feel safe or less safe. Each participant was invited to rate how the concept made her feel in relation to safety. Each question had an accompanying Likert scale for the participant to select one of the following options: “Very Safe,” “Somewhat Safe,” “Neither Safe nor Unsafe,” “Somewhat Unsafe,” or “Very Unsafe.” Each concept was coded as to whether it was more likely to be associated with a Strict Father (SF) or Nurturant Parent (NP) model and also which moral priority was associated with it. These codes were not part of the actual interview and are only shown in the chart below for illustrative purposes. Additionally, the concepts contained various names for God, such as God, Jesus, or Holy Spirit, with each name for God having at least one Strict Father-informed concept and one Nurturant Parent-informed concept associated with it. Four

²⁵¹ Sanders, *Theology in the Flesh*, 193.

concepts were placed in sentences with the name “God.” Four concepts were placed in sentences with the name “Jesus.” Two concepts were placed in sentences with the name “Spirit.” Also, among the concepts you will see highlighted words that tend to align with the concept’s cognitive model, although not exclusively. Again, these were not highlighted in the interview and are included here for illustrative purposes only. Finally, it should be noted that while every concept is a theological concept, two concepts specifically relate to suffering, one that is Strict Father-informed and one that is Nurturant Parent-informed. All the concepts were randomized using Research Randomizer into the order you see below.

People believe many things about the Divine and these beliefs are put into concepts that you may hear people say in everyday conversation, read in spirituality books, or sing about in church. I invite you to imagine being at church and a minister says the following statements. Tell me if the following statements help you to feel more safe or less safe.

1. **Surrender** yourself to Jesus. (SF-authority)
2. Jesus became human to show us how to **obey** God’s commands. (SF-authority)
3. Jesus became human to show us how to **care** for others. (NP-nurturance)
4. In times of suffering, God is testing us to make us **stronger**. (SF-strength)
5. Not my will, but **God’s will**. (SF-authority)
6. The Spirit helps us **strongly** stand up to evil and resist temptations. (SF-strength)
7. **Give yourself** to Jesus. (SF-authority)
8. In times of suffering, God **empathizes** with us and shows compassion for us. (NP-empathy)
9. God **listens** to me and helps me know what to do. (NP-empathy)
10. The Spirit helps us **understand** and **care** for others. (NP-empathy, nurturance)

Jesus Christ as Trauma Survivor Section

This next section of the interview looked at whether the concept of Jesus Christ as a survivor of trauma may be of comfort to the participants who themselves self-identified as relational abuse survivors in order to participate in the research. The theologian David Tombs identifies Jesus as a survivor of *sexual abuse* during his torture and crucifixion, noting that the historical records indicate that crucifixion victims were stripped naked to increase their shame.²⁵² Tombs is clear to differentiate between sexual humiliation and sexual assault, both of which may be categorized as sexual abuse. Tombs writes, “Gospel accounts indicate a striking level of public sexual humiliation....”²⁵³ He looks to Mark and Matthew’s gospels’ reference to Jesus being stripped (Mark 15:16-20 and Matthew 27:26-31). He also references the Gospel of John in which soldiers play lots for his clothes (John 19:24). The Gospel of Luke does not specifically state that Jesus was stripped like the other gospels do, but based on his being flogged, it is assumed that he was at least partially stripped (Luke 23:16). Luke also has a curious line that is a reminder that we do not know the whole story of Jesus’ experience: “and he handed Jesus over to them to deal with as they wished.” (Luke 23:25). Tombs raises the question of whether Jesus also suffered sexual assault and acknowledges that it cannot be determined because, “[w]hereas the texts offer clear indications of sexual humiliation, the possibility of sexual assault can only be based on silence and circumstance.”²⁵⁴ Regardless of

²⁵² David Tombs, “Crucifixion, State Terror, and Sexual Abuse,” *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 53, no. 1-2 (1999): 89-109, 101-103. For an expanded exploration of the concept of Jesus as a historical victim of sexual abuse and its implications, see Jayme R. Reaves, David Tombs, and Rocío Figueroa, eds. *When Did We See You Naked?: Jesus as a Victim of Sexual Abuse* (London: SCM Press, 2021).

²⁵³ Tombs, “Crucifixion, State Terror, and Sexual Abuse,” 90.

²⁵⁴ Tombs, “Crucifixion, State Terror, and Sexual Abuse,” 107.

whether Jesus also suffered sexual assault, it is clear that he suffered sexual humiliation, a form of sexual abuse.

Moreover, we know Jesus suffered other forms of abuse at the time of his arrest, torture, and crucifixion. Clearly, every gospel includes the narrative of Jesus' torture and crucifixion, a reminder that Jesus suffered *physical abuse*. Jesus also suffered *verbal abuse* at the time of his crucifixion, not only by soldiers and others in the crowd, but even from those crucified with him, "The revolutionaries who were crucified with him also kept abusing him in the same way." (Matthew 27:44). It must also be noted that he suffered *spiritual abuse* and betrayal trauma by his own spiritual followers who betrayed him (Judas), denied him (Peter), and fled from him when he was arrested (his disciples), and by his spiritual leaders when he goes before the Sanhedrin Jewish court (Matthew 26:57-68, Mark 14:53-66, Luke 22:66-71, John 12:24).

Finally, it should also be acknowledged that Jesus was likely someone who suffered some trauma prior to the crucifixion. It is hard to imagine him not having suffered trauma in other ways throughout his life as a member of a minority religious group under colonization by the Roman Empire. One example that may hint at Jesus' earlier trauma is from the Gospel of Mark in which Jesus begins his ministry immediately after his cousin John is arrested: "After John had been arrested, Jesus came to Galilee proclaiming the gospel of God." (Mark 1: 14). One thinks of family members of the incarcerated who, in their grief, find ways to engage in political or religious movements to work for change. Could Jesus' response to John's arrest be what Judith Herman calls a "survivor's mission"? Herman records the unique pattern of some trauma survivors who take on a mission in response to devastating experiences, saying:

Most survivors seek the resolution of their traumatic experience within the confines of their personal lives. But a significant minority, as a result of the trauma, feel called upon to engage in a wider world. These survivors recognize a political or religious dimension in their misfortune and discover that they can transform the meaning of their personal tragedy by making it the basis for social action. While there is no way to compensate for an atrocity, there is a way to transcend it, by making it a gift to others. The trauma is redeemed only when it becomes the source of a survivor mission.²⁵⁵

While it is outside the scope of this thesis project to explore this idea further, Jesus likely experienced trauma not only in the experience of his arrest, torture, and crucifixion, but also prior to it.

Regardless of whether he suffered trauma prior to the passion experience, it is clear that in the midst of his arrest, torture, and crucifixion that Jesus suffered abuse in multiple forms and this insight has potentially vast pastoral implications. Speaking specifically of Jesus' experience of sexual abuse, Tombs recognizes the potential pastoral implications saying "...it could help sensitize people to the experiences of those who have suffered sexual abuse and in some cases might even become a healing step for the victims themselves."²⁵⁶ Tombs and Rocío Figueroa have conducted qualitative studies with abuse survivors to inquire as to whether the concept of Jesus as a victim of sexual abuse may be helpful to survivors and the wider community.²⁵⁷ They have studied both male survivors of clergy abuse in Peru and women religious survivors of sexual abuse in Europe (both clergy and non-clergy perpetrators).²⁵⁸ The responses to the concept of

²⁵⁵ Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 207. Jesus may not only be a trauma survivor as seen in the crucifixion and post-crucifixion narratives, but may also be someone who is a trauma survivor *during* his life and offers a model of trauma stewardship; something more that I would like to explore that is outside the scope of this thesis project.

²⁵⁶ Tombs, "Crucifixion, State Terror, and Sexual Abuse," 90.

²⁵⁷ While in the rest of this paper I use "survivor," here I use "victim of sexual abuse" because that is the language used by Figueroa and Tombs in their studies.

²⁵⁸ See Rocío Figueroa and David Tombs, "Recognizing Jesus as a Victim of Sexual Abuse: Responses from Sodalicio Survivors in Peru," *Religion and Gender* 10, no.1 (2020): 57–75.; See also Rocío Figueroa and David Tombs, "Seeing His Innocence, I See My Innocence," in *When Did We See You Naked?: Jesus*

Jesus as a victim of sexual abuse in their studies have been mixed. Some survivors have found the concept helpful for their healing and others have raised concerns. Some have wondered how the concept may be used in the hands of Church officials and whether it could be misinterpreted or even harmful for survivors. Tombs and Figueroa are careful to note that survivors, "...should not be seen as a uniform group. What some might find positive might be irrelevant, or even negative, to others. Further work therefore needs to be done to investigate how and when the acknowledgement of the sexual abuse of Jesus can be helpful to survivors."²⁵⁹

These cautions are equally important for this thesis project. All survivors have different experiences of abuse and different responses as to what may aid in their healing, as well as different cognitive models. In designing the research for this project, it was decided to ask the participants if they felt the concept of Jesus as a trauma survivor was helpful for them and/or the wider Church in a similar fashion as those questions asked by Tombs and Figueroa. In particular, this research also explored whether one's cognitive model may impact a survivor's response to the idea of Jesus as a fellow survivor. For example, would those with a Nurturant Parent conception for God be more likely to feel comfort from the concept of Jesus as a fellow survivor, since their concept of God did not have "strength" as a moral priority and thus they may be more comfortable seeing Jesus in a weakened state? In other words, would those with a Nurturant Parent conception for

as a Victim of Sexual Abuse, eds. Jayme R. Reaves, David Tombs, and Rocío Figueroa (London: SCM Press, 2021), 287-312.

²⁵⁹ Figueroa and Tombs, "Seeing His Innocence, I See My Innocence," 302.

God, with its top priority being empathy, be consoled by Jesus who suffers *with* them and understands their suffering?²⁶⁰

To see the full script and questions for this section on Jesus Christ as trauma survivor, see the box below. To craft the questions in a trauma-informed way, the psychologist consultant for this project recommended not using the word “abuse” in reference to Jesus, but to apply the more general word “trauma.” For each question, a participant could reply “very comforting,” “somewhat comforting,” “neither comforting nor uncomfortable,” “somewhat uncomfortable” or “very uncomfortable.” Afterwards, she could elect to elaborate on her response if she desired. This empowered the survivors to decide how much focus they wanted to give the question in case some found it uncomfortable to reflect upon the idea.

There are Christian scholars who recognize that Jesus can be viewed as a trauma survivor due to the crucifixion. These scholars recognize that Jesus may be a model for abuse survivors to show a path toward healing and how to live with one’s wounds.

1. Is it comforting or not comforting to know that Jesus is a trauma survivor?
2. Whether or not it is helpful for you, do you think that the idea of Jesus as a trauma survivor could help other survivors?
3. Do you think that the idea could be useful for the wider church, for those who minister in the church and/or other Catholics?

²⁶⁰ While it is outside the scope of this study, future research could look at whether abuse survivors with a Strict Father cognitive model find the concept less comforting due to their cognitive models’ moral priority on strength.

Family and Parenting Beliefs for Cognitive Models Section

The final substantive portion of the interview related to Lakoff's cognitive models. It sought to ascertain whether a participant leaned toward a Strict Father or Nurturant Parent model based on a participant's beliefs about families and parenting. As noted above, from a research perspective, it may have been better to have separated this section of questions from the others or to have not informed the participants in advance about the questions related to family beliefs. While this may have been a better approach from a research perspective so as not to bias the responses and could be helpful for more statistically significant research in the future, for the purposes of this project it was decided to put the interview questions about conceptions for God and family beliefs together in one interview. First, from a trauma-informed perspective, there was a desire to disclose in advance the general themes of the research so that the participants were not surprised at the questions during the interview. Since the participants would all be abuse survivors, and trust is an important element in the healing journey from abuse, it was decided to err on the side of disclosure in advance.²⁶¹ To try to reduce potential bias, the questions about family and parenting beliefs were placed at the end of the interview.

This section of the interview is indebted to Matthew Feinberg who graciously shared his research article and its Moral Politics Scale with the researcher of this project.²⁶² The scale was developed by Feinberg, Wehling, and their colleagues to

²⁶¹ For a description of the importance of trust and its relation to safety, see Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 51-52.

²⁶² Matthew Feinberg, Elisabeth Wehling, Joanne M. Chung, Laura R. Saslow, and Ingrid Melvaer Paulin, "Measuring Moral Politics: How Strict and Nurturant Family Values Explain Individual Differences in Conservatism, Liberalism, and the Political Middle," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Advance Online Publication (June 27, 2019). Shared with this author by Matthew Feinberg via email on March 3, 2025.

understand an individual's cognitive model (Strict Father or Nurturant Parent) based on their responses to a list of statements about family and parenting beliefs. For purposes of this thesis project and its research design, a Likert scale accompanied each of the statements. Participants were asked to respond with whether they agreed with the statement with options of "strongly agree," "somewhat agree," "neither agree nor disagree," "somewhat disagree," or "strongly disagree." It must be noted that some of the statements, when presented in the context of this research with self-identified abuse survivors, might be heard in certain ways that may skew the validity of the scale. For example, during the interviews sometimes a participant seemed to have a strong reaction to certain statements and the researcher felt compelled from a trauma-informed perspective to verbally clarify that these statements were from another study. In particular, after the following question, the researcher clarified in each interview that the statement was not referring to the context of abuse: "It's fine for children to have secrets and hide things from their parents." Again, it is important to note that the research for this thesis project is not statistically significant and more nuanced research would need to be done in the future to truly understand the implications of cognitive models and conceptions for God among abuse survivors. Nonetheless, below are each of the statements from the Moral Politics Scale as presented by Feinberg, Wehling, and colleagues, with the first 14 being Nurturant Parent items, with some reverse scored and the remaining 15 being Strict Father items, with some reverse scored.²⁶³ To indicate the

²⁶³ For example, if one held a Nurturant Parent model, one would more likely respond to one of the statements that is coded as Nurturant Parent (NP) with "strongly agree" or "somewhat agree." However, when a statement has been "reverse scored" it means that it reflects a view that someone holding a Nurturant Parent model would *dis*-agree with. For example, a statement among the Nurturant Parent list was, "Knowing how to care for others is not a central thing for a child to learn." I have marked this as "reverse scored" since someone holding a Nurturant Parent perspective would more likely respond "strongly disagree" or "somewhat disagree."

reverse scoring items, an R has been placed after the NP or SF coding. Please note the coding below is only for illustrative purposes. These statements were not coded in the interviews. For purposes of the research, these statements were randomized using the Research Randomizer tool previously cited. For the order of statements as presented to participants, see the box below these statements.

1. Children must learn to see the world through other people's eyes. (NP)
2. Parenting means nurturing the child's true nature. (NP)
3. Knowing how to care for others is not a central thing for a child to learn. (NP-R)
4. Children will grow up to be happy adults if parents encourage them to follow their curiosity. (NP)
5. In order to truly nurture children, one needs to be empathic. (NP)
6. Learning to understand others and accepting them for who they are is not important for children to learn. (NP-R)
7. Children shouldn't feel obligated to care about the well-being of people they do not know. (NP-R)
8. Siblings should receive parental support in accordance to their individual needs. (NP)
9. I'd rather see my child play cooperatively than play competitively. (NP)
10. Tending to the needs of others is not a sign of responsibility in children. (NP-R)
11. Children should learn to understand others needs and attend to them. (NP)
12. Parents should empower children as much as possible so that they may follow their dreams. (NP)
13. It's not important for parents to explain to their children why they set certain rules and limits. (NP-R)
14. It's not critical for children to learn to take the perspective of others into account. (NP-R)
15. Children must be disciplined through strict rules at home. (SF)
16. Bad behavior in children must be punished sufficiently. (SF)
17. I will not have my child talk back to me. (SF)
18. Sometimes it's okay to let bad behavior in children go unpunished. (SF-R)
19. Children need to be disciplined in order to build character. (SF)
20. Obedience must be instilled in children. (SF)
21. When grownups talk, children ought to be quiet. (SF)
22. It's fine for children to have secrets and hide things from their parents. (SF-R)
23. "Tough love" is required to raise a child right. (SF)
24. Children must always be on time. (SF)
25. When in doubt, parents should err on the side of lenience rather than strictness. (SF-R)
26. Parents shouldn't handicap their children by making their lives too easy. (SF)
27. While other people must not be one's concern, within a family, everyone should look after each other. (SF)

28. Children must be taught that people get what they deserve. (SF)
29. At times it's okay for children to disobey their parents. (SF-R)

We have about about ___ minutes left and I have a final series of questions to ask you. Since this study is looking at people's conceptions of God, and sometimes they are related to ideas about families and parenting, I would like to ask you the following questions. Please let me know if tend to agree or disagree with the statement by indicating: *Strongly Agree, Somewhat Agree, Neither Agree or Disagree, Somewhat Disagree, or Strongly Disagree.*

1. Siblings should receive parental support in accordance to their individual needs.
2. It's fine for children to have secrets and hide things from their parents.
3. Tending to the needs of others is not a sign of responsibility in children.
4. While other people must not be one's concern, within a family, everyone should look after each other.
5. I'd rather see my child play cooperatively than play competitively.
6. It's not important for parents to explain to their children why they set certain rules and limits.
7. Sometimes it's okay to let bad behavior in children go unpunished.
8. Children shouldn't feel obligated to care about the well-being of people they do not know.
9. Parents should empower children as much as possible so that they may follow their dreams.
10. In order to truly nurture children, one needs to be empathic.
11. When in doubt, parents should err on the side of lenience rather than strictness.
12. Parents shouldn't handicap their children by making their lives too easy.
13. Obedience must be instilled in children.
14. Children must be disciplined through strict rules at home.
15. Bad behavior in children must be punished sufficiently.
16. Children should learn to understand others needs and attend to them.
17. I will not have my child talk back to me.
18. Children will grow up to be happy adults if parents encourage them to follow their curiosity.
19. Learning to understand others and accepting them for who they are is not important for children to learn.
20. Knowing how to care for others is not a central thing for a child to learn.
21. At times it's okay for children to disobey their parents.
22. Children need to be disciplined in order to build character.
23. Parenting means nurturing the child's true nature
24. It's not critical for children to learn to take the perspective of others into account.

Finally, at the end of the questions related to family and parenting beliefs, there was a demographic question related to age. No other demographic questions were asked, as noted previously, to avoid potential triggers. The age ranges that were used were drawn from the Library of Congress website related to U.S. generations.²⁶⁴ The website reminds the reader that generational grouping is not an “exact science” and the generational groupings are “based around common economic, social, or political factors that happened during formative years.”²⁶⁵ The age demographic question is in the box below.

When were you born?

Between 1997 and 2012

Between 1981 and 1996

Between 1965 and 1980

Between 1946 and 1964

Before 1946

Closing Section

Each interview was concluded with a closing script that included an invitation for the participant to ask any questions or provide any comments before the interview concluded. The script is included in the box below. After each interview, the researcher emailed the participant the healing resources list.²⁶⁶

²⁶⁴ Library of Congress, “Doing Consumer Research: A Research Guide,” Accessed August 14, 2025, <https://guides.loc.gov/consumer-research/market-segments/generations>.

²⁶⁵ Ibid.

²⁶⁶ See Appendix E.

Thank you so much for your time and all that you shared today. I am truly grateful to you for your courage to respond to the flyer and share your wisdom. Your insights will potentially help others in the future. After our time today, I will send you an email with some healing resources and if you have any questions, you are welcome to follow up with me in the future. Do you have any questions or comments before we conclude our time together?

Conclusion

This chapter, through the meta-method stage of safety, addressed how the research portion of this thesis project was designed with a focus on safety as a theme of the research, as well as the priority of safety for the research participants. The overall thesis project is concerned with survivor safety in the ministerial field as it relates to concepts for God. The research hopes to explore, in part, how cognitive models for God may impact a survivor's sense of safety and, in turn, how ministers could be attentive to cognitive models for God to better support survivors. The psychologist Judith Herman and others have shown the critical importance of safety for a survivor's healing. Without safety, a survivor's healing cannot begin or progress. As such, the research was designed using Trauma and Resilience Informed Research Principles and Practice (TRIRPP) to attempt to create a safer experience for all participants. Each of the TRIRPP principles and accompanying practices that were used in this research were described. Additionally, this chapter reviewed the questions, and reasons behind the questions, that were used during each research interview to further the exploration of the project's research question. In the next chapter, utilizing the second and third meta-methods of remembrance and mourning (to reflect the interviews and responses of the participants), and reconnection (to reflect on the common themes), the results of the interviews will be

reviewed. The chapter will center the participants' experiences, sharing direct quotes about their conceptions of God and their sense of safety in relation to certain conceptions.

Chapter Three: The Interviews

The second chapter expounded on the reason that safety was central to this thesis project. It looked at Judith Herman's understanding of safety as a phase in the healing process and as a phase in the meta-method for this project. In turn, the primary content of that chapter explored how the research was designed using Trauma and Resilience Informed Research Principles and Practice (TRIRPP), as well as the reasons behind the interview questions to help explore whether or not cognitive models for God may impact a survivor's sense of safety. Now, this third chapter progresses through Judith Herman's second and third phases in the healing process which serve as the meta-methods for this chapter: *remembrance and mourning*, and *reconnection*. The chapter will briefly look at how the second stage of healing, remembrance and mourning, was envisioned as a meta-method for the interviews themselves in which the participants gave voice to their spirituality. It will then look at how the third stage of healing, reconnection, was conceived as a meta-method for the analysis of the interviews. It is the voices of the participants and analysis of their responses in terms of common themes that will serve as the primary content of this chapter.²⁶⁷

Judith Herman's Second Stage of Healing: Remembrance and Mourning

Herman notes that the second phase of healing is that of remembrance and mourning. Once safety has been established, the survivor works within a trusted therapeutic relationship to remember and mourn the trauma she has experienced. In so

²⁶⁷ To provide anonymity, all interview quotes will be noted in the footnotes by a system where the letter represents a participant and the number represents the line where the quote may be found within the interview transcription.

doing, the survivor looks at each unintegrated piece of the trauma as it surfaces “to see how it fits into the whole.”²⁶⁸ She slowly remembers and stitches the traumatic memories together and sews them into the greater fabric of her full life story. A key part of this process is the courage to mourn her losses. It is only when she mourns that which was taken from her, or never provided her, can she “discover her indestructible inner life.”²⁶⁹ It is through the narration of integration in a relationship of safety that healing proceeds, however slowly it must. Over time, the survivor finds strength to speak the previously unspeakable, to share the truth of her traumatic experience(s), and to grieve.

The research interviews represented this stage of the meta-method in which a survivor gave voice to her experiences of relationship with God.²⁷⁰ The interviews were not intended to be a therapeutic process, nor was the survivor asked to recount her trauma. In fact, the screening criteria for participation in the research ensured that the participant had previously been in a therapeutic relationship and currently had that same relationship or a trusted person in their lives with whom they could speak. Rather, from a meta-method perspective, the interviews drew upon the spirit of narration from this stage of healing, creating a safe space for the survivors to share their experiences and perspectives of God. For example, when asked at the end of an interview if the participant had any questions or comments, one participant shared how it had been an integrating process for her, saying, “I think it’s been a positive experience for me. It’s

²⁶⁸ Judith Lewis Herman, M.D. *Trauma and Recovery: The aftermath of violence—from domestic abuse to political terror* (New York City: Basic Books, 1992), 184.

²⁶⁹ Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 188.

²⁷⁰ The use of the word “God” here and throughout the chapter refers generally to a sense of the divine. However, each participant was asked to select the word for God with which she felt most comfortable and safe, these ranged from “Jesus” to “Higher Power.” You will see these words for God within the quotes from the participants but when used generally without reference to a particular participant’s quote, the word “God” will be used.

kind of helped me to clarify some ideas that I've had swirling around in my head. And it's certainly something that makes me happier to be, to have the faith that I have. And to be a Catholic."²⁷¹

The interviews took place during the summer of 2025, ranging between July 18, 2025 and September 12, 2025. There were eight women who reached out to the researcher in response to the notices they had seen. One woman was not able to proceed because she was recently out of an abusive relationship and did not meet the screening criteria of having been out of an abusive relationship for more than five years. Another participant did not proceed because she did not return the Consent and Eligibility Form. Ultimately, six participants filled out and returned the Consent and Eligibility Form, met the criteria, and proceeded to the interview stage.²⁷²

While this research is not statistically significant and thus demographics are not as pertinent to this project, nonetheless, there is some minor demographic information that can be shared. First, in terms of location, the participants represented the span of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Chicago. One participant belonged to a parish in the city of Chicago, two participants belonged to parishes in the suburbs west of Chicago, one participant belonged to a parish in the suburbs south of Chicago, one participant belonged to a parish in the suburbs north of Chicago, and one participant belonged to a community of women religious that ministers in the Chicagoland area. In terms of regional parish representation, each of the four regions initially identified by the researcher for distributing notice of the research (city of Chicago, north suburbs, west suburbs, and south suburbs) were ultimately represented in the final composition of participants.

²⁷¹ B310-311

²⁷² For a copy of the Consent and Eligibility form, see Appendix C.

Second, while no question was asked about the participants' abuse, all participants brought it up as part of their responses. The abuse the participants shared ranged from experiences of childhood sexual and/or emotional abuse to domestic violence in marital relationships. Additionally, the one demographic question that was intentionally asked at the end of each interview pertained to age. The participants identified their birth years as being in the ranges between "1981 and 1996", "1946 and 1964", or "Before 1946." As such, while this research is not statistically significant, the participants do reflect some diversity across Catholic generations.

While the interviews were envisioned as the second phase of the meta-method, that of *remembrance and mourning*, it is to the third phase of Judith Herman's stages, *reconnection*, that this chapter now turns in order to share the interview responses and provide some analysis.

Judith Herman's Third Stage of Healing: Reconnection

Herman notes that as a survivor goes through the grieving process, she now comes to terms with the life that is before her. She writes:

She has mourned the old self that the trauma destroyed; now she must develop a new self. Her relationships have been tested and forever changed by the trauma; now she must develop new relationships. The old beliefs that gave meaning to her life have been challenged; now she must find anew a sustained faith. These are the tasks of the third stage of recovery. In accomplishing this work, the survivor reclaims her world.²⁷³

It is in this stage that a survivor enters into what may feel like new territory for her: space where she is not controlled by her abuser, nor by the constant grip of trauma responses. She has seasons in which she feels free and this can be both frightening and/or

²⁷³ Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 196.

exhilarating. She is learning how to walk through the world in new ways and with healthier connections. In terms of spirituality, this may also be a time of exploration of new or renewed faith practices, and changed or deepened connections with God.

From a meta-method perspective, it is the spirit of connection in this third stage of Herman's method that the research draws upon in this chapter. What does a survivor's connection with God look like? What type of connection might that be, in terms of Lakoff's Strict Father and Nurturant Parent cognitive models? And what concepts about God may help or hinder a survivor's connection with God and her spiritual journey by making the survivor feel safe or unsafe? Analysis will also be done by looking at the "connections," or common themes, that arose among the participants' responses. The rest of this chapter will explore these questions by proceeding to review the responses based on each section of the interview.

Interview Section: Family and Parenting Beliefs for Cognitive Models

This thesis project was interested not only in concepts for God among women abuse survivors which has been previously studied, but also the relationship between concepts for God, cognitive models, and a sense of safety.²⁷⁴ To understand the cognitive models toward which the women participants leaned, the Moral Politics Scale's statements were presented to each participant as the last section of the interview.²⁷⁵ However, for purposes of this chapter, this section of the interview will be explored first

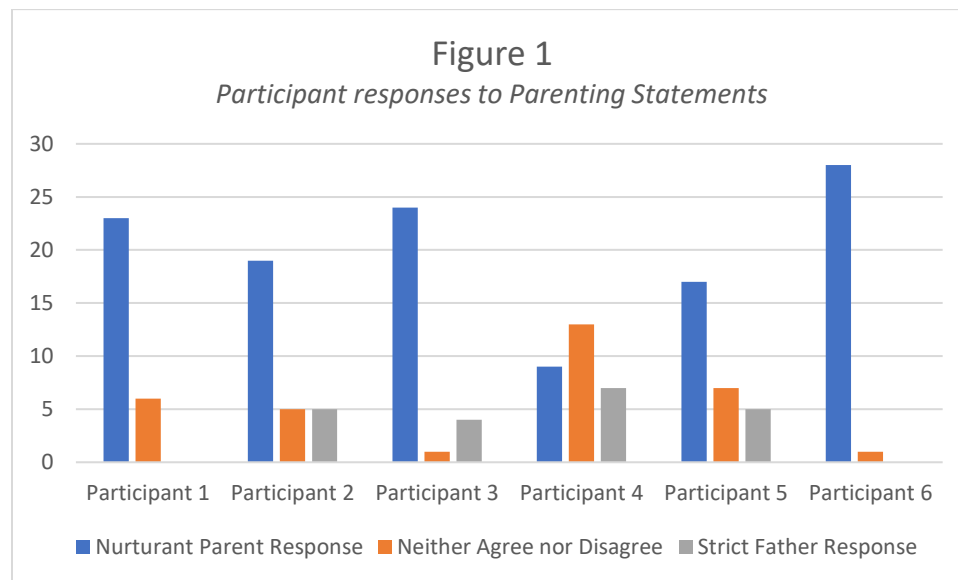
²⁷⁴ For a comprehensive study on representations of God and women abuse survivors, see Carrie Doehring, *Internal Desecration: Traumatization and Representations of God* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1993).

²⁷⁵ Matthew Feinberg, Elisabeth Wehling, Joanne M. Chung, Laura R. Saslow, and Ingrid Melvaer Paulin, "Measuring Moral Politics: How Strict and Nurturant Family Values Explain Individual Differences in Conservatism, Liberalism, and the Political Middle," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* Advance Online Publication (June 27, 2019). Shared with this author by Matthew Feinberg via email.

so as to ascertain the cognitive models of the participants. The Moral Politics Scale was developed by Matthew Feinberg, Elisabeth Wehling, et. al. to help determine an individual's cognitive model: Nurturant Parent or Strict Father. As noted in the previous chapter, statements about parenting were presented to the participants from the Moral Politics Scale and participants were invited to respond with whether they agreed with the statement by using a Likert Scale with response options of "strongly agree," "somewhat agree," "neither agree nor disagree," "somewhat disagree," or "strongly disagree." Statements that represented a Nurturant Parent-leaning included statements such as "I'd rather see my child play cooperatively than play competitively." and "In order to truly nurture children, one needs to be empathic." Statements that represented a Strict Father-leaning included statements such as "Children must be taught that people get what they deserve." and "Children need to be disciplined in order to build character." The responses of the participants were entered into the SurveyMonkey instrument during the interview and then tallied afterwards.

Of the six participants, each generally leaned toward a Nurturant Parent cognitive model, with varying degrees. After excluding the "Neither Agree nor Disagree" response, every participant more often selected a response that reflected a Nurturant Parent perspective rather than a response that reflected a Strict Father perspective. If one were to *include* the "Neither Agree nor Disagree" responses, one participant chose this category more than the other two categories. This participant might be considered a bi-conceptual who may lean towards a Nurturant Parent model. It is interesting to note that of all the participants, this participant self-disclosed the most abusive experiences across her lifetime. Future research might explore whether there is a correlation between increased

instances of abuse, severity as self-reported or externally-evaluated, and cognitive models. Carrie Doering’s research did find a correlation between self-reported severe abuse and women’s God images such that “When women were severely traumatized in childhood...loving God representations significantly decreased, while absent and wrathful God representations increased.”²⁷⁶ The question would be whether there is a similar pattern of correlation between instances of abuse, severity, *and* cognitive models. Nonetheless, from this research, there seems to be a leaning among the participants toward a Nurturant Parent model. For a visual representation of the overall results, see Figure 1 below.



While Figure 1 reflects the cognitive model toward which the participants leaned (Nurturant Parent, indicated in blue), it is also worth noting that there were specific statements on which the participants had significant agreement. There were five statements where every participant’s response fell into the same category: that of a

²⁷⁶ Doering, *Internal Desecration*, 111.

Nurturant Parent response category. Due to the small sample size, it is hard to draw any significant conclusions, but it is worth noting the statements (note that the final two statements were reversed scored):

- “Siblings should receive parental support in accordance to their individual needs.”
- “In order to truly nurture children, one needs to be empathic.”
- “At times it's okay for children to disobey their parents.”
- “It's not critical for children to learn to take the perspective of others into account.”²⁷⁷
- “Children must be taught that people get what they deserve.”²⁷⁸

One may wonder if the participants’ common experience of relational abuse had any bearing on their significant agreement on any of these statements or if this was just a random result due to the small sample size. This could be an area for future research.

Interview Section: Safe Participation and Names for the Divine

Having established that the six participants lean toward a Nurturant Parent cognitive model, with one of them likely being a bi-conceptual who may lean toward a Nurturant Parent model, the rest of this chapter will explore each section of the interviews in the order they were conducted. The first section of the interview questions explored *Safe Participation and Names for the Divine*. This section included open-ended questions related to whether the participant was a practicing Catholic (according to her own definition) and whether there were aspects of church that made the participant feel safe or less safe. Additionally, open-ended questions were asked to ascertain what name

²⁷⁷ This was a reverse scored response where if one disagreed with this statement, it reflected a Nurturant Parent perspective.

²⁷⁸ This was a reverse scored response where if one disagreed with this statement, it reflected a Nurturant Parent perspective.

for God felt more safe or less safe for the participant and also how she would describe God and how God interacts with her.²⁷⁹

Question 1: To start, in a sentence or a few sentences, please share how you currently practice your Catholic faith, if you do? If you don't, what causes you not to?

All participants said that they currently practice their Catholic faith, but the way in which they do so varied. All participants mentioned participating in a local faith community and some mentioned specific ways that they participate in that faith community's communal worship, including serving as a lector, a sacristan, and a eucharistic minister. All participants mentioned participating in personal prayer (one participant did not mention it in response to this question but brought it up later), including multiple participants sharing spiritual books or authors that have been helpful to them. Participants also expressed ways that they lived their faith beyond communal worship and personal prayer. These included learning about the lives of the saints, engaging in current topics related to the Catholic faith, leading religious education for the developmentally delayed, visiting the sick, participating in a 12-step program, and helping with service projects.

It should be noted that even though all participants said that they currently participate in communal worship, some participants expressed caveats.²⁸⁰ One participant expressed, "I no longer have time for a space where I don't feel fully seen and welcomed, so I just choose to not go if it's not going to fill my cup..."²⁸¹ Another participant shared

²⁷⁹ The importance of open-ended questions for God are reflected in the work of Mark A. Kunkel, et. al. "God Images: A Concept Map," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 38, no. 2 (1999): 193-202.

²⁸⁰ Due to space limitations, not every response of the participants is included in this paper. There was an attempt to share responses that represent the responses of multiple participants and also to reflect outlier responses.

²⁸¹ F15

her struggles with Catholicism and mentioned that if she did not have her particular faith community where she worships, “I’m not sure I would go anyplace else.”²⁸² Moreover, every participant at some point in the interviews expressed at least one painful experience or more while practicing her Catholic faith. The painful experiences were either incidents in relation to someone who was a representative of the Church or in relation to Catholic teachings. These stories will become evident in future responses. In summary, while the criteria for participation in the research were that the survivors *self-identify* as Catholic, the responses to this first question made clear that beyond a sense of identity, every participant also currently *practices* her faith.

Question 2: Are there things that make you feel safe in church? (or did make you feel safe in church?)

All participants were able to name things that help them feel safe in church or said they generally feel safe there. While there were a variety of responses to this open-ended question, the majority (five out of six) seem to reflect a common theme of safety being related to feeling connected to their community and feeling seen, heard, and respected for who they are.²⁸³ In terms of community, one participant succinctly summed up what makes her feel safe in church by saying, “Those are my people. It’s community.”²⁸⁴ Another participant shared that what makes her feel safe in church is the “routine” and the feeling of welcome from the community.²⁸⁵ She reflected, “I’m African American, and I wasn’t always welcome.”²⁸⁶ She mentioned that at a previous Church that they had

²⁸² A13

²⁸³ The sixth participant said, “I don’t generally not feel safe, so I don’t think anything in particular...part of the reason I go is not the feeling of safety so much, but serenity, I guess you might say.” (C21)

²⁸⁴ E206

²⁸⁵ D61

²⁸⁶ D63

“gotten rid of the pastor who did not like Black people,” and, after that, the priests were cordial.²⁸⁷ But when she attended her current parish for the first time, a woman turned to her at the end of Mass and said, “Come back.”²⁸⁸ She remembered what an impact that made on her to have someone welcome her directly. She knew this was the community that she wanted to make her parish.

Another participant shared, “the love of the people, the love of the priests, and their commitment to us as community...to listen to the people, that for me is safety.”²⁸⁹ Although she also, unprompted, shared what makes her feel unsafe before the question was asked. She shared, “I would not say theoretically that I feel safe within the Catholic Church as a woman. I do not.”²⁹⁰ The participant who is a woman religious also noted the importance of a community that values who she is as a woman. She reflected:

I think, you know, the safest place of church for me is when I am at one of my motherhouses. I think because...it is a space that is ours, it is clearly feminine, and we have some choice and some decision-making in how the Mass is run, and who we invite into our space.... I love the artistic ways that it is expressed, because that feels safe, because, you know, I have a very embodied spirituality, and so the ways that are artistic and more embodied, I think, that makes me feel safe.... As well as a kind of radical welcome in terms of the table, in terms of language that is inclusive. And also, I think it just being my home. It feels like my home so that’s what feels safe for me. In terms of other parishes, you know, I think those same things apply.²⁹¹

The participants are clear about what makes them feel safe and some began to hint at what does not make them feel safe, which is the topic of the next question.

Question 3: Are there things that make you feel unsafe in church? (or made you feel unsafe in church?)

²⁸⁷ D64

²⁸⁸ D68

²⁸⁹ A80

²⁹⁰ A91

²⁹¹ F18

Similar to above, five out of the six participants responded that there were things that made them feel unsafe in church or in Catholic contexts.²⁹² The responses about what makes the participants feel unsafe tended to fall into three general, sometimes overlapping, categories and all three themes were linked to views or actions by those in church authority: a *lack of listening*, *hierarchical perspectives/behavior resulting in inequality or abuse*,²⁹³ and/or *literal scripture interpretations without contextualization*, also linked to abuse.²⁹⁴

While it is difficult to parse out the themes because they sometimes overlap within the responses of the participants (i.e. a lack of listening to women which touches on both the “lack of listening” and “hierarchical perspectives”), it is nonetheless worth noting that two participants specifically mentioned a *lack of listening* by those in authority as what makes them feel unsafe. One of these participants initially said that there was not anything that made her feel unsafe in church, but then shared a story that took place in the context of counseling at a Catholic agency. She was being abused by her spouse and they went to counseling, but were assigned to a counselor who was not trained to deal with their situation. She said, “I felt I was not listened to at all by the counselor who was assigned to us.”²⁹⁵ She went on to say that the counselor’s final words to them were “You seem like such a cute couple. You need to keep on talking to each

²⁹² The sixth participant said, “Occasionally I hear homilies that I’m not real comfortable with, but they don’t make me feel unsafe.” C30

²⁹³ I am including abuse as part of the *hierarchical perspectives and behaviors* theme since abuse is connected to hierarchical views and behavior in terms of “power-over.” See Judith Herman’s chapters, “The Rules of Tyranny,” “The Rules of Equality,” and “Patriarchy,” that make this connection in Judith Herman, *Truth and Repair: How Trauma Survivors Envision Justice* (New York: Basic Books, 2023), 25-73.

²⁹⁴ It is worth noting that the lack of listening, rigid perspectives regarding inequality, and/or literal interpretations were named by the participants in relation to their impact on specific groups of people: women (three responses), LGBTQ people (two responses), and/or abuse survivors or the context of abusive behavior (four responses).

²⁹⁵ B27

other,” but, she said, “I had been saying throughout our entire sessions, the problem is that he doesn’t listen to me at all.”²⁹⁶ The other participant who also specifically mentioned the lack of listening said, “As a woman, I feel that being a woman is something they would prefer that I not be. I do not feel respected as a whole...that I would not be listened to, and that has been my experience....”²⁹⁷ She was quick to point out that it was not the case, for the most part, in her own parish, but rather that she had experience with visiting priests and seminarians who would not listen to her experiences as a woman nor the pain of sexism in the Church. A lack of listening erodes a feeling of safety for these participants.

Three participants mentioned *hierarchical perspectives or behavior* that lead to inequality or abuse in the church as something that makes them feel unsafe. One participant said what makes her feel unsafe are, “The doctrines and the things that have come out. All say women simply are second class citizens, maybe even worse. And I find that so [pause], it makes me cry. To say, for the Church to say, I am not good enough to answer the call of God to be a priest is offensive and, to me, sinful. I don’t use that word ‘sinful’ very often.”²⁹⁸ Another participant referenced ecclesial hierarchical perspectives and behaviors that harm lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) members of her parish as making her feel unsafe. She said, “I am not LGBT, but I have some friends in that, and they are great people, and wonderful parents, and very involved.... It should be a moot point as far as I am concerned.”²⁹⁹ A third participant also referenced hierarchical

²⁹⁶ B34

²⁹⁷ A97

²⁹⁸ A100. In the question preceding this one, this participant also mentioned a lack of listening as making her feel unsafe, which was also related to women.

²⁹⁹ E222

views and behaviors as related to women and LGBTQ³⁰⁰ people, as well as abusive behavior as having made her feel unsafe. She related: “I grew up with very, very rigid and very traditional gender roles. And so I think what makes me feel unsafe is if it is clearly, if those gender roles are enforced. I feel very unsafe.”³⁰¹ She went on to say,

I think that there is a feeling of unsafety in, if there is anti-LGBTQ rhetoric being spoken. I have, I’ve also had some experiences in terms of, like, feeling physically unsafe in church. You know, one of, when I was younger, one of the priests that I went to confession for, like, hit on me and things like that, you know, tried to talk me out of becoming a sister. That is, that was incredibly unsafe, and I was very scared to go to church, when he was still at the parish. I think, I think in terms of safety, a lot of my abuse has been around men and, and traditional, rigid gender roles.³⁰²

These participants, in different ways, mentioned how hierarchical perspectives (relating to women and LGBTQ people) and behaviors in the church, including abuse, do not make them feel safe.

Finally, two participants referenced *literal interpretations of scripture without contextualization* as being something that makes them feel unsafe in church and both participants ultimately linked their responses to abuse. One of these participants expressed the feeling of unsafety related to literal interpretations, while also referencing the theme of hierarchical perspectives in terms of women, as explored above:

Well, sometimes I think some of the priests and the laymen are too literal in their interpretation of what’s in, in the Bible, and they think that men have a higher position than women. And I don’t agree with that. I don’t! I don’t think, I don’t think Jesus had that belief. But sometimes when people become Catholics or Christians, they take with them some of the prejudices that they grew up with.... You know, and sometimes they don’t even realize that’s what they’re doing. But it still hurts.³⁰³

³⁰⁰ I am honoring the specific words of the participants by using the words as stated by the participants. For example, the participant above this one referenced “LGBT” and this participant references “LGBTQ.” Both are common ways of referencing the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and broader queer community.

³⁰¹ F41

³⁰² F47

³⁰³ D74

She shared stories of how she had seen this manifested in her parish. As she continued talking, she said that it ultimately came down to abusive behavior. She remarked, “But we’re not talking about sexism or racism, right? We’re talking about abuse, period. And the abusers come in all colors and sexes.”³⁰⁴ She starts by identifying literal scripture interpretation as that what makes her feel unsafe, but also pairs it with hierarchical views that may lead to abuse. Another participant echoed similar concerns about literal interpretations given without context and also related it to abuse. When asked what makes her feel unsafe, she said, “Anything having to do with the letter of the law. I know I’m not going to feel safe.”³⁰⁵ She went on to share stories of how she has seen such perspectives impact people in various contexts but she ultimately began to share how it had impacted her personally. She soberly remarked, “The ‘turn the other cheek’ really kept me in the marriage way longer.”³⁰⁶ She spoke passionately, saying:

‘Turn the other check’ has not been put, by people who give the sermons, into historical context. And the historical context is if you turn the other cheek, they have to use the other hand and become unclean if they hit you again. Okay! So why don’t we hear this from the pulpit? Why don’t, when we’re abused? No, we talk like that and say stop, this is not okay!.... And it makes me really angry that scripture is not put into its historical context and the meaning coming from that time period. Because it, it makes such a big difference to the way it’s interpreted, to the instructions and directions we’re given from the pulpit.³⁰⁷

This biblical phrase of “turn the other cheek” caused her to stay longer in an abusive marriage. She wishes she had a minister who had been able to put the scripture into historical context and to be clear that it was not suggesting that she should accept abuse.

³⁰⁴ D102

³⁰⁵ E217

³⁰⁶ E257. The participant is referring to “Turn the other cheek,” a line from scripture in Matthew 5:39.

³⁰⁷ E381

Both of these participants' responses note how a lack of contextualization of scripture in ministerial settings makes them feel unsafe.

All three of the common themes among the participant responses—lack of listening, hierarchical perspectives/behaviors, and literal interpretations without contextualization—could be considered more closely associated with the Strict Father cognitive model. In this model, an authority figure does not need to listen to those below them in rank, tends to hold firm perspectives about hierarchy, and believes that rules are not open to interpretation nor change based on the context. These behaviors and beliefs arise from the model's moral priorities of strength, authority, order, and boundaries, previously discussed in detail in chapter two. While looking at cognitive models was not part of this question, it is nonetheless worth noting. Regardless, it is clear from the responses that church authorities, including those in ministry, can have an impact on whether or not a Catholic women relational abuse survivor feels safe in church.

Question 4: People give the Divine many names, what name for the Divine feels most comfortable and safe to you? For example, God, Jesus, Spirit, or perhaps another descriptive or non-descriptive name for the Divine? And why?

Each participant had a name for God that felt comfortable to her. While some participants felt drawn to one particular name and others felt comfortable with many names, when asked to share one name for God that the researcher could use in future questions during the interview, all the participants shared one. These names, shared below in randomized order, were:

- Jesus
- Higher Power
- Mother-Father-Creator
- Jesus
- Spirit

- God

While the small number of participants limits drawing any firm conclusions, among these participants it seems that there is not one particular name that survivors are drawn toward but for many of the participants the safe names for God were often rooted in deeply personal experiences related to their healing journey, an unanticipated aspect of the research.

For four of the women, this question prompted them to share how the name for God that they selected came from a deep place of meaning related to the abuse they had experienced and their journey toward healing. For example, before selecting just one name, a participant shared a list of names that have been meaningful to her such as Father, Mother, God, Spirit, Jesus, Brother, and Companion. She went on to say, “if the Creator is male, it’s also female, so I’ll sometimes say Father-Mother-Creator.”³⁰⁸ She went on to share a story about the word Spirits that was meaningfully connected with her healing journey from abuse that arose in relation to a particular therapist she had. Another participant noted, “What I may feel most comfortable with is the Spirit, because for me, the Spirit is the Divine Feminine that came from a vision that I had when I went to Our Lady of Guadalupe.”³⁰⁹ She went on to add later, “and that’s what kept me alive through all the abuse that I went through, and I knew I was loved by a Spirit, by a being that truly loved me because I was a little girl.”³¹⁰ Similarly, another participant spoke about how the name she selected for God was related to what helped her endure a difficult childhood:

³⁰⁸ E422

³⁰⁹ A160

³¹⁰ A179

You know, what really saved me was, you know, really, Jesus came to me at a young age, as my companion, and I found him to be different than this God that my mother was talking about. From a very young age, and I really attribute that companionship with Jesus to be the thing that really saved me, like, not even just physically, but, like, I think saved me in terms of, like, helped me to endure a childhood, where I just didn't feel seen.³¹¹

Another participant credited her 12-Step experience to giving her the freedom to find a name for the God that felt right to her in the context of her healing journey. She said that the experience helped her understand:

that you can give your Higher Power any name, right? Including your big toe, if you want. So it could be Duke. It could be Big Brother. It could be Daddy. So I don't have one particular, depends on where I am at the time.... And of course, my Higher Power can be a female, because spirits don't have gender. And there were many times early on that my Higher Power was Mother Earth and since I'm from central Illinois, our earth is Black. So, my Higher Power was a Black woman.... So, I had to start with where I was and I didn't trust men because I had been abused by men.³¹²

These four participants all described how their names for God in some way arose from their journeys toward healing. It is an important note for ministers to recognize how important it can be for abuse survivors to be able to name God in a way that feels safe to them.

Not all participants directly tied their preferred name for God explicitly to their experience of abuse and healing. One participant said she felt fine with the names in the question but when asked to select one specifically with which she felt most comfortable, she selected the name God.³¹³ Another participant gave Jesus as the name that felt most comfortable, saying, "I think the idea of Jesus as a person who truly lived the human experience and knows us all and understands us all on a person-to-person basis is an idea

³¹¹ F66

³¹² D116

³¹³ C43

that gives me a lot of comfort.”³¹⁴ It is of note that these two participants were both survivors of abuse in their marriage but did not mention abuse prior to their marriages.³¹⁵ This contrasts with the four participants mentioned above who, unprompted by the researcher, spoke about experiences of abuse that took place earlier in their lives, as well as additional experiences as adults. The four participants who experienced abuse early in their lives, when asked for a name for God that felt most safe and comfortable, each shared in their own way how the name for God they chose was specifically related to their experience of healing. Psychologists recognize that humans’ God images begin developing in childhood and for those who experience abuse in childhood, their God image may be more deeply impacted by and intertwined with the experience, both positively or negatively.³¹⁶ Additionally, as Froese and Bader note, “...as we age, our image of God develops more fully and continues to be influenced by new experiences, which are reconciled with—or completely undermine—our earliest image of God.”³¹⁷ While these responses about God names are not statistically relevant due to the small sample size, they do point toward the potential that those who have suffered abuse at earlier ages may be more sensitive to the name for God that is used.

Question 5: Is there a name for the Divine that I mentioned – God, Jesus, or Spirit – that makes you feel less comfortable or less safe? And if so, why?

³¹⁴ B61

³¹⁵ There may have been additional experiences of abuse that were not named during the interview.

³¹⁶ Mary Gail Frawley-O’Dea, “God Images in Clinical Work with Sexual Abuse Survivors: A Relational Psychodynamic Paradigm,” in David F. Walker, Christine A. Courtois, and Jamie D. Aten, eds. *Spiritually Oriented Psychotherapy for Trauma* (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2015), 169-188.

³¹⁷ Paul Froese and Christopher Bader, *America’s Four Gods: What we say about God and what that Says about Us* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 42.

When asked if there was a name for the Divine that felt less comfortable or less safe, the responses fell along similar lines as those above. The two participants mentioned above who did not self-report abuse in their childhood and did not tie their preferred names of God to their healing journeys, were also the two participants who did not have a name for God that felt less comfortable or less safe. In response to the question of whether there was a name that felt less comfortable or less safe, one participant simply said, “No.”³¹⁸ and the other participant said, “No, all of them give me the warm, fuzzy feelings, if you like.”³¹⁹ Both of these participants felt comfortable with the names for God that were mentioned in the question.

For the four participants who expressed having suffered early experiences of harm, each of them had a response to this question that reflected a name for God that either currently feels or previously felt less comfortable or less safe. For two of the participants, the name of God as Father was problematic. For example, one participant shared:

I have never been able to connect with God as a Father and I think God as a Father was the thing that I was, was the, was the image that my Southern Baptist upbringing told me was, like, he’s just waiting to send you to hell.... You know, really kind of a destroyer. That’s how I always saw him, as a very scary character. And also, I think, paired with that, like, you know, I have a very loving father and a really healed relationship with my family now, but my father yelled all the time.... There are also just a lot of men in my life that, you know, I mean, I think just being in that sort of patriarchal stew was all of the males of my life.³²⁰

Another participant noted that the name Father previously felt like an unsafe name for God. She recalled, “At one time, it might have been Father. My dad died when I was 2, okay? My stepfather was very strict, you know, but I got past that. With 12-Step, I got

³¹⁸ C41

³¹⁹ B56

³²⁰ F81

past that, you know, but in order to get past that, you know, I had to start with where I was in order to get past that.”³²¹ While God the Father was more comfortable to her now, earlier in her healing journey it caused her to feel less safe.

For the additional participants who identified a name for God that felt less comfortable or less safe, both initially named Jesus for the ways that Jesus is sometimes portrayed. One noted, “Even if you say the word Jesus, what happens is, people go immediately to their perception of who Jesus is, which is fine but it also can build a wall between people.”³²² She went on to later say, “I will tell of my experience with Mary and Jesus and make it very clear: to me, it’s not traditional.”³²³ The other participant also pointed to the way that Jesus, when portrayed in a particular way, feels less safe. When asked the question, she immediately stated: “Jesus this. Jesus that. Jesus says you have to do it this way. And then I start beginning to recoil at the name of Jesus or God when it’s attached to ‘letter of the law’ attitudes. Makes my insides recoil that I just, they just kind of draw in on top of themselves and say, protect yourself from this.”³²⁴ Again, this is an important note for ministers to recognize how important it can be for abuse survivors to be able to name God in a way that feels safe to them. Naming God for an abuse survivor, depending on the name that is chosen, can make her feel unsafe.

Question 6: In your own words, how would you describe _____ and how _____ interacts with you?

This question was asked by inserting in the question’s blanks the name for God that each participant selected earlier. Three participants noted that it can be difficult to

³²¹ D188

³²² A194

³²³ A222

³²⁴ E544

describe God and God's relationship with us, but all participants did respond and, gratefully so, because, "[w]hile the 'look' of God reveals some basic differences in theology, beliefs about how God behaves are even more crucial."³²⁵ Froese and Bader have noted that how God behaves tells us much more about a person's sense of God than how someone's God looks. For example, while most people in the United States believe in a loving God, that love can be experienced in different ways.³²⁶

The participant's responses about God's engagement with them seem to fall into two general but overlapping categories that, for purposes of this paper, are being called "open communication" and "constant presence." While it cannot be determined based on these limited responses, it is worth noting that both of these categories are behaviors that are described within the Nurturant Parent model and may reflect its moral priorities of empathy and nurturance. With regards to "open communication," Lakoff writes, "Open, two-way, mutually respectful communication is crucial."³²⁷ A parent communicates with the child, but the child also communicates with the parents. In the Strict Father model communication is often one-way from parent to child, but in the Nurturant Parent model authentic dialogue takes place that is part of the moral priority on empathy, a parent needs to hear from a child in order to empathize with them. With regards to the category of "constant presence," Lakoff notes that the Strict Father model posits that "children primarily learn through reward and punishment" however in the Nurturant Parent model

³²⁵ Froese and Bader, *America's Four Gods*, 5.

³²⁶ "a vast majority of Americans agree that God is loving." Froese and Bader, *America's Four Gods*, 82. While the majority of people in the United States agree that God is loving, as noted earlier in this paper, a Strict Father model for God may lead someone to believe that love comes as a reward for good behavior as a way to encourage human growth. Whereas the Nurturant Parent model for God may lead someone to believe that love comes unconditionally from God as a way to encourage human growth.

³²⁷ George Lakoff, *Moral Politics: How Liberals and Conservatives Think* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996), 109.

“it is assumed that children learn through their attachments to their parents—which are, ideally, secure and loving attachments.”³²⁸ The secure bond or attachment between the parent and child is crucial to this model. The child is not assumed to learn from reward and punishment, but rather by experiencing the loving presence of the parent and being nurtured by the parent in order to grow up to be one that nurtures, hence why nurturance is a moral priority of this model.³²⁹ These two categories of “open communication” and “constant presence” are related and overlapping because of the underlying moral priorities of empathy (“open communication”) and nurturance (“constant presence”). Lakoff helps explain how these moral priorities relate, writing, “Nurturance presupposes empathy. A child is helpless; it cannot care for itself. It requires someone to care for it, and to care *for* a child adequately, you have to care *about* a child. You have to project your capacity for feeling onto a child accurately enough to have a sense of what that child needs. This not only requires empathy, it requires constant empathy.”³³⁰ As such, those with a Nurturant Parent model for God are likely to experience God’s interactions with these moral priorities of empathy and nurturance and, remarkably, these were resonant in the participant’s responses.

First, looking at the participants whose responses reflected a relationship of open communication, one participant said, “I think of God almost as a very close friend, someone to reach out to when I’m feeling happy, or sad, or grateful, or frustrated. I just, pretty much have ongoing conversations, which, which I guess means I’m talking in my head and hearing voices which could be a really bad thing, but for me, I find that very

³²⁸ Lakoff, *Moral Politics*, 110.

³²⁹ For further exploration of nurturance and closeness, particularly as related to Christianity, see Lakoff, *Moral Politics*, 256.

³³⁰ Lakoff, *Moral Politics*, 116.

comforting.”³³¹ For this participant, she and God interact through open communication where she feels free to bring all her emotions, whether she is “feeling happy, or sad, or grateful, or frustrated.” It is worth noting how many times this participant, and the other two participants whose responses reflect this common theme, use some variation on the word feeling. For example, another participant noted how God interacts with her through open communication, saying:

So, during the day, and whatever is happening, I will say, I will bring things.... ‘God,’ maybe I think right now, ‘I feel angry that so-and-so just said this to me,’ you know, I feel hurt about, you know, and I am constantly, and I am learning. I have a spiritual director, and now I’m trying to make quiet time. But quieting my mind and learning to listen and being quiet is a challenge for me. And when I’m able to get there and just be quiet and not wait for the words, I don’t get words, I get feelings.... And as often healing. There’s kind of like a warm, radiating, what? Feeling that rises. Yeah, I want more of this. I don’t know how. I don’t have words to define it or explain it really well.³³²

This participant, like the participant above, feels she can communicate with God and bring her emotions, such as when she feels “angry” or “hurt.” Not only does she bring her emotions to God, but God also responds with a sort of feeling that she calls “warm, radiating.” This resembles the arc of the participant above who in bringing her emotions to God feels, in turn, “comfort[ed].” Additionally, a third participant noted open communication as the hallmark of the way that God interacts with her. She shared:

I would say my Higher Power is my best friend. When I have problems, I can talk to my Higher Power about them. When I’m mad or angry, I can get one of those fat pillows and smack the heck out of it. And hit it, and hit it, and hit it until I start crying, because usually under all that anger is a lot of hurt. And then, I can ask my Higher Power to help me get through that, you know.³³³

³³¹ C47

³³² E581

³³³ D205

This participant also seems to have interactions with God in which she brings her feelings, such as “mad or angry” or “hurt.” In turn, God responds to “help [her] get through.” This same participant then shared a story about how her Higher Power has also helped guide her toward jobs when she asked for direction. Communication is not necessarily absent from the Strict Father model but the presence of this pattern of dialogue may reflect a Nurturant Parent model for God that prioritizes open communication without fear of retribution.

The other three participant responses reflected a “constant presence” quality to their God interactions.³³⁴ All three of the participants used the word “presence” or “present” in their responses and two of them used the word “constant.” One participant shared that the Spirit, “...is for me a mystical presence that goes beyond the boundaries of what we know about Jesus and his life, and why he came and everything.”³³⁵ For this participant, God is a “mystical presence” and she went on to describe that she believes that we are all particles that are part of God; an incredibly close bond between individuals and God. Another participant shared, “I would say I, I have a feeling of a, of a constant presence and watching over me and someone who wants the best for me in my life.”³³⁶ Like the above response, this participant also reflects a closeness to her attachment with God. She says it is “a constant presence” of God watching and wanting the best for her. Another participant used the word “constant,” as well, saying, “...it’s that relationship with Jesus that is, like...when I have not been able to rely on anything else in my life,

³³⁴ For more on presence as related to God and the Nurturant Parent model, see Lakoff, *Moral Politics*, 255-257.

³³⁵ A241

³³⁶ B66

that is the constant. He always shows up for me.”³³⁷ She went on to share that while she has broadened her images of God, “That image of God is still, that he’s still present... I feel very deeply connected, and I think you, know, friend, companion, you know. I’ve really experienced deep healing at his hands.”³³⁸ This participant feels that God is “constant” and “connected” with her. Because of this depth of connection, “he’s still present,” she has experienced healing. These three participants reflect a sense of God’s abiding presence, reflecting the possibility that their Nurturant Parent cognitive model may be related to their understanding of God.

All six participants, as noted in the first section of this chapter, lean toward a Nurturant Parent cognitive model. The participants responses to this question seem to indicate that the participants may also experience God through a Nurturant Parent cognitive model. However, more in-depth, non-textual research certainly needs to be done to see whether there is a firm connection between cognitive models and one’s model of God. As Lakoff reminds:

There is nothing surprising about this or wrong with it. Literal modes of thought and literal language are simply not adequate for characterizing God and the relation of human beings to God. Such things can be understood only through metaphorical thought and communicated through metaphorical language. God, after all, is ineffable—beyond human comprehension. If you’re going to even think or talk about God, you’re going to have to use human experience as your basis and have an extensive collection of metaphors at your disposal.³³⁹

For these participants, like Christians throughout the ages, they subconsciously drawn upon metaphor to understand God and, based on their cognitive model, may also lean toward describing God through the Nurturant Parent model.

³³⁷ F109

³³⁸ F117

³³⁹ Lakoff, *Moral Politics*, 245-246.

This section, *Safe Participation and Names for the Divine*, represented by questions 1-5 above, confirmed that the participants not only self-identify as Catholic but are practicing Catholics and that they can name what makes them feel safe or unsafe as related to the church. Additionally, this section showed that for some survivors, there is a connection between names for God and what makes them feel safe. Finally, the last question seems to point toward the possibility that for these participants, their understanding of God may be connected with their Nurturant Parent cognitive model.

Interview Section: Safe-Making Characteristics for the Divine

This section of questions continues to open a window into understanding the participant's relationship with God. It focused on characteristics for God that may relate to a participant's cognitive model.³⁴⁰

Question 1: What are one or two characteristics that you associate with _____? And tell me what they mean to you. And if you can't think of any at this moment, that's fine. In the next screen, I will offer some examples.

Each participant named characteristics that she associates with her God-image. Some form of the word “love,”—“love/s,” “loving,” or “all-loving,”—was shared by every participant and reflects the “vast majority of Americans [who] agree that God is loving.”³⁴¹ However, that love can reflect love from a Strict Father perspective or a Nurturant Parent perspective. That is why it was crucial in this question not only to ask about characteristics, but to ask what they meant to the participant.

³⁴⁰ It should be emphasized that this section on *characteristics* for God and the following section on *roles* for God are based on preliminary textual analysis and cannot say definitely whether there is a relationship between one's cognitive model and one's understanding of God. While there appears to be the potential of a relationship, the most important learnings from these sections are to hear directly from the participants about their relationship with God.

³⁴¹ Froese and Bader, *America's Four Gods*, 82.

One participant described the characteristic of loving by saying, God “loves my life and knows me.”³⁴² Another participant described what she meant by “all-loving” by saying, “non-judgmental, and there’s nothing God will not forgive.”³⁴³ Another participant said, “God loves all of us, even when we’re battling. That means that God loved Hitler. Ouch, that is hard to imagine, because it’s almost like saying, God loves evil. No, but God doesn’t love evil. God loves the person.”³⁴⁴ In each of these responses, there was a sense of God’s love as having an unconditional quality. This could align with a Nurturant Parent cognitive model of a God who loves unconditionally. This God still sets expectations, but love is not given as reward for good behavior, but rather love comes *first* as a way to foster their growth towards those expectations.

In addition to the characteristic of God as loving, the participants also named at least one other characteristic for God. These included words such as “trust,”³⁴⁵ “caring,”³⁴⁶ “completely reliable,”³⁴⁷ and “kindness, nonjudgment, peace,”³⁴⁸ all of which seem to express a very compassionate perception of God, a God with whom these survivors can feel safe.

It is worth noting that one participant, in addition to expressing the characteristic of “all-loving,” spoke at length regarding a second characteristic for God that did not seem to have the same tone as the others. Without giving a one-word answer, she described God in the following way:

Well, my mental picture of God is still of the patriarch. I know it’s pretty common these days to refer to God as “she,” but in my mind it’s, it’s the almighty warrior

³⁴² B79

³⁴³ C63

³⁴⁴ E623

³⁴⁵ F141

³⁴⁶ D237

³⁴⁷ B76

³⁴⁸ A280

God, and I find that reassuring. I guess it's just that's always been my picture of God. Safety. Tradition. My father was a very, well, my parents, but my father in particular, just seemed to me to be a very strong, he was very strong in his faith and so maybe in some ways that patriarchal picture, it also includes, I mean, when I picture God, I don't have my dad's face on him, but, but, they kind of go together to some extent.³⁴⁹

This is an interesting response because the participant used certain key words that may be more likely to be aligned with someone who holds a Strict Father cognitive model, words such as “almighty,” “warrior,” and “strong.” But what is also interesting is the fact that this participant had the second highest score on the Moral Politics Scale toward a Nurturant Parent cognitive model. Why the discrepancy? It could be that she holds different cognitive models for different areas of her life, both Nurturant Parent and Strict Father. It may also be explained when one looks at another response of hers later in the interview when the participant was asked about roles for God. She said:

I don't think of God very often in terms of the Old Testament God. Despite my description of what I, you know, picture him as being and maybe in a lot of ways, it's, it's my religion, and so God offers me a safe space and, not that I currently need one, but its just mentally. It's, it's always somewhere I can go, no matter how busy I am, or how frustrated or annoyed. I can always go there, at least in prayer, and I find a lot of healing and, and assistance. Well, you know, kind of just calming through that.³⁵⁰

She seems to make a distinction between her “picture” of God versus the “experience” of God. Her “picture” of God could seem aligned with a Strict Father model, but she shares that her experience of God is different and has qualities that she experiences as “healing,” “assistance,” and “calming.” This accords with what Froese and Bader note, that the “look” of God does not provide as much insight into a person's God as does the way that God is experienced by someone.³⁵¹ While the responses to this

³⁴⁹ C56

³⁵⁰ C88

³⁵¹ Froese and Bader, *America's Four Gods*, 5.

question cannot determine whether a participant's God-roles align with a Nurturant Parent model, the majority of participants seem to put a priority on God's empathy and nurturance, moral priorities of the Nurturant Parent model, (for example, "nonjudgemental," "knows me") rather than on God's strength and authority, moral priorities of the Strict Father model.

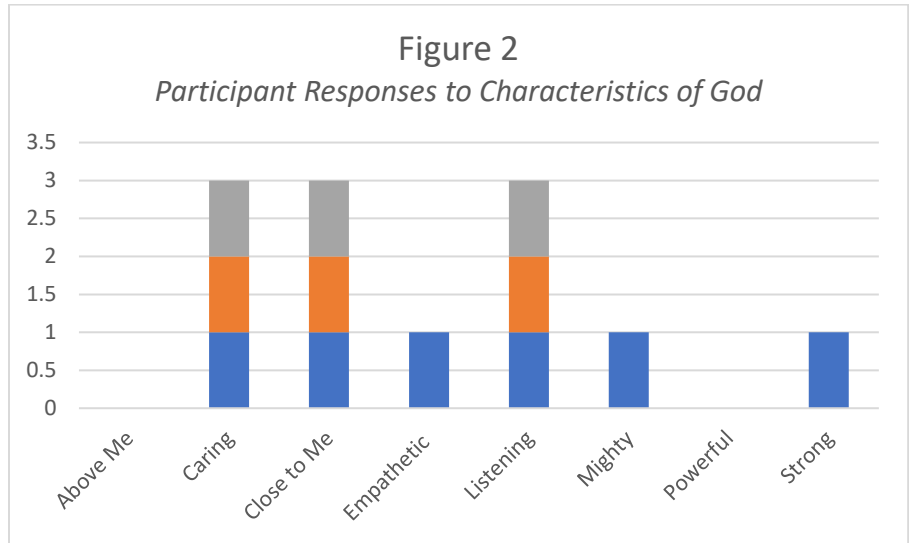
Question 2: Looking at this list of possible characteristics for _____, what would you select as two characteristics that you closely associate with _____?

The participants were shown eight potential characteristics for God, randomly arranged on the screen, and were asked to select two that they closely associate with their word for God. This question was created to offer some examples should the participants not have been able to think of their own in the previous question and to further understand how the participants experience God. Each characteristic offered was selected specifically for its *potential* connection with Lakoff's Strict Father and Nurturant Parent models. It is important to note, however, that the words are not exclusively tied to one or another cognitive model, hence why the following question asked the participants to say more about what their selections meant to them.

First, none of the participants selected two of the characteristics that were presented: "powerful" and "above me." These two characteristics were potentially more aligned with a Strict Father cognitive model. Of the characteristics that were selected, there were three that were selected repeatedly by the participants, all of which are potentially more aligned with a Nurturant Parent cognitive model:

- "Caring" (selected by three participants)
- "Close to Me" (selected by three participants)
- "Listening" (selected by three participants)

There were three additional characteristics that were selected by one participant each: “strong,” “mighty,” and “empathetic.” You can see the participants’ selections in Figure 2 below.



Question 3: What do each of your selections mean to you?

Below, in tables, are the participant responses to what the selections meant to them, along with a summarized reflection at the end.

Caring

<p>“means that I’m not on my own, that I have somebody in my corner, somebody who is – even though things may seem bleak or unpromising – that I have somebody who cares, and that I can, that I can talk to and offer my troubles to.”³⁵²</p>
<p>“my belief that, that I matter to God, and, and he cares about my successes and failures.”³⁵³</p>
<p>“Sometimes, I think I know what’s best for me. But, but I don’t. And, but my Higher Power does know what’s best.”³⁵⁴</p>

³⁵² B95
³⁵³ C74
³⁵⁴ D252

Close to Me

“it’s like the, the closeness and this is, I can’t remember, it must have been Eckhart. You know, it’s like there’s no separation between my skin and the Spirit. They’re both one, that’s pretty close. It’s the breath that I breathe, and that is closeness. I don’t see my breath as separate from the Spirit of the Divine.”³⁵⁵

“Close to me, I think, in the sense of being ready to listen. I really prayed really hard during the years, you know, the, the entire course of, of my marriage and post-divorce as well. And I feel that in, in many ways the prayers that I, that I offered up were answered. So, I feel that close to me would really mean somebody who is, who is there listening and caring.”³⁵⁶

“Close to me, which kind of includes the empathetic and listening.”³⁵⁷ and the participant went on to share a story about a priest who represented this characteristic during reconciliation: “I have this glitch in the middle of me. Whenever I think of her name [the name of the relative who was entwined with the trauma], and sometimes when I think of what could have been for [name of participant’s child], and I try to let go of that and just deal with what is. But there is pain here. And he went through, okay, the absolution, and I just, it didn’t go. And I just thought, ‘Oh, four-letter word. I’m not over this yet.’ And then he, he said, ‘Did she ever acknowledge what she did or apologize?’ And I shook my head and, and said, ‘No.’ And he kind of bent down and gave this groan that I can’t, this noise that I cannot replicate. And all of a sudden, the glitch was gone. But he actually companioned with me into that deep pain. And I don’t find that much when we go to confession. But that’s what, you know, that’s what did it.”³⁵⁸

Empathetic

“when I have ever struggled with anything, I know Jesus has been there. And, and he has the capacity to be with me in it and not shy away from it, but be with me in it, and see, walk with me through it.”³⁵⁹

Listening

“It’s a special kind of listening, like your best friend and even beyond that, it’s a soul closeness, okay, where it even listens to my heartbeat and it just knows me. That’s the listening, would be more a knowing what’s on my heart and mind and there’s an intimacy in that that I, it’s hard to explain.”³⁶⁰

³⁵⁵ A361

³⁵⁶ B88

³⁵⁷ E679

³⁵⁸ E764

³⁵⁹ F153

³⁶⁰ A350

“I feel heard. I feel that there is relationship now, where I didn’t feel that there was relationship before, there were just rules. And the relationship is important. I think listening has more to do with relationship and caring and healing.”³⁶¹

“I think that image of, like, Jesus sort of, like, being delighted by someone and, like, just creating space and not saying anything but just waiting. I think that, that’s what Jesus often does with me, especially when I’m not ready. When I’m not ready, right? He’s waiting and he’s creating the ample space for me to say what’s, what is needed. He never pushes me, right?”³⁶²

Mighty

“All things are possible with my Higher Power” and she then related a story about God helping guide her as she sought jobs.³⁶³ She later seems to sum up her understanding of mighty by saying, “I think about how Jesus loved people, whether they were sinners or not. You know, and sometimes as parents, we think, I had four children, we think we’ve got to make them go down that straight road, but they had four different personalities, and the same approach did not work with all four of them, you know.”³⁶⁴

Strong

“He’s able to help me through some difficult times, but also there to celebrate my successes and joy.”³⁶⁵

As noted above, the characteristics most selected were “caring,” “close to me,” and “listening,” all of which were potentially more closely aligned with the Nurturant Parent model. Additionally, one participant selected “empathetic,” another selection that was potentially more aligned with the Nurturant Parent model. Two responses, by two different participants, each selected a word that could be considered more aligned with a Strict Father model (“mighty” and “strong”) but the descriptions of their choices are not easily categorized, leaving open the possibility of a Strict Father or Nurturant Parent

³⁶¹ E690

³⁶² F158

³⁶³ D258

³⁶⁴ D297

³⁶⁵ C79

model. For example, Lakoff talks about how a Nurturant Parent model does value strength, but through a different lens. The Strict Father model's emphasis on strength, for example, "is concerned with internal evils, cases where the issue of self-control arises."³⁶⁶ This contrasts with the Nurturant Parent's view of strength, for example, that "is in the service of morality conceptualized as nurturance."³⁶⁷ Were the participants who selected the words "mighty" or "strong" using it from a Strict Father or Nurturant Parent perspective? While it is not fully clear from the brief responses, it is a reminder that more research is necessary, both to better assess responses such as these and also to compare them with responses among those who may hold a Strict Father model.

Interview Section: Safe-Making Roles for the Divine

This section of questions continues to reflect on the participant's relationship with God. It focused on roles for God that may relate to a participant's cognitive model.

Question 1: In addition to characteristics, many people also associate different roles with _____. What roles do you associate with _____? And tell me what they mean to you. And if you can't think of any at this moment, that's fine. In the next screen I will offer some examples.

Each participant named at least one role, or offered a description about God's interaction with the participant that reflects a role, that she associates with her God-name. One participant shared the role of "presence," because she likes to think beyond roles toward authentic relationship, "That is authentically, that line, 'I am who am.'"³⁶⁸ Another participant expressed the role of "human," saying, "Jesus is in a great many ways, and I think the whole point of him living amongst us was to be one of us, to be

³⁶⁶ Lakoff, *Moral Politics*, 72.

³⁶⁷ Lakoff, *Moral Politics*, 136.

³⁶⁸ A383

really right here amongst us. Obviously, during his time on earth he was a human being, had a family, had friends, lived a life, experienced people who were against him and who loved him, and he in many ways had a life that has mirrored our own.”³⁶⁹ Another participant shared the role of “caretaker,” saying, “caretaker would be always there, the omnipresent and omniscient, but also empathetic and nonjudgemental.”³⁷⁰ A further participant expressed three roles without further elaboration: “perfect parent,” “supportive sibling,” and “universal counselor.”³⁷¹ Another participant shared the role of “healer,” saying, “what that means to me is, you know, when I have prayed and, you know, prayed with moments that have, moments that have been traumatic and abusive in my life, and, and I have experienced actual healing from it, you know, and yeah, so he, he has healed me.”³⁷² This same participant also expressed another role through a description, rather than through a one-word role, saying, “And then the other role is [pause], you know, my spiritual director always tells me, don’t pray if you don’t want to be asked something. Like, when we pray...Jesus is gonna ask something of us.... So, you know, Jesus calling Peter, Jesus calling the 12. That, that this faith is not, is about something that is active, something that I go out and do in my life, something that I share.”³⁷³ Similarly, another participant chose to share a story, rather than a one-word role, to describe how God interacts with her. She said, “I will pray and say, ‘I’ve got to give this to you because I have no clue....’ And then I’ll go about my day or days and all of a sudden either in a dream, or just as I’m doing something, I’ll get a spark of ‘I could

³⁶⁹ B100

³⁷⁰ C87

³⁷¹ D381

³⁷² F175

³⁷³ F184

do this! Or I can look at that person this way instead of so judgmentally.”³⁷⁴ Every participant clearly has a sense of how God interacts with her. While the responses to this question cannot determine whether a participant’s God-roles align with a Nurturant Parent model, the participants seem to put a priority on God’s empathy and nurturance, moral priorities of the Nurturant Parent model, (for example, “caretaker,” “supportive sibling,” “healer”) rather than on God’s strength and authority, moral priorities of the Strict Father model.

Question 2: Looking at this list of roles for _____, what would you select as two roles that you most closely associate with _____?

The participants were shown ten potential roles for God, randomly arranged on the screen, and were asked to select two that they closely associate with their word for God, represented by the blank in the question. This question was asked to offer possible roles should the participants not have been able to think of their own in the previous question and to further understand how the participants experience God. Each role that was listed was selected specifically for its *potential* connection with Lakoff’s Strict Father and Nurturant Parent models. However, the roles are not necessarily correlated to one or another cognitive model, thus why the question following this one asked the participants to say what their selections meant to them.

Among the roles listed, none of the participants selected, “Father,” “Judge,” “King,” “Lord,” or “Ruler.” These five roles were included as being potentially more aligned with a Strict Father cognitive model with moral priorities of strength, authority, order, and boundaries. That being said, it is important to remember that none of these

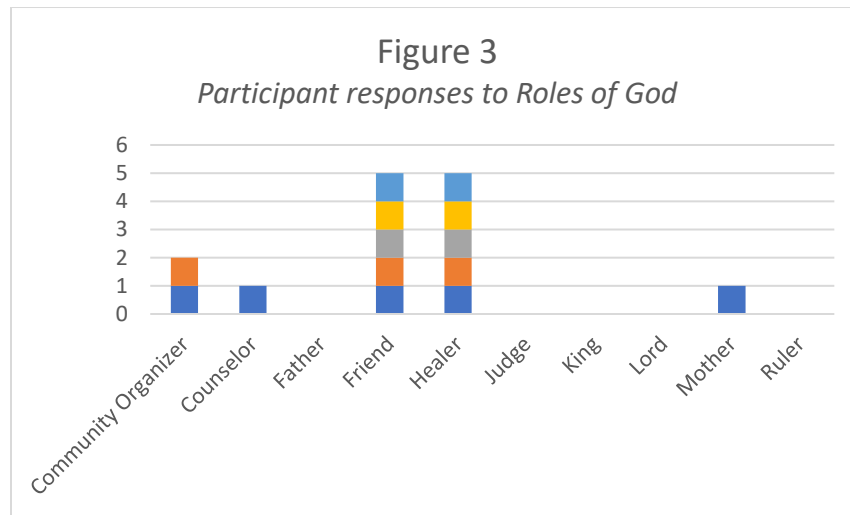
³⁷⁴ E816

roles are exclusively aligned with a particular cognitive model. For example, one could envision God the Father with the moral priorities of strength, authority, order, and boundaries that would align it with the Strict Father model *or* one could envision God the Father with the moral priorities of empathy, nurturance, self-nurturance, and nurturance of social ties that would align it with the Nurturant Parent model.

That being said, the roles that were selected were the five that were potentially more aligned with a Nurturant Parent cognitive model:

- Community Organizer
- Counselor
- Friend
- Healer
- Mother

You may view the participants' selections in Figure 3 below.



Each participant selected two roles but one participant could not decide and selected four roles which she later narrowed in her response to question number three, further down in this paper. Her four responses have been kept in the above figure and were “community organizer,” “counselor,” “healer,” and “mother.” With her four selections included, “friend” and “healer” were the most selected by the participants with five participants

selecting them each. If one removes the participant who selected four roles, retaining only those who selected two roles, it still keeps the role of “friend” with five selections, “healer” with four selections, and “community organizer” with one selection. Either way, “friend” and “healer” were the favored roles of these participants. It raises the question of whether this arose due to the fact that the participants are abuse survivors and whether this would be similar among all abuse survivors or just those who may tend to lean toward a Nurturant Parent model.

Question 3: What do each of your selections mean to you?

Below, in tables, are the participant responses to what the selections meant to them, along with a summarized reflection at the end. Note that when the participant who selected four roles (“healer,” “community organizer,” “counselor,” “mother”) was asked to describe them, she shared stories related to her abuse and women, including a woman parishioner who supported her during a court case related to her abusive marriage and stories about her parents. Ultimately, she seemed to summarize these by speaking mainly about the role of God as “mother.” As such, her responses will be indicated by her response to the “mother” role, below. Additionally, when one participant was asked to describe her selections of friend and healer, she gave one description for both of them. As such, her description will be listed once under “friend” and again under “healer.” Finally, one participant had previously described “healer” in response to the first question of this section so that same description was brought down and included below.

Community Organizer

“Okay, well, the community organizer was the one who did the loaves and the fishes, right? People came a long way. They were hot. They didn’t need to go home hungry, you know?”³⁷⁵

Friend

“would not have a preconceived agenda and would not be judgmental. And that doesn’t mean that they don’t make judgements or give counsel or anything, but there’s a sense of openness that is so wide they can really touch the essence of the other person.”³⁷⁶

“is just non-judgmental.... I feel God is just there to help me, and, and happy to hear my pleas. So what more could you ask in a friend?”³⁷⁷

“a friend is somebody who I can share my concerns with and my joys and, yeah, my sadness, yeah. And, and, when I’m elated.”³⁷⁸

“comes back to the idea of some, having someone in my corner.”³⁷⁹

“when I was a little girl and Jesus first came to me, Jesus was always very physical with me. Like, I could see him, you know, I could interact with him. I would go on a walk and he would walk with me. I felt him there, walking with me. And he was the person that I could just say anything to and he’d always be there no matter how lonely I was, no matter how scared I was, and I was scared a lot. He just, he never left me alone.”³⁸⁰

Healer

“would not have a preconceived agenda and would not be judgmental. And that doesn’t mean that they don’t make judgements or give counsel or anything, but there’s a sense of openness that is so wide they can really touch the essence of the other person.”³⁸¹

“what that means to me is, you know, when I have prayed and, you know, prayed with moments that have, moments that have been traumatic and abusive in my life, and, and I have experience actual healing form it, you know, and yeah, so he, he has healed me.”³⁸²

“no matter how frustrated, or angry, or sorrowful I might be, I find that turning to God through prayer is a very healing process for me.”³⁸³

“Someone who is listening and someone who can understand what is happening in my heart. And then here I would say, someone who, who has the power to, to assure me

³⁷⁵ D408

³⁷⁶ A431

³⁷⁷ C101

³⁷⁸ D419

³⁷⁹ B117

³⁸⁰ F199

³⁸¹ A431

³⁸² F175. Note that this participant described “healer” as a God role in question 1 of this section so her response from that section has been included here.

³⁸³ C100

that things are going to be okay, and that I can trust; help me even in ways that I haven't thought he could help me."³⁸⁴

Mother

"But mothering, you know, you want the hug. You want the compassion, and I, you know, I can think of grandma. Grandma, my mother's mother, would sit with each of us and she'd read to us and she'd talk with us and she'd say, 'Okay, girlies and boys, what do you want? You know, I think we'll do this today, and we'll do nature today, and we'll do this today. And so I, yeah, I can think of grandma for nurturing, so I can think of my grandmother for mothering."³⁸⁵

As noted above, the majority of participants selected "friend" and "healer" as roles they closely associate with God. In fact, five out of the six participants selected the role of "friend" as being most closely associated with God.³⁸⁶ If all responses are kept, despite the fact that one participant selected four roles, then five participants also selected the role of "healer."³⁸⁷ It is worth mentioning that none of the participants selected the roles that were potentially more likely aligned with the Strict Father model. Overall, the participants seem to select roles for God that, according to their descriptions, tend to lean towards the possibility of being associated with roles of a Nurturant Parent model that prioritizes empathy and nurturance. For example, their descriptions include ideas of God as a community organizer who feeds people, as a friend who would not have a

³⁸⁴ B118

³⁸⁵ E914

³⁸⁶ These numbers may be higher than the general public. While the concept of God as "friend" is common, it seems to be a concept for God that may be in decline. In 1984, when asked to describe God when presented with a series of contrasting roles, 29% of people in the United States selected "friend" and only 18% selected "king." In 2008, when asked the same question, only 18% of people in the United States selected "friend" and 23% selected "king." Ted Olsen, "Go Figure," *Christianity Today* 53, no. 12 (December 2009): 14-18. 4p. The survey from which he draws can be found in the General Social Survey here: NORC at the University of Chicago, "General Social Survey," <https://gssdataexplorer.norc.org/variables/337/vshow>.

³⁸⁷ The General Social Survey asked about God as Creator versus Healer between the years 1984 and 1986. At that time, people in the United States were less inclined to select God primarily as Healer. The fact that the participants overwhelmingly selected healer is interesting to note. See more here: NORC at the University of Chicago, "General Social Survey," <https://gssdataexplorer.norc.org/variables/338/vshow>.

“preconceived agenda” and would be “non-judgemental,” and as a healer who would be about “listening and someone who can understand what is happening in my heart,” or a grand/mother “for nurturing.” That being said, more research would be needed to verify this and also compare it with responses of those who hold a Strict Father model of God.

Interview Section: Safe-Making Concepts for the Divine

This section of the interview tried to understand what concepts for God may cause a survivor to feel safe or less safe. Is a Catholic women survivor’s sense of safety related to the cognitive model with which she is presented in a ministerial setting? The question for this section was:

Question: People believe many things about the Divine and these beliefs are put into concepts that you may hear people say in everyday conversation, read in spirituality books, or sing about in church. I invite you to imagine being at church and a minister says the following statements. Tell me if the following statements help you to feel more safe or less safe.

The participants were presented with the following ten statements and, for purposes of this paper, they have been coded in parenthesis with their potential alignment with a Strict Father or Nurturant Parent model. The coding in parenthesis was not present during the interviews.

1. Surrender yourself to Jesus. (Strict Father)
2. Jesus became human to show us how to obey God’s commands. (Strict Father)
3. Jesus became human to show us how to care for others. (Nurturant Parent)
4. In times of suffering, God is testing us to make us stronger. (Strict Father)
5. Not my will, but God’s will. (Strict Father)
6. The Spirit helps us strongly stand up to evil and resist temptations. (Strict Father)
7. Give yourself to Jesus. (Strict Father)
8. In times of suffering, God empathizes with us and shows compassion for us. (Nurturant Parent)
9. God listens to me and helps me know what to do. (Nurturant Parent)
10. The Spirit helps us understand and care for others. (Nurturant Parent)

The participants were invited to respond with one of the following options on a Likert scale as to how they felt about the statement: “very unsafe,” “somewhat unsafe,” “neither safe nor unsafe,” “somewhat safe,” and “very safe.” The following figure reflects the responses. For the figure and ease of analysis, “Very Unsafe” and “Somewhat Unsafe” have been combined within the category of “Unsafe.” “Very safe” and “Somewhat Safe” have been combined into the category of “Safe.”

Figure 4
Participant Responses to Safe-Making Concepts for the Divine

	1-Strict	2-Strict	3-Nurturant	4-Strict	5-Strict	6-Strict	7-Strict	8-Nurturant	9-Nurturant	10-Nurturant
P1	Unsafe	Neither	Safe	Unsafe	Unsafe	Unsafe	Unsafe	Safe	Safe	Safe
P2	Unsafe	Neither	Safe	Neither	Unsafe	Neither	Unsafe	Safe	Safe	Safe
P3	Safe	Safe	Safe	Safe	Safe	Safe	Safe	Safe	Safe	Safe
P4	Neither	Safe	Safe	Safe	Safe	Neither	Neither	Safe	Neither	Safe
P5	Unsafe	Unsafe	Safe	Unsafe	Unsafe	Unsafe	Unsafe	Unsafe	Neither	Neither
P6	Safe	Unsafe	Safe	Unsafe	Neither	Safe	Safe	Safe	Safe	Safe
	3 U, 1 N, 2 S	2 U, 2 N, 2 S	6 S	3 U, 1 N, 2 S	3 U, 1 N, 2 S	2 U, 2 N, 2 S	3 U, 1 N, 2 S	1 U, 5 S	2 N, 4 S	1 N, 5 S

P=Participant
U/Unsafe=Very Unsafe or Somewhat Unsafe
N=Neither Unsafe nor Safe
S/Safe=Very Safe or Somewhat Safe

Removing the responses of “neither unsafe nor safe,” for the six statements that were internally coded as potentially aligned with a Strict Father model (numbered 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 7 and colored yellow), none of the statements had more than two participants who believed they felt explicitly “somewhat safe” or “very safe.” Removing the responses of “neither unsafe nor safe,” for the statements that were internally coded as potentially aligned with a Nurturant Parent model (numbered 3, 8, 9, 10 and colored green), the majority of participants said they felt explicitly “somewhat safe” or “very safe,” with only one participant who noted that one of these statements felt unsafe. Stating this another way, the statements that helped the majority of participants feel *safe* were the four that were internally coded as potentially aligned with the Nurturant Parent model:

#3-Jesus became human to show us how to care for others.

- #8-In times of suffering, God empathizes with us and shows compassion for us.
- #9-God listens to me and helps me know what to do.
- #10-The Spirit helps us understand and care for others.

It is worth noting that the statement where there was unanimous agreement among participants that they felt safe was #3: “Jesus became human to show us how to care for others.” For this small group of participants, they generally feel safer with theological concepts that tend to reflect a possible Nurturant Parent model. Further study could be done with a larger sample size to see whether these findings hold and whether feelings of safety and unsafety are correlated more so with abuse survivors versus those who have not experienced abuse. It is also worth further study to see if those who hold a Strict Father model, whether abuse survivors and/or those who have not experienced abuse, feel safer with Strict Father theological statements or whether they, too, feel safer with Nurturant Parent theological statements.

It is also worth raising the question of whether who is delivering the statement may have an impact on the person’s sense of safety. For example, one participant during the exercise shared, “It depends what comes before this and after this.... I could feel very *unsafe* if it were a priest who was very letter of the law.”³⁸⁸ More research could be done to see whether the perceived cognitive model of the person delivering the statement has significant impact on the felt sense of safety in the person receiving the statement.

It should also be noted that one participant said she felt safe with every concept that was listed. The way she responded was an outlier compared with the other participants and could be an area for further study. She was among the participants who did not mention abuse in her childhood and it is worth future exploration whether

³⁸⁸ E1112

exposure to abuse in one's younger years or other reasons may more deeply impact a person's sensitivity to safety as related to cognitive models for God.

While the results of this question are not statistically significant, it is nonetheless worth noting that these six participants who lean toward a Nurturant Parent cognitive model, and possibly also lean toward a Nurturant Parent model for God, also generally tend to feel *safer* with theological concepts that reflect a Nurturant Parent model and, for some, at times *less safe* with theological concepts that reflect a Strict Father model. Knowing that safety is the foundation of a person being able to move forward in their healing from abuse, these findings have potentially significant pastoral implications.

Interview Section: Jesus Christ as Trauma Survivor

This section of the interview looked at whether concepts of Jesus Christ as a survivor of trauma may be of comfort to the participants who self-identified as Catholic women relational abuse survivors. As noted in the previous chapter, similar questions have been asked of Catholic, and previously Catholic, sexual abuse survivors as part of research conducted by Figueroa and Tombs.³⁸⁹ However, this thesis project was designed to explore an additional layer: whether one's cognitive model may impact a survivor's response to the idea of Jesus as a fellow survivor. For example, are people with a Nurturant Parent model for God, with its top moral priority being empathy, more comforted by Jesus who suffers trauma and empathizes with their suffering? On the other hand, are people with a Strict Father model for God, with its top moral priority being

³⁸⁹ See Rocío Figueroa and David Tombs, "Recognizing Jesus as a Victim of Sexual Abuse: Responses from Sodalicio Survivors in Peru," *Religion and Gender* 10, no. 1 (2020): 57–75.; See also Rocío Figueroa, and David Tombs, "Seeing His Innocence, I See My Innocence," in *When Did We See You Naked?: Jesus as a Victim of Sexual Abuse*, eds. Jayme R. Reaves, David Tombs, and Rocío Figueroa (London: SCM Press, 2021), 287-312.

strength, less comforted by Jesus who suffers trauma because it shows weakness? While the latter concept could not be explored with this group of participants who leaned toward a Nurturant Parent model, further research could be done in the future among those with a Strict Father model and their perceptions of Jesus Christ as trauma survivor.

This section of the interview was started by sharing a statement about Jesus as a trauma survivor with the participants:

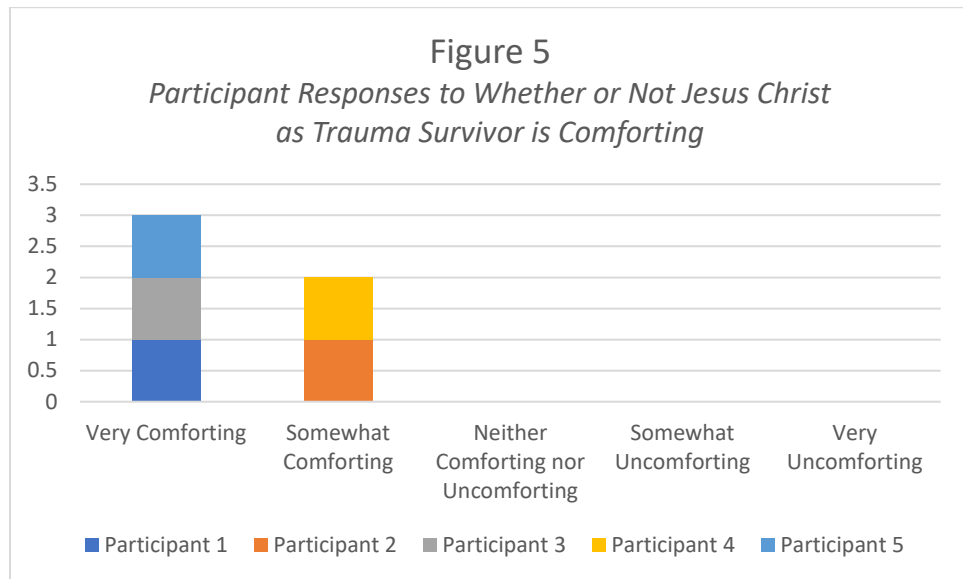
There are Christian scholars who recognize that Jesus can be viewed as a trauma survivor due to the crucifixion. These scholars recognize that Jesus may be a model for abuse survivors to show a path toward healing and how to live with one's wounds.

After this was read aloud, each participant was asked three questions and were offered a Likert scale of potential answers. They were also given the opportunity to provide extended responses, or comments, to their selected answer. One participant did not respond to the given potential answers, but rather chose to provide only an extended response for each question so those responses will not be indicated in the following figures, but her extended responses will be included below with the other participants' responses.

Question 1: Is it comforting or not comforting to know that Jesus is a trauma survivor?

For this question about whether it is comforting or not to know that Jesus is a trauma survivor, the participants could reply “very comforting,” “somewhat comforting,” “neither comforting nor uncomfortable,” “somewhat uncomfortable,” or “very uncomfortable,” and/or give an extended response. Of the five participants who chose a response from the Likert scale, three participants responded “very comforting” and two responded “somewhat comforting.” One participant did not give a response on the Likert

scale but chose to give an extended response that is shared further below. See the results in visual form in Figure 5.



All the participants, whether via the Likert scale or the extended responses, shared that Jesus Christ as trauma survivor could be comforting to some extent to them. One participant, upon being asked the question, responded: “Oh, wow! I think that would be comforting,” and then elaborated, “Well, it has to do with that being fully human and fully divine. And the humanity of understanding what’s, what it is like to be abused. There’s a connection there, and makes him more relatable, way more relatable.”³⁹⁰ Another participant shared a similar sentiment that Jesus knew what she was going through, saying, “...I think it’s the very fact that when I was in my trauma, knowing that I didn’t have to express it, because Jesus already knew what it was like, yeah, and that he was a survivor, he was, not only that he was a survivor, but he was healed and I trusted

³⁹⁰ A523

him to heal me.”³⁹¹ The participant who did not give an answer from the Likert scale, instead, shared a story about a vision that she had more than two decades ago, saying:

I was losing a friendship that I really cared about and I remember saying, ‘Jesus,’ you know, my fist in the air, ‘When did you ever have to grieve a relationship?’ And I was struck and I couldn’t believe it. All of a sudden, I saw the cross, the purple, kind of around it... I had to sit down, and there was no words, but the message was ‘The cross was not only about sins of omission and sins of commission, but it was grieving about what might have been.’³⁹²

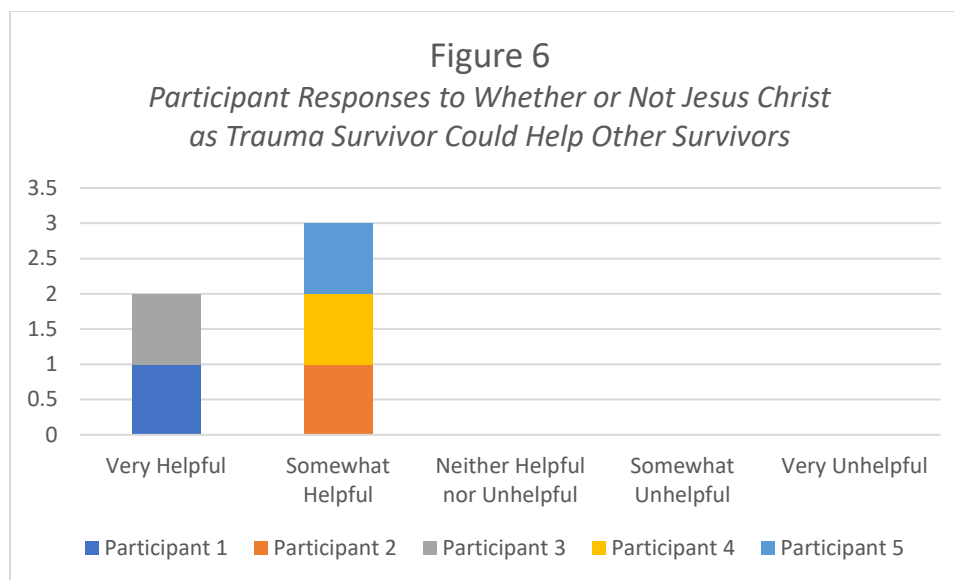
Her story reveals a recognition of grief in the passion story, one to which she felt she could relate to her own grieving. For the participants in this project, it seems that Jesus as a fellow trauma survivor was comforting because his journey was relatable to their own journeys.

Question 2: Whether or not it is helpful for you, do you think that the idea of Jesus as a trauma survivor could help other survivors?

For this question about whether the idea of Jesus as a trauma survivor could help other survivors, the participants could reply “very helpful,” “somewhat helpful,” “neither helpful nor unhelpful,” “somewhat unhelpful,” or “very unhelpful,” and/or give an extended response. Of the five participants who chose a response from the Likert scale, two responded “very helpful” and three responded “somewhat helpful.” One participant did not give a response on the Likert scale but chose to give an extended response that is shared further below. See the results of the Likert responses in visual form in Figure 6.

³⁹¹ F256

³⁹² E1462



All the participants who gave a response on the Likert scale or in an extended response felt that the concept of Jesus Christ as trauma survivor could be helpful to some extent to other survivors. For example, one of the participants shared in her extended response:

I have the impression that many trauma survivors, well, maybe before they get to the point of survivors, they feel isolated. I've heard the comment many times that, 'I thought I was the only one,' and I think that it's, it's easier to survive many of life's emotions if you know that others can empathize with what you're going through. So I think that the idea that Jesus is a trauma survivor would be very helpful to that; very comforting.³⁹³

This participant saw that Jesus Christ as trauma survivor could help abuse survivors know that they are not alone. The thought that this concept could be helpful for other survivors was echoed throughout the expanded responses, but the potential for its harm was also expressed by multiple participants who said it depended on the context. For example, one participant said, "I think it would be way more helpful than saying he came for our sins...." but she went on to note that while it, "could be very helpful to people.

³⁹³ C158

I've also seen it be very awful for people, I mean, like awful the way the Church has talked about it. I think, and, and this is not a 'yes or no' question. It would be depending on how it's presented. It could be very helpful. If it's presented in the old way, it could be more traumatic."³⁹⁴ Similarly, another participant noted that it would be helpful "If they can embrace Jesus as a trauma survivor."³⁹⁵ However, she cautioned:

If Jesus is just God and God comes with power...and rules, and, and they can't embrace the compassion of Jesus that Jesus had for the woman at the well, the woman caught in adultery, the, the, oh, the lepers, the blind people, and, and really embrace that. Because what I hear coming from people who professed to be Christian, but letter of the law, doesn't equate with what I see and hear in the Gospel. So if they, it's how people are equating Jesus and the Gospel. Is it a bunch of rules or do they, do they really feel and embrace Jesus as the compassionate healer, understanding where people are coming from?³⁹⁶

This participant shares that it depends on someone's concept of Jesus, whether he is Jesus "of rules" or "compassionate healer." Reflecting a similar concern, another participant shared:

I think it depends on where someone is in their trauma, that I wouldn't, I know it was helpful for me, but I don't know what it would be like for another person because I would, yeah, because I know Jesus' trauma is so sensationalized and we're so focused on it. I think the danger can be that we should go through trauma. I think that's what I hear from some people with some theologies. So I think that I, I would always, just in my own practice, like, I always, you always have to start with love. Is it a safe relationship first before we can know if it's helpful for another person? And what is the theology of what the crucifixion means to them, I think is really important to know before we know if it can be a helpful image.³⁹⁷

This participant also believes the concept of Jesus Christ as trauma survivor could be helpful, but it depends on the context such as "where someone is in their trauma" and what type of "theologies" and whether it is a "safe relationship first."

³⁹⁴ A533

³⁹⁵ E1533

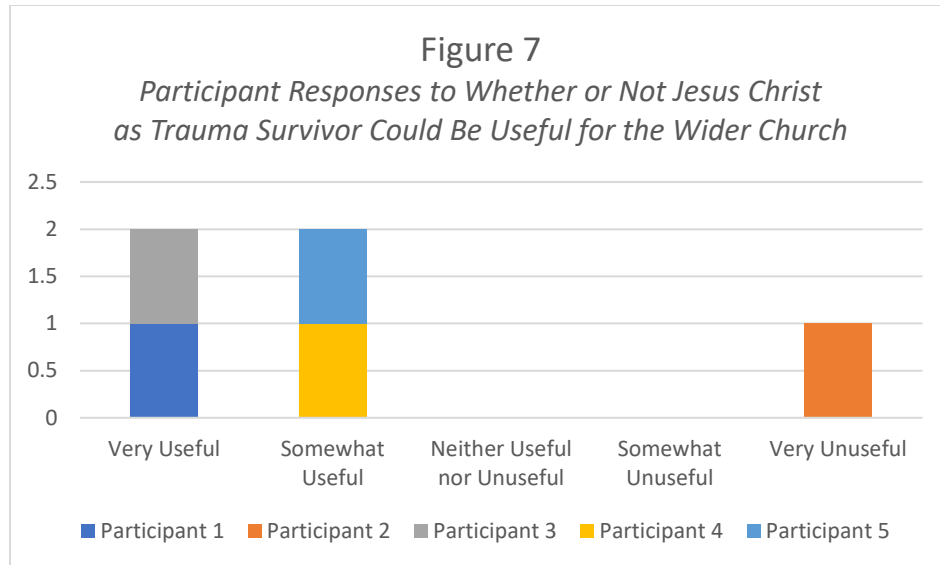
³⁹⁶ E1534

³⁹⁷ F268

All the participants who selected a given answer and all those who gave an extended response thought that the concept of Jesus Christ as trauma survivor could be helpful to other survivors. However, multiple participants expressed concerns about how it may be shared and whether it could do more harm. There seems to be a recognition that the potential harm could arise from, in part, what type of theologies are held by someone. Without naming cognitive models, there seems to be a sense that Jesus Christ as trauma survivor could be viewed from a Nurturant Parent lens where he is able to empathize with other people who have suffered (reflecting the Nurturant Parent moral priority of empathy) or through a Strict Father lens where “God comes with power...and rules,” as the participant noted above (reflecting the Strict Father moral priority of strength). What model of Jesus is presented with the concept of him as a trauma survivor has potentially significant pastoral implications.

Question 3: Do you think that the idea could be useful for the wider church, for those who minister in the church and/or other Catholics?

For this question about whether Jesus Christ as trauma survivor could be a useful idea for the wider church, the participants could reply “very useful,” “somewhat useful,” “neither useful nor unuseful,” “somewhat unuseful,” or “very unuseful,” and/or give an extended response. Of the five participants who chose a response from the Likert scale, two responded “very useful,” two responded “somewhat useful,” and one responded “very unuseful.” One participant did not give a response on the Likert scale but chose to give an extended response that is shared further below. See the results in visual form in Figure 7.



The majority of participants were positive about the concept’s usefulness for the wider church. One responded, “Yes, because we come from different backgrounds, and some people have never encountered trauma. It doesn’t matter, you know, what the background is, and others have, you know, and if we have one set rule for different kinds of situations, I think we’re, we’re not very effective.”³⁹⁸ She thought the concept could be helpful for a diversity of people. Another participant emphasized its benefit as “humanizing,” sharing:

Well, what I’m thinking is, it’s, it’s very humanizing. I, I think part of the disconnect between Church as a practice and churches like Christianity and Catholicism as a way of life is the, the difficulty in grasping the humanity of Jesus, and I think that, I mean, obviously ‘trauma survivor’ is something only a human is going to.... By and large, I think trauma is a human emotion, and I think being able to grasp or to, to visualize Jesus as a trauma survivor would be very comforting and, and helpful with the process of healing.³⁹⁹

This participant also could see the benefit of the concept for the wider church, that it could be “comforting” and “helpful with the process of healing.”

³⁹⁸ D509

³⁹⁹ C165

There were some participants who gave extended responses that lifted up both the positive pastoral potential of the concept but also had concerns about its potential to be used against survivors.⁴⁰⁰ One participant reflected, “Yes, but depending. I, it’s hard for me to give a pure answer because again it can be twisted. See, I was brought up, and I don’t believe this anymore, but the more you suffered with Jesus, the closer you were to God. So it was a badge of honor to suffer and be a victim.”⁴⁰¹ Another participant expressed similarly mixed feelings, saying, “I would say somewhat useful with a big comment about formation, good theological training. I would say, ‘somewhat useful,’ not ‘do more trauma.’”⁴⁰² Another participant thought that if she heard it from the right pastor that it would be OK, saying, “I would love to hear what Father Oldershaw and... Father Pflieger how they would explain this and then I think I could embrace it.”⁴⁰³ But she shared the concern that depending on the way the concept was shared, survivors might erroneously think, “‘Okay, I guess I have to die in order to be the trauma survivor.’ Well, that doesn’t sound good.”⁴⁰⁴

⁴⁰⁰ The concerns raised by participants in this section reflect similar concerns raised by feminist theologians. While not using the language of cognitive models, feminist theologians have pointed toward the need for a God who empathizes with the suffering of creatures but at the same time rejects a Strict Father model that demands suffering in the name of character building. Feminist theologian Elizabeth Johnson writes: “From a feminist perspective, the idea that God might permit great suffering while at the same time remaining unaffected by the distress of beloved creatures is not seriously imaginable. The connected self typical of women’s way of being in the world demands a different concept of God in the midst of suffering. But here a new caveat presents itself. Predicating suffering of God in such a way that suffering becomes a value in itself, or that God becomes essentially weak or powerless, and then holding up this model for emulation is a trap that ensnares women’s struggle for equality and full humanity. Statements about ‘God’s power that is weakness,’ claims about the Father’s love show in Jesus’ abandonment on the cross, assertions that God was never so great as in humiliation, never so glorious as in self-surrender, and never so powerful as when impotent—such themes abound in current reformulations of impassibility and omnipotence.... when spoken to women, stress on the powerless suffering of God is particularly dangerous.” Elizabeth A. Johnson, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse* (New York: Crossroad, 1996), 253.

⁴⁰¹ A549

⁴⁰² F279

⁴⁰³ E1575. Father Oldershaw and Father Pflieger, both priests in the Archdiocese of Chicago, are known in certain circles in the archdiocese for their ministry in support of those who are marginalized.

⁴⁰⁴ E1595

For the participant who responded “Very Unseful,” she shared an extended response about the concept’s potential to further harm survivors:

I don’t think it would for the wider church, because I think there’s a huge amount of ignorance about the, the true nature of abuse within relationships. And I feel that there are people who don’t really want to think about it too much, and would say, ‘Well, if Jesus could get over it, why can’t you?’ Because it’s a huge amount of post-abuse! Well, post-abuse problems all the way from PTSD to anxiety or to, you know, these are things that can’t really be, you can’t really shake them off just because somebody else got over it. Everybody has their own path to follow, and I think overall a lot more education about the nature of abuse; that there aren’t two sides to a story necessarily, and that the question, ‘Why don’t, why didn’t she just leave?’ is one that really is, is something that you hear quite a lot and I feel like saying, treating the wider, showing Jesus as an example of, to the wider community, of trauma that was overcome wouldn’t be all that helpful given the extent of ignorance and a certain amount of denial and a tendency to think there must be a provocation. If a man abuses a woman in some way, that she must have been a nag, or in some way provoked what was, what was done.⁴⁰⁵

This participant who earlier noted that the concept of Jesus Christ as a trauma survivor could be comforting to her and could be helpful to other survivors, was clear where she would draw a boundary. She did not think the concept would be useful for the wider church due to the potential that it would be used against abuse survivors. She shares the concern that some could erroneously think, as she powerfully put it, “Well, if Jesus could get over it, why can’t you?”

It is clear that while the concept was generally seen as comforting to these participants and helpful for other survivors, there is concern about its potential to be used against survivors. Without using the language of cognitive models, there seems to be an underlying sense that the concept of Jesus Christ as trauma survivor depends on the model through which it is shared. For example, if the concept is shared through a Nurturant Parent lens that values empathy and, thus, is “humanizing,” as one of the above

⁴⁰⁵ B175

participants said, it seems to be comforting and helpful. However, if the concept is shared through a Strict Father lens that values strength and makes people think survivors are weak and wonder “why didn’t she just leave,” as one of the participants said above, there is concern that it could be used for further harm. The cognitive model through which the*logical concepts are shared may have possible implications for whether or not survivors are engaged with helpful or harmful pastoral ministry.

Conclusion

This third chapter shared the voices of the participants through each section of the interview, reflecting the meta-method of *remembrance and mourning*, the narration stage that takes place in Judith Herman’s second stage of healing. Moreover, the chapter also began to make preliminary connections between a survivor’s cognitive model, her understanding of God, and her sense of safety, reflecting Judith Herman’s third stage of healing called *reconnection*.

In the first section of this chapter, it was discovered that all six participants lean toward a Nurturant Parent model for God, with one participant likely being what researchers term a bi-conceptual who appears to slightly lean toward a Nurturant Parent model.

In the second section, it was learned that all participants consider themselves practicing Catholics and are connected with a local Catholic faith community. Additionally in this section, the participants shared what makes them feel safe in their faith community, such as feeling connected to their community and feeling seen, heard, and respected for who they are. This section also explored what makes some participants feel unsafe, which included behaviors by those in church authority such as a lack of

listening, hierarchical perspectives, and literal interpretations without providing context. Also in this section, it was learned that the four participants who mentioned during the interview that they had an experience, or experiences, of abuse during their childhood or youth shared that their preferred names for God were related to their healing journey. These same four participants also had a name for God that either currently or in the past felt less comfortable or less safe. Finally in this section, the participants were invited to describe how God interacts with them and each participant shared encounters with God that may be reflective of a Nurturant Parent cognitive model for God. Overall, this section helped explore ideas of safety for survivors, both related to their worship sites as well as names for God.

In section three and four of this chapter, the participants offered, selected, and described characteristics and roles for God. Based on the responses, there is a possibility that their cognitive models may relate to their perceptions of God. Perhaps most surprising was the near unanimity of selected roles for God as being “friend” and “healer.” This gives weight to the learnings above that show that some Catholic women relational abuse survivors not only can name what feels safe or unsafe in their spiritual lives, but that certain ways of understanding God may resonate more than others.

In the fifth section of this chapter, the participants were invited to reflect on the*logical concepts related to God and what makes them feel safe. The statements that helped the majority of participants to feel safe were the four statements that were internally coded as potentially aligned with the Nurturant Parent model. Again, while not statistically significant, this points towards the potential that cognitive models, reflected in the*logy and often used in ministry, can impact a survivor’s sense of safety.

Finally, in the sixth section of this chapter, the participants were presented with the concept of Jesus Christ as trauma survivor and invited to reflect on whether that could be a concept that was comforting to them, helpful for other abuse survivors, and/or useful for the wider church. The majority of participants responded that the concept was comforting to them and could be helpful to other abuse survivors. However, the majority of participants also had concerns that the concept could be used to further harm abuse survivors when presented through a certain lens. This will be explored further in chapter four.

Overall, this chapter helped to shine a light on the potential importance of cognitive models in ministry and their relationship to safety for survivors. The research explored the experiences of Catholic women relational abuse survivors who hold a Nurturant Parent cognitive model and found what could be a meaningful connection for some participants between cognitive models and a sense of safety in relation to one's faith community, one's relationship with God, and the theology one may encounter in ministerial settings. For the majority of the participants, particularly those who suffered early experiences of abuse, a sense of safety may be more deeply related to one's cognitive model and, in turn, may have an impact on what may help a survivor to heal in the context of one's spirituality. The potential pastoral implications of these findings will be explored in the next chapter.

Chapter Four: Insights and Pastoral Implications

The third chapter shared the responses of the research participants and found that there may be a meaningful connection between cognitive models and a felt sense of safety for some Catholic women relational abuse survivors with a Nurturant Parent model. For some of these survivors, they feel less safe when presented with the*logical concepts rooted in a Strict Father model. Since safety is the foundation for healing from abuse, if certain cognitive models can diminish a survivor's sense of safety, for the benefit of their spiritual lives and their healing in general, it may be beneficial for ministers to be aware of cognitive models and mindful of their use in order to better help survivors.⁴⁰⁶ This fourth chapter will explore the possible pastoral implications of this research utilizing the fourth stage of the meta-method which is justice. Based on these insights, the chapter concludes with a the*logical sketch of God through a Nurturant Parent model that takes seriously the perspective of relational abuse survivors and the trauma they experience.⁴⁰⁷ It may offer entry points of words and concepts that could be used in ministry with survivors.⁴⁰⁸

⁴⁰⁶ I use the term "healing" to connote its ongoing nature. For most trauma survivors, healing is a lifelong journey.

⁴⁰⁷ This the*logical sketch serves as the grounding toward what I hope to eventually craft into a spirituality of resilient love that may support survivors looking for a spirituality that will support them in their healing journey.

⁴⁰⁸ I feel it is important to make two statements at the outset of this chapter. First, while I will be offering a the*logical sketch of God through a Nurturant Parent model, it should not be offered to a survivor wholesale. A survivor needs the space to express who God is to her and to develop her own words and concepts over time. I offer the the*logical sketch to simply provide words or images that may help, when appropriate, in various ministerial contexts. For example, a priest may elect in a homily to draw from the sketch and speak of Jesus as someone who suffered the trauma of losing his cousin John and took on a survivor mission, or speak of the Spirit of Resilient Love who guides us through life. Second, I also feel it necessary to state that while Catholics in ministry can spiritually support survivors, this should never be a substitute for the other kinds of support that they need in terms of psychological counseling, medical interventions, etc.

Judith Herman's Fourth Stage of Healing: Justice

Judith Herman added a fourth stage to a survivor's healing journey in her 2023 book, *Truth and Repair*.⁴⁰⁹ She recognized, "If trauma is truly a social problem, and indeed it is, then recovery cannot be simply a private, individual matter."⁴¹⁰ As a survivor is able to express her trauma, she begins to see how her experience of harm is not isolated, but rather connected to systemic injustices found in institutions and culture, including religious traditions. Healing is not a solo journey. Herman's research shows that healing is more possible when done with a moral community that can serve as a witness to the survivor's narrative of trauma, respond to the survivor's needs, and seek justice in order to transform the very institutions and cultures in which the original harm is rooted. Herman notes that this fourth stage requires "...bystanders and the larger community to recognize their own moral responsibility and to take action in solidarity with those who have been harmed."⁴¹¹ It is a survivor's moral community, such as a family or faith community, a neighborhood or civil organization, that can make the difference in whether a survivor is able to experience justice and continue her healing. A survivor needs to feel that the wider community shares her "...feelings of hurt and outrage, [will] mobilize to help the victim, and [will] hold the perpetrator accountable."⁴¹² Only then may trust be restored and communal bonds repaired. From a Catholic spiritual perspective, it is this

⁴⁰⁹ Judith L. Herman, MD, *Truth and Repair: How Trauma Survivors Envision Justice* (New York City: Basic Books, 2023).

⁴¹⁰ Herman, *Truth and Repair*, 2.

⁴¹¹ Herman, *Truth and Repair*, 37.

⁴¹² Herman, *Truth and Repair*, 48.

stage that gives a glimpse of the kin-dom⁴¹³ where God's family is healed and reconciled.

Herman eloquently notes:

Justice in some form is necessary in order to heal the victim's profound sense of humiliation and abandonment by her moral community. For this reason, the pursuit of justice, with its promise to restore respect for the victim's humanity, must be a major part of the process of healing from psychological trauma. In standing by the survivor, implicated bystanders reclaim their own moral standing. As the survivor puts down her burden of shame, the community puts down its own burden of guilt for its previous indifference or, worse, its complicity with the perpetrator. In restoring honor to the survivor, the moral community also restores its own honor.⁴¹⁴

A survivor's striving for justice as part of her healing cannot be done alone. The striving must be done in community. If a survivor is to experience healing, a community must also respond.

This important insight in Judith Herman's fourth stage of healing, that of *justice*, serves as the meta-method for this final chapter that addresses the pastoral implications of the research findings and how Catholic ministers, as leaders within survivors' moral communities, may respond to what the survivors have shared in this research. As such, this chapter will propose four insights gleaned from the research that was presented in the previous chapter, as well as potential pastoral implications of these insights, in order to help those in Catholic ministry better help survivors in their healing, particularly in the spiritual context. This chapter will conclude with an exploration of the the*logical concept of Jesus Christ as trauma survivor, a concept that was found in the research to be

⁴¹³ I use the term "kin-dom" based on Ana Maria Isasi Diaz' use of it. She writes that the word kin-dom "makes it clear that when the fullness of God becomes a day-to-day reality in the world at large, we will all be sisters and brothers—kin to each other; we will indeed be the family of God." Ana Maria Isasi-Diaz, *Mujerista Theology: A Theology for the Twenty-First Century* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1996), 103

⁴¹⁴ Herman, *Truth and Repair*, 53.

of potential benefit for some Catholic women relational abuse survivors, the use of which may serve as one small step on the pathway toward justice.

Thesis Project Insights and Potential Pastoral Implications

I propose that there are four potentially significant insights with pastoral implications of this thesis project's research, ones that would be beneficial for Catholic ministers to understand and implement in order to better help Catholic women relational abuse survivors who lean toward Nurturant Parent models. While the small scale of this research does not permit firm conclusions, should the research be confirmed in larger studies, I suggest the following considerations for Catholic ministers:

- 1) **First, Catholic women who are relational abuse survivors—like the general population—hold cognitive models. As suggested by Lakoff and Sanders,⁴¹⁵ these cognitive models may relate to their understanding of God and how God interacts with them.⁴¹⁶ Catholic ministers could help Catholic women who are relational abuse survivors by learning about cognitive models and how they relate to the*logy and spirituality.**
- 2) **Second, Catholic women who are relational abuse survivors can identify what makes them feel safe or unsafe in their spiritual lives.⁴¹⁷ Catholic ministers could help Catholic women who are relational abuse survivors by listening to and practicing what makes them feel safe in their spiritual lives, since safety is the foundational stage of healing.**
- 3) **Third, bringing cognitive models and safety together, it was found that some Catholic women relational abuse survivors who hold Nurturant Parent**

⁴¹⁵ Both Lakoff and Sanders have identified the way that cognitive models serve as a lens for how people understand the*logy and spirituality. For Lakoff, see George Lakoff, *Moral Politics: How Liberals and Conservatives Think* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996), 245-262. Also see George Lakoff, *Don't Think of an Elephant: Know Your Values and Frame the Debate* (White River Junction: Chelsea Green Publishing, 2004), 102-103. For Sanders, see John Sanders, *Theology in the Flesh: How Embodiment and Culture Shape the Way We Think about Truth, Morality, and God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2016) and John Sanders, *Embracing Prodigals: Overcoming Authoritative Religion by Embodying Jesus' Nurturing Grace* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2020).

⁴¹⁶ This insight is based on the findings in chapter three, section *Family and Parenting Beliefs for Cognitive Models* (starting on page 105), section *Safe-Making Characteristics for the Divine* (starting on page 127), and *Safe-Making Roles for the Divine* (starting on page 134).

⁴¹⁷ This insight is based on the findings in chapter three, section *Safe Participation and Names for the Divine* (starting on page 108), particularly questions 2 and 3 of that section.

cognitive models feel more safe when presented with Nurturant Parent cognitive models in the*logical concepts and less safe when presented with Strict Father cognitive models in the*logical concepts.⁴¹⁸ *Catholic ministers could help these survivors feel safer—the foundational stage of healing—by using Nurturant Parent models in the*logical concepts in ministry with them.*

- 4) **Fourth, understanding Jesus Christ as a trauma survivor may be a comforting and helpful concept for Catholic women relational abuse survivors with Nurturant Parent cognitive models.**⁴¹⁹ *Catholic ministers could help these survivors by using this concept in ministry with them when shared through a Nurturant Parent model.*

The remainder of this section will explore these four research insights (listed above in bolded text), as well as how Catholic ministers may pastorally respond to the insights.

Insight #1 – Pastoral Implication related to Cognitive Models

Catholic women who are relational abuse survivors—like the general population—hold cognitive models. As suggested by Lakoff and Sanders, these cognitive models may relate to their understanding of God and how God interacts with them. *Catholic ministers could help Catholic women who are relational abuse survivors by learning about cognitive models and how they relate to the*logy and spirituality.*

Drawing upon the interview section that evaluated a participant’s cognitive model, it was discovered that all six participants lean toward a Nurturant Parent model for God, with one of those participants likely being what researchers term a bi-conceptual who slightly leans towards a Nurturant Parent model. As such, these Catholic women who are relational abuse survivors are similar to the general population in that they hold one of Lakoff’s cognitive models (Nurturant Parent or Strict Father) or are bi-conceptuals.

⁴¹⁸ This insight is based on the findings in chapter three, section *Safe-Making Concepts for the Divine* (starting on page 141).

⁴¹⁹ This insight is based on the findings in chapter three, section *Jesus Christ as Trauma Survivor* (starting on page 144).

Not only did the participants hold a particular cognitive model, but that cognitive model may impact their understanding of God and how God interacts with them, as found in the responses in the previous chapter to the following questions relating to God:⁴²⁰

- In your own words, how would you describe ____ and how ____ interacts with you?
- What are one or two characteristics that you associate with ____? And tell me what they mean to you. And if you can't think of any at this moment, that's fine. In the next screen, I will offer some examples.
- Looking at this list of possible characteristics for ____, what would you select as two characteristics that you closely associate with ____?
- In addition to characteristics, many people also associate different roles with _____. What roles do you associate with ____? And tell me what they mean to you. And if you can't think of any at this moment, that's fine. In the next screen I will offer some examples.
- Looking at this list of roles for _____, what would you select as two roles that you most closely associate with _____?

These questions tried to better understand how the participants understood God and whether their understanding may be tied to their cognitive model. For example, a participant selected the characteristic of “listening” for God and reflected on her selection by saying, “I feel heard. I feel that there is relationship now, where I didn't feel that there was relationship before, there were just rules. And the relationship is important. I think listening has more to do with relationship and caring and healing.”⁴²¹ Her emphasis on a relationship of “listening” reflects a Nurturant Parent model of God where “...just as Nurturant parents are open to input from their children, so is God. God listens to the input of humans and is open to persuasion.”⁴²² While more studies are necessary, this small sample seems to align with the work of Lakoff and Sanders who have proposed that

⁴²⁰ The blanks in the following question were filled in during the interview process by the name for God that was selected by the participant.

⁴²¹ E690

⁴²² Sanders, *Embracing Prodigals*, 34.

cognitive models impact one's God concepts. Conversely, the two models of God, both the Nurturant Parent God model and Strict Father God model, "directly reflect[s] the social values of the models of the family on which they are based" which are the Nurturant Parent cognitive model and Strict Father cognitive model.⁴²³ One's cognitive model and one's God model are related. That being said, it should be noted that humans are exposed to both models and may use elements from both models to comprehend the world around them. However, among the general population there seems to be a tendency to subconsciously lean toward one model, as has been noted earlier in this paper in the research of Feinberg. As Lakoff has noted, it seems that people generally lean toward aligned models in various areas of their lives such as beliefs about politics, family, and religion as a way to avoid cognitive dissonance.⁴²⁴ Certainly in this small sample, one's cognitive model does, indeed, seem to have some relation to one's God model.

Catholic ministers might help Catholic women who are relational abuse survivors by learning about cognitive models and their relation to the*logy and spirituality. For example, seminaries, divinity schools, clinical pastoral education programs, spiritual direction programs, and other ministerial training settings might teach cognitive models in order to help ministers identify cognitive models, meet people where they are, and over time potentially invite individuals to move toward a model that may better help them in their healing.⁴²⁵ They could draw upon the work of those who are writing at the

⁴²³ Lakoff, *Moral Politics*, 261.

⁴²⁴ Lakoff, *Moral Politics*, 14-16, 159-160.

⁴²⁵ Let me be clear that this is not done by offering Lakoff's models. This is shared with the assumption that one is engaged in pastoral ministry and, over time, may help someone enhance their empathy, for themselves and others, as well as offer elements of the more helpful cognitive model. Moreover, one must recall that Herman notes that, "The first principle of recovery is the empowerment of the survivor. She must be the author and arbiter of her own recovery. Others may offer advice, support, assistance...but not cure." Judith Herman, *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence—from domestic abuse to political terror* (New York, Basic Books, 1992), 133.

intersection of cognitive linguistics and Christian the*logy or biblical interpretation, such as Lakoff, Sanders, DesCamp, and Sweetzer.⁴²⁶

Insight #2 – Pastoral Implication related to Safety

Catholic women who are relational abuse survivors can identify what makes them feel safe or unsafe in their spiritual lives. *Catholic ministers could help Catholic women who are relational abuse survivors by listening to and practicing what makes them feel safe in their spiritual lives, since safety is the foundational stage of healing.*

Drawing upon the initial research questions related to safety, Catholic women who are relational abuse survivors are able to identify that which makes them feel safe and unsafe in their spiritual lives. This is based on responses to the following safety-related questions:

- Are there things that make you feel safe in church? (or did make you feel safe in church?)
- Are there things that make you feel unsafe in church? (or made you feel unsafe in church?)
- People give the Divine many names, what name for the Divine feels most comfortable and safe to you? For example, God, Jesus, Spirit, or perhaps another descriptive or non-descriptive name for the Divine? And why?
- Is there a name for the Divine that I mentioned – God, Jesus, or Spirit – that makes you feel less comfortable or less safe? And if so, why?

These questions were not related to cognitive models, but rather intentionally look at what makes the participants feel safe in various aspects of their spiritual lives, specifically what makes them feel safe/unsafe in church and what names for God make them feel safe/unsafe.⁴²⁷ For example, multiple participants mentioned that the practice of

⁴²⁶ See Lakoff, *Moral Politics: How Liberals and Conservatives Think* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996), 245-262; See John Sanders, *Theology in the Flesh: How Embodiment and Culture Shape the Way We Think about Truth, Morality, and God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2016) and John Sanders, *Embracing Prodigals: Overcoming Authoritative Religion by Embodying Jesus' Nurturing Grace* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2020); See Mary Therese DesCamp and Eve E. Sweetser, "Metaphors for God: Why and How Do Our Choices Matter for Humans? The Application of Contemporary Cognitive Linguistics Research to the Debate on God and Metaphor," *Pastoral Psychology* 53, no. 3 (January 2005).

⁴²⁷ Safety in relationship with God and with others in the faith community are critically important. "More than anything else, being able to feel safe with other people defines mental health; safe connections are

listening by those in religious authority was important to help them feel safe. One participant shared that “the love of the people, the love of the priests, and their commitment to us as community...to listen to the people, that for me is safety.”⁴²⁸ Conversely, not being listened to by those in authority led another participant to feel unsafe. She shared, “I felt I was not listened to at all by the [Catholic Charities] counselor who was assigned to us.”⁴²⁹ This need to be heard is evidenced in Herman’s research with trauma survivors. She notes, “Trust is rebuilt only when victims see that those in a position of authority have listened to them and share in their righteous indignation. So often that is the main thing they seek.”⁴³⁰ While more research would be helpful to identify specific categories of ministerial practice that make survivors feel safe/unsafe and to determine if those relate to cognitive models, nonetheless this sample points toward the fact that survivors are able to name what feels safe and unsafe in spiritual contexts and have provided initial indications about what helps Catholic women who are relational abuse survivors with Nurturant Parent cognitive models feel secure in their spiritual lives.

Catholic ministers could help Catholic women who are relational abuse survivors by asking them what makes them feel safe or unsafe in church and/or ways of naming God that help them to feel safe or less safe, and then practicing what helps increase their sense of safety, since safety is the foundational stage of healing.⁴³¹ For example, one can

fundamental to meaningful and satisfying lives.” Bessel A. van der Kolk, M.D. *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma* (New York: Penguin Books, 2014), 354.

⁴²⁸ A80

⁴²⁹ B27

⁴³⁰ Herman, *Truth and Repair*, 52-53.

⁴³¹ See the work of Annie Imbens and Ineke Jonker on the impact of Christian images in the lives of incest survivors, the importance of letting survivors use their own God images, and pastoral methods of helping survivors disconnect their image of God from that of their perpetrator. Annie Imbens and Ineke Jonker, *Christianity and Incest* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 189-234.

see the benefit of letting survivors express their own sense of God in the work of Imbens and Jonker who studied Christian women who were incest survivors. They write that it is critical that ministers give survivors “the room to start seeking their own image of God, one with which they can be comfortable; a God whom they can love after their suffering” in order to separate out the God image that was often tied to that of their abuser from a new God image that could be healing.⁴³²

It may be helpful to remember that a trauma-informed church is one that recognizes that “[s]afety is the first-principle of trauma-informed practice” and that “[s]afety is not defined by leadership or those with more power; it is defined by the person who experienced the trauma.”⁴³³ There are a number of resources available to Catholic ministers to help them learn more about relational abuse and how to better minister to survivors. These include resources from organizations such as Awake, Catholics for Family Peace, Domestic Violence Outreach Ministry of the Archdiocese of Chicago, and FaithTrust Institute.⁴³⁴ Additionally, books from a Christian perspective that may be helpful to ministers working with survivors, in addition to those mentioned above, include those by Baldwin, Doehring, Leslie, and many others referenced in this paper.⁴³⁵

⁴³² Imbens and Jonker, *Christianity and Incest*, 210.

⁴³³ Pete Singer, “Toward a More Trauma-Informed Church Equipping Faith Communities to Prevent and Respond to Abuse,” *Currents in Theology and Mission* 51, no. 1 (January 2024), 66, 67.

⁴³⁴ See Awake Community <https://www.awakecommunity.org/start-here>; Catholics for Family Peace <https://www.catholicsforfamilypeace.org/resources.html>; Domestic Violence Outreach Ministry of the Archdiocese of Chicago <https://pvm.archchicago.org/human-dignity-solidarity/domestic-violence-outreach>; FaithTrust Institute <https://www.youtube.com/FaithTrustInstitute> (while the FaithTrust Institute does not operate at this time, a rich array of their resources remain available on their YouTube channel).

⁴³⁵ See Jennifer Baldwin, *Trauma-Sensitive Theology: Thinking Theologically in the Era of Trauma* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2018); Carrie Doehring, “Spiritual Care after Violence: Growing from Trauma with Lived Theology,” *The Table*, Biola University Center for Christian Thought, June 23, 2014, <https://cct.biola.edu/spiritual-care-violence-growing-trauma-lived-theology/>; Kristin J. Leslie, *When Violence is No Stranger: Pastoral Counseling with Survivors of Acquaintance Rape* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002).

Insight #3 – Pastoral Implications related to both Cognitive Models and Safety

Bringing cognitive models and safety together, it was found that some Catholic women relational abuse survivors who hold Nurturant Parent cognitive models feel more safe when presented with Nurturant Parent cognitive models in the*logical concepts and less safe when presented with Strict Father cognitive models in the*logical concepts. Catholic ministers could help these survivors feel safer—the foundational stage of healing—by using Nurturant Parent models in the*logical concepts in ministry with them.

Drawing upon the question related to the*logical concepts and safety, it was found that the majority of participants indicated feeling more safe when presented with the*logical concepts reflective of a Nurturant Parent cognitive model and some felt less safe when presented with theological concepts reflective of a Strict Father cognitive model. This was based on the question:

- *People believe many things about the Divine and these beliefs are put into concepts that you may hear people say in everyday conversation, read in spirituality books, or sing about in church. I invite you to imagine being at church and a minister says the following statements. Tell me if the following statements help you to feel more safe or less safe.*

This question brought together the themes of cognitive models and safety. While more research is necessary, in this small sample there were initial indications that when some Catholic women relational abuse survivors who hold a Nurturant Parent cognitive model are presented with the*logical concepts rooted in the same cognitive model, they report feeling safer; whereas when the same survivors are presented with the*logical concepts rooted in the Strict Father cognitive model, some report feeling less safe. The four statements with which the majority of participants expressed feeling safe were those that had been internally coded as potentially aligned with the Nurturant Parent model:

- #3-Jesus became human to show us how to care for others.
- #8-In times of suffering, God empathizes with us and shows compassion for us.
- #9-God listens to me and helps me know what to do.
- #10-The Spirit helps us understand and care for others.

While the author is not aware of other research that has been done specifically linking cognitive models, the*logical models, and felt safety of survivors, there has nonetheless been work done in similar areas related to God images and their impact on abuse survivors that seem to reflect the spirit of the findings in this study. Again, drawing upon the work of Imbens and Jonker who studied Christian women who were incest survivors, they note that the women they interviewed “were afraid of God’s almightiness in combination with the divine all-seeing eye. They recognized these characteristics in their own fathers who committed incest.... They thought that they must resign themselves to [the abuse], because God wanted it this way.”⁴³⁶ The majority of women in their study did not feel safe with a the*logical concept of God that had traits that could be said to be similar to Lakoff’s Strict Father God model.

Catholic ministers could help Catholic women who are relational abuse survivors who hold Nurturant Parent models to feel safer by sharing the*logical concepts rooted in a Nurturant Parent cognitive model. For many abuse survivors, elements of a Strict Father model can be devastating to their sense of safety. As the*logians Kim and Shaw note, “Many of the church’s traditional male images reinforce notions of God as a controlling power-over, one who demands total surrender.... The impact of these kinds of images on survivors of sexual violence can be profoundly deep, making God part of the problem and part of what must be survived.”⁴³⁷ Since a sense of safety is the foundational stage of the healing journey, Catholic ministers would be aiding these survivors in their

⁴³⁶ Imbens and Jonker, *Christianity and Incest*, 206.

⁴³⁷ Grace Ji-Sun Kim and Susan M. Shaw, *Surviving God: A New Vision of God through the Eyes of Sexual Abuse Survivors* (Minneapolis: Broadleaf Books, 2024), 71.

healing from abuse by sharing the*logical concepts that match the survivor's Nurturant Parent cognitive model.

Insight #4 – Pastoral Implications related to Jesus Christ as Trauma Survivor

Understanding Jesus Christ as a trauma survivor may be a comforting and helpful concept for Catholic women relational abuse survivors with Nurturant Parent cognitive models. *Catholic ministers could help these survivors by using this concept in ministry with them when shared through a Nurturant Parent model.*

Drawing upon the interview section in which the participants were asked about their thoughts on the concept of Jesus Christ as a trauma survivor, the participants agreed that it could be comforting to them and helpful to other survivors, while also cautioning that it could be used in a way that may further harm abuse survivors, particularly when presented through a particular lens. The participants shared their thoughts in response to the following questions:

- *Is it comforting or not comforting to know that Jesus is a trauma survivor?*
- *Whether or not it is helpful for you, do you think that the idea of Jesus as a trauma survivor could help other survivors?*
- *Do you think that the idea could be useful for the wider church, for those who minister in the church and/or other Catholics?*

Nearly every participant mentioned in some way that the concept could be comforting for them and possibly helpful for other survivors, but also expressed concern over whether the concept could cause more harm for some survivors when reflected through a particular lens. For example, one participant in response to the first question above, responded, "Oh, wow! I think that would be comforting," and then elaborated, "Well, it has to do with that being fully human and fully divine. And the humanity of understanding what's, what it is like to be abused. There's a connection there, and makes

him more relatable, way more relatable.”⁴³⁸ However, in response to the last question listed above, she shared that she could see how the concept could, “...be twisted. See, I was brought up, and I don’t believe this anymore, but the more you suffered with Jesus, the closer you were to God. So it was a badge of honor to suffer and be a victim.”⁴³⁹ She raised the concern that if ministerial leaders lift up Jesus as a model survivor without context, it could lead some survivors to feel that they should suffer too. Without using the language of cognitive models, it seems that many of the participants sensed that the concept could be helpful through one model, but could be dangerous through another. The*logian Rita Nakashima Brock, also without using the language of cognitive models, nonetheless points to the potential danger of a model of God that could be used to justify suffering, as the participant above also mentions. Nakashima Brock writes:

Christianity presents God as the benevolent, all-powerful father, and human beings as sinful and helpless, replicating the model of the parent who is good, the child who is bad. We are supposed to be grateful for divine forgiveness and protection in the face of human disobedience and powerlessness. This gratefulness carries relief from the threat of horrible punishment which lurks behind God’s benevolent image. When divine power is defined as control of sinfulness and evil, the response of many faithful people is to deny the tragedy of what happens to them, looking for a reason that God allows it. This system reinforces belief in the need for control and obedience, and fosters responses of guilt, relief, and schadenfreude. I could not see how these doctrines empowered people to affirm their own agency, to resist abuse, to take responsibility for ethical discernment, and to work for justice.... Defining love and relationship as obedience and sacrifice structures them in the terms of power and abuse.⁴⁴⁰

While more research is necessary, this small sample indicates that the concept of Jesus Christ as a trauma survivor may be comforting and helpful for Catholic women relational

⁴³⁸ A523

⁴³⁹ A549

⁴⁴⁰ Rita Nakashima Brock and Rebecca Ann Parker, *Proverbs of Ashes: Violence, Redemptive Suffering, and the Search for What Saves Us* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2001), 156.

abuse survivors with Nurturant Parent cognitive models if the theological concept is shared in a certain way, a way that will be explored in the next section.

As such, Catholic ministers could help Catholic women who are relational abuse survivors with Nurturant Parent cognitive models by offering elements of this the*logical concept in ministry, elements that will be shared more fully in the remainder of this chapter.⁴⁴¹

Jesus Christ as Trauma Survivor: Cognitive Models, The*logical Concepts, and Safety

Cognitive models shape our worldviews, including religious views. The*logy is constructed, in part, through subconscious cognitive models that, in turn, impact people in different ways.⁴⁴² As indicated in the research of this thesis project, the*logical concepts expressed through a particular cognitive model may cause some Catholic women relational abuse survivors with Nurturant Parent cognitive models to feel more safe or less safe, depending on which model is used.

⁴⁴¹ Whether Jesus Christ as trauma survivor is comforting or helpful for some Catholic women relational abuse survivors who hold a Strict Father cognitive model still needs more research. Nonetheless, from this project's research it seems that for some Catholic women relational abuse survivors with a Nurturant Parent cognitive model, this theological concept is comforting and helpful when presented in a similar cognitive model "At the pastoral level, confronting the possibility of sexual abuse in the passion of Christ could provide practical help to contemporary victims of torture and sexual abuse....The acceptance that even Jesus may have suffered evil in this way can give new dignity and self-respect to those who continue to struggle with the stigma and other consequences of sexual abuse. A God who through Christ is to be identified with the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the naked, the sick, and the imprisoned (Matt. 25:31-46) is also to be identified with those suffering abuse and torture in the modern world." David Tombs, "Crucifixion, State Terror, and Sexual Abuse" *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* Vol. 53. No. 1-2. (1999): 109.

⁴⁴² While drawing upon similar distinctions as those of Lakoff, Sanders notes in his chapter "Different Gods Create Us in their Image" that there is "research that shows that believing in a Benevolent God produces people with healthier relationships and better mental health than those who believe in an Authoritative God." Sanders, *Embracing Prodigals*, 40.

When the concept of Jesus Christ as a trauma survivor was raised in the interviews, there were mixed reactions, as has been indicated by previous studies.⁴⁴³ As the participants in this research project noted, the concept of Jesus Christ as a trauma survivor may be comforting to them as abuse survivors and may also be helpful for other survivors, but needs to be used with caution. Why did they cite caution? Could it be that they primarily hold Nurturant Parent cognitive models and could see how the concept through their Nurturant Parent model could be helpful, but from a Strict Father cognitive model may not make them feel safe?⁴⁴⁴ After expressing that it could be helpful for her and other survivors, one participant also cautioned, "...I feel that there are people who don't really want to think about [abuse] too much, and would say, 'Well, if Jesus could get over it, why can't you?'"⁴⁴⁵ Perhaps the response, "Well, if Jesus could get over it, why can't you?"—or even a more pastoral version of "I imagine Jesus has triumphed and I know you can, too"—could be indicative of a response by someone who holds a Strict Father cognitive model. This model's top moral priorities are strength and authority and are reflected in the underlying focus on strength: "get over it" or "triumph." Whereas, a response from someone who holds a Nurturant Parent model might be more along the lines of "I empathize with your suffering and care about your healing and I imagine God does, too." This model's top moral priorities are empathy and nurturance and are reflected in the underlying focus on empathy: "care about your healing." Based on the above

⁴⁴³ See Rocío Figueroa and David Tombs, "Recognizing Jesus as a Victim of Sexual Abuse: Responses from Sodalicio Survivors in Peru," *Religion and Gender* Vo. 10 No. 1 (2020): 57–75. See also Rocío Figueroa and David Tombs. "Seeing His Innocence, I See My Innocence," in *When Did We See You Naked?: Jesus as a Victim of Sexual Abuse*, eds. Jayme R. Reaves, David Tombs, and Rocío Figueroa (London: SCM Press, 2021), 287-312.

⁴⁴⁴ See the research in chapter three on the*logical concepts and safety that indicate there may be a connection between feeling safer with the*logical concepts that are rooted in one's cognitive model.

⁴⁴⁵ B175

reflections, one may see how different cognitive models might interpret Jesus Christ as a trauma survivor in different ways.

Could cognitive models help explain the discrepancies in why some Christian trauma survivors are comforted by the concept of Jesus Christ as trauma survivor and others are not, or why some may fear the concept through a particular cognitive model? While there are likely multiple reasons for the mixed reactions, cognitive models may play a part in the different reactions of survivors. For example, the*logians Grace Ji-Sun Kim and Susan M. Shaw give testimony to their spiritual journeys that started in a model of God that “willed abuse, or at least allowed it, and then judged us for letting ourselves be abused”⁴⁴⁶ to a different model where “God doesn’t cause or will or want abuse—any kind of abuse. Rather, God suffers with us; God survives with us. God is a surviving God who experiences our suffering and is with us in our pain.”⁴⁴⁷ Kim and Shaw now seem to lean into a Nurturant Parent model for God who reflects the moral priority of empathy. This model of God still has strength, but leads with empathy and nurturance for humans and, as they say, “experiences our suffering and is with us in our pain.” This contrasts with the*logian Shanell T. Smith who finds the idea of “Jesus as a victim of sexual assault ...problematic” and shares, “If God is all-knowing, all-powerful and all-seeing, then why did God not do something? Why did God allow my assailant to do those things to me?”⁴⁴⁸ Her questions may reflect elements of a Strict Father model for God that leads with the moral priorities of strength and authority. This model of God prioritizes strength

⁴⁴⁶ Kim and Shaw, *Surviving God*, 3.

⁴⁴⁷ Kim and Shaw, *Surviving God*, 3.

⁴⁴⁸ Shanell T. Smith, “‘This is My Body’: A Womanist Reflection on Jesus’ Sexualized Trauma during His Crucifixion from a Survivor of Sexual Assault,” in *When Did We See You Naked? Jesus as a Victim of Sexual Abuse*, eds. Jayme R. Reaves, David Tombs, and Rocio Figueroa (London: SCM Press, 2021), 278, 283.

and is, in her words, “all-knowing, all-powerful,” but then the question arises for survivors, as it did for Smith: if God is all-powerful, why didn’t God stop Jesus’ crucifixion or other abuses throughout history? The Strict Father model of God potentially creates a sense of absence of God in the midst of abuse. Moreover, it provides a difficult expectation that one needs to strive with strength toward total healing, “get over it,” something unrealistic based on what is known about trauma healing today as a lifelong journey. Could it be that one cognitive model may be more helpful for abuse survivors; one in which they feel safer because God does not abandon them and their healing is able to progress at a realistic pace?

There are a number of the*logians, ministers, and others looking at trauma and the*logy, including the trauma of abuse.⁴⁴⁹ It may be helpful to integrate the work of Lakoff and Sanders with regards to cognitive models into this field of study for the benefit of abuse survivors.⁴⁵⁰ The question arises, is there a model for God that is better for use in ministry with abuse survivors?⁴⁵¹ While the small sample size of the research cannot provide a definitive answer, there are hints that for some Catholic women relational abuse survivors who hold a Nurturant Parent cognitive model that a Nurturant Parent the*logical model may be the option that helps them feel safer and thus may be more helpful for their healing. As such, to assist those ministering to Catholic women relational abuse survivors who likely lean toward a Nurturant Parent cognitive model, it

⁴⁴⁹ See bibliography.

⁴⁵⁰ In addition to the field of trauma and the*logy, I believe that cognitive models could be important for other areas of study, as well, including systematic the*logy, ecclesiology, liberation the*logy, and more. It may also be used to research other critical questions in Catholicism such as why more young women than men are leaving the Church in the United States.

⁴⁵¹ While this study focuses mainly on those who lean toward a Nurturant Parent model, see chapter one for research by others that provides growing evidence that the Nurturant Parent model of God may be a better one for survivors, regardless of their cognitive model.

may be helpful to briefly sketch a the*logical model of God through a Nurturant Parent lens that takes seriously relational abuse and integrates the concept of Jesus Christ as trauma survivor. However small it may seem, starting to use the*logical concepts that do not harm and may even promote a sense of safety—a key part of healing—is a small step toward the justice intoned at the beginning of this chapter.⁴⁵²

Before doing so, it may be helpful to recall the Nurturant Parent cognitive model through a Christian lens by first remembering what it is not: The Strict Father cognitive model through a Christian lens. Sanders described Lakoff’s Strict Father cognitive model in language that reflects a Strict Father model of God:

In the God Is an Authoritative Parent model, God sets out rules that humans are to obey. God wants people to develop moral strength and uphold the moral order. Respect for divine authority comes first, and then God rewards those who obey with acceptance. Each individual has failed to obey, and so must suffer the consequences in order to learn responsibility. Jesus, however, takes the punishment due each of us and is condemned in our place. In this way, the divine moral accounting between obedience and disobedience is balanced because someone pays the price and is punished for disobedience. God gives those who accept Jesus’ atonement a fresh start. God wants each of us to be upstanding children who follow the instructions of those higher up in social and religious institutions. For the Authoritative God model, sin is primarily understood as breaking rules and atonement is payment for wrongdoing.⁴⁵³

Using the chart below, one may glimpse the top two moral priorities of the Strict Father model from the above description and how it may impact Catholic women relational

⁴⁵² It is worth noting that Feinberg’s research has found “initial support that individuals who are more likely exposed to politicians and their political rhetoric are also more likely to connect their ideal parenting beliefs with their political attitudes.” Feinberg, Wehling, et. al. *Measuring Moral Politics*, 16. More research could be done in this area related to whether the same holds true for those more likely exposed to ministers and a particular cognitive model and whether that more deeply shapes their God concepts and religious beliefs. It could point to the even greater role ministers have in supporting a model of God that will help abuse survivors heal.

⁴⁵³ Sanders, *Theology in the Flesh*, 149. Note that Sanders uses the term “Authoritative God” to refer to the “Strict Father” model.

abuse survivors as they seek healing. Note the final column that includes quotes from abuse survivors that reflect the model.

Moral Priorities of the Strict Father Model of God and Sample of Survivor Interpretation

MORAL PRIORITY	LAKOFF’S STRICT FATHER MODEL	SANDERS’ STRICT FATHER MODEL OF GOD (as written above)	SURVIVORS’ STRICT FATHER MODEL OF GOD
Moral Strength	“The world is divided into good and evil. To remain good in the face of evil...one must be morally strong. One becomes morally strong through self-discipline and self-denial. Someone who is morally weak cannot stand up to evil and so will eventually commit evil. Therefore, more weakness is a form of immorality. Self-indulgence...and lack of self-control are therefore forms of immorality.” ⁴⁵⁴	“God sets out rules that humans are to obey. God wants people to develop moral strength and uphold the moral order.... Each individual has failed to obey, and so must suffer the consequences in order to learn responsibility.” ⁴⁵⁵	God sets the rules and wants people to develop moral strength but not everyone follows the rules all the time and survivors suffer the consequences. Even if survivors suffer, they can use that suffering to surrender to God and be rewarded by receiving complete healing, showing the strength of their faith. For example, in the words of an abuse survivor, “He pays us back for all the mistreatment we have experienced in life, and then, in His goodness, He uses those painful things to help us help others. God makes us strong at our broken places!” ⁴⁵⁶
Moral Authority	“...the parent (typically the father) sets standards of	“Respect for divine authority comes first, and then God rewards	God is the ultimate authority that you need to obey. For

⁴⁵⁴ Lakoff, *Moral Politics*, 73.

⁴⁵⁵ Sanders, *Theology in the Flesh*, 149.

⁴⁵⁶ Joyce Meyer, “You are Not Damaged Goods,” Joyce Meyer Ministries, June 27, 2025, Accessed December 19, 2025, <https://joycemeyer.org/DailyDevo/2025/06/27-You-Are-Not-Damaged-Goods>. Or see Joyce Meyer, “Freedom from the Pain of Abuse,” Joyce Meyer Ministries, Accessed December 19, 2025, <https://joycemeyer.org/Grow-Your-Faith/Articles/Freedom-from-the-Pain-of-Abuse>.

	<p>behavior and punishes the child if the standards are not met. Moral behavior by the child is obedience to the parent's authority. But just as importantly, the exertion of authority is moral behavior on the part of the parent, and it is immoral for the parent to fail to exert authority, that is, to fail to set standards of behavior and to enforce them through punishment."⁴⁵⁷</p>	<p>those who obey with acceptance.... God gives those who accept Jesus' atonement a fresh start. God wants each of us to be upstanding children who follow the instructions of those higher up in social and religious institutions."⁴⁵⁸</p>	<p>survivors, you must obey God and if you obey fully, surrendering all your pain, then you will be rewarded with healing/salvation. If you do not recover fully, perhaps you have not surrendered fully. For example, in the words of an abuse survivor, "...anyone who has been abused can fully recover if they will give their life completely to Jesus" and when that happens, God will remove "[your] shame and [give you] a double reward and recompense."⁴⁵⁹</p>
--	--	---	---

The Strict Father model of God is certainly used by some Christian women abuse survivors in their journeys of healing, as noted in the above chart. Another example comes from the*logian R. Marie Griffiths who documents her research with the Aglow movement, an international Christian fellowship and outreach movement, and notes how some Christian women process their abuse through what this paper would likely define as a Strict Father model of God. She shares her experience attending an Aglow women's workshop that was marketed as aid for women whose husbands do not attend church, but,

⁴⁵⁷ Lakoff, *Moral Politics*, 76-77.

⁴⁵⁸ Sanders, *Theology in the Flesh*, 149.

⁴⁵⁹ Joyce Meyer, "Embracing Life Beyond Abuse through Faith," Joyce Meyer Ministries, Accessed December 19, 2025, <https://joycemeyer.org/Grow-Your-Faith/Articles/Life-Beyond-Abuse?sr>.

as Griffiths notes, was “actually a session on coping with unhappy, even unbearable marriages.”⁴⁶⁰ She writes:

Even while dispensing advice on marital enrichment, Eleanor assures the women that if they have become the object of mockery and scorn in their own homes, God is their deliverer and rescuer. She chastises them for their own role in creating discord and notes that, despite what the churches teach, ‘Sometimes you need to stay home on Sunday mornings and lie in bed with your husband!... Or stay home from a special [religious] service on Friday night and cook him dinner.’ After giving tips on how to make husbands happy, including explicit instructions on ‘trade-offs’ within sexual relations, Eleanor concludes with a tearful prayer of repentance, inviting the women to pray with her for the ability to yield fully to their husbands, to stop blaming their husbands for personal failings, and to be cleansed from all sin within the bonds of marriage.⁴⁶¹

One may see qualities of the Strict Father model with a focus on strength with God as “deliverer” and a focus on authority with women being encouraged to “yield fully to their husbands,” following the model’s ideal of Jesus Christ who obediently submitted to God. Griffith notes that Aglow’s literature and workshops often speak to Christian women who have suffered or are suffering abuse.⁴⁶² What she found is that, “Conservative evangelical women who believe that their true liberation is found in voluntary submission to divine authority consider this a bold surrender, an act of assuming the crucial role God has called women to play in the making of history....”⁴⁶³ The problem, however, is that this God model with its prioritization of the strength of those in authority and submission to that authority may replicate the pattern of abuse that some women have experienced and, potentially, may keep them in abusive patterns of relating. For example, the *logians Kim and Shaw note, “Everywhere we turned we were told to submit and obey—God, fathers,

⁴⁶⁰ R. Marie Griffiths, *God’s Daughters: Evangelical Women and the Power of Submission* (Berkeley, University of California Press: 2000), 15.

⁴⁶¹ Griffiths, *God’s Daughters*, 15.

⁴⁶² Griffiths, *God’s Daughters*, 187.

⁴⁶³ Griffiths, *God’s Daughters*, 199.

pastors. The message became part of us. Good girls, good boys, and good women did as they were told and kept quiet about it. What a setup for abuse.”⁴⁶⁴ As Lakoff has noted, the power of the cognitive model is that it is subconsciously applied to multiple areas of one’s life. So if one leans toward a Strict Father cognitive model in religious matters, there is a good chance that one will also apply it to relational matters. The*logian Joanne Carlson Brown suggests, “We must... address the image of God. If God is presented as all powerful, judgmental, capricious, requiring passive obedience, and male, we have just described the experience of women and children who have had their autonomy and personhood destroyed by men.”⁴⁶⁵ While the Strict Father model of God may support some women in their healing, it holds the danger of serving as a pattern that women use in multiple areas of their lives and may lead to the replication of abuse in other relationships, be they at home, church, or politics.⁴⁶⁶

Turning to the Nurturant Parent model of God, Sanders has also translated Lakoff’s Nurturant Parent model into a the*logical model:

In the God Is a Nurturant Parent model, divine grace is seen as primary for nurturance. Divine love comes first, which results in respect for divine authority. God accepts people into the divine family, and through love, empowers them to transform sinful ways of living to loving ways. Jesus is the divine-human exemplar showing us how to live a life of love toward others and who liberates us from enslaving powers and returns us to God. God demonstrates that God is trustworthy and is, in significant ways, a model for humans to imitate. God wants to produce communities where people are nurtured in the ways of grace and love

⁴⁶⁴ Kim and Shaw, *Surviving God*, 16.

⁴⁶⁵ Carlson Brown, “Because of the Angels: Sexual Violence and Abuse,” in *Violence Against Women*, Concilium 1994/1 eds. Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza and Mary Shawn Copeland (London: SCM Press, 1994), 9.

⁴⁶⁶ For another analysis of how elements of the Strict Father model (such as submission, punishment, etc.) may not only affect survivors, but may prime Catholics for abuse, see Thomas Doyle’s section on “Conditioning for Abuse” in Thomas P. Doyle, “The Spiritual Trauma Experienced by Victims of Sexual Abuse by Catholic Clergy,” *Pastoral Psychology*, Vol. 58 (2009), 239-260.

for others. For the Nurturant God model, sin is primarily understood as harming others and atonement is restoration to loving relations.⁴⁶⁷

Using the chart below, one may glimpse the top two moral priorities of the Nurturant Parent model from the above description and how it may impact Catholic women relational abuse survivors as they seek healing. Note the final column that includes quotes from abuse survivors that reflect the model.

Moral Priorities of the Nurturant Parent Model of God and Sample of Survivor Interpretation

MORAL PRIORITY	LAKOFF'S NURTURANT PARENT MODEL	SANDERS' NURTURANT PARENT MODEL OF GOD (as written above)	SURVIVORS' NURTURANT PARENT MODEL OF GOD
Moral Empathy	“Empathy is a projection of your capacity to feel onto another person. An empathetic person will therefore not want others to experience a lack of well-being. And a truly empathic person will be able to feel what it is like to have another person’s values and to see the world from their perspective. According to this	“The Christian doctrine of the incarnation shows that God fully engages in perspective-taking by walking in our shoes. God learned what it was like to be in our place. Philosophers speak of God’s ‘great-making’ properties but they seldom include empathy and perspective-taking in the list. However, God is love and part of	God does not want creatures, including humans, to suffer. God has suffered and empathizes with the suffering that survivors experience. For example, in the words of an abuse survivor, “God cries for me; God also suffers with me. For me this is a great consolation.” ⁴⁷⁰

⁴⁶⁷ Sanders, *Theology in the Flesh*, 148-149. While Sanders does not touch as clearly on the Nurturant Parent model’s moral priority of empathy in this particular description, he does touch on it in other places. For example: “There is an old adage: ‘To understand someone, you need to walk a mile in their shoes.’ To do this requires empathy and perspective-taking. The Christian doctrine of the incarnation shows that God fully engages in perspective-taking by walking in our shoes. God learned what it was like to be in our place. Philosophers speak of God’s ‘great-making’ properties but they seldom include empathy and perspective-taking in the list. However, God is love and part of what it means to treat others as we want to be treated is to try to understand things from their perspectives. Research shows a number of benefits for those with strong skills in perspective-taking. People are more trusting and cooperative, use fewer stereotypes to understand others, and identify discrimination when it occurs.” Sanders, *Embracing Prodigals*, 86.

⁴⁷⁰ Rocío Figueroa and David Tombs. “Seeing His Innocence, I See My Innocence,” 292.

	metaphor, this is a moral activity and should lead one to be nurturant.” ⁴⁶⁸	what it means to treat others as we want to be treated is to try to understand things from their perspectives.” ⁴⁶⁹	
Moral Nurturance	“...to care <i>for</i> a child adequately, you have to care <i>about</i> a child. You have to project your capacity for feeling onto a child accurately enough to have a sense of what that child needs. This not only requires empathy, it requires constant empathy. It also requires, to a significant extent, putting the child’s needs before your own, making sacrifices for your child—though not so much that it prevents one from nurturing adequately.” ⁴⁷¹	“Jesus is the divine-human exemplar showing us how to live a life of love toward others and who liberates us from enslaving powers and returns us to God.” ⁴⁷²	God shows how to love others, not based on hierarchy and obedience, nor reward and punishment in response to that obedience, but rather based on empathic care and nurturance. For survivors, this means healing/salvation does not come out of submission to God, but rather out of caring for themselves and others through the lifelong work of trauma healing. ⁴⁷³ For example, in the words of an abuse survivor, “Jesus’ resurrection and the continuation of his movement are not triumphs, but a glimpse of the power of survival.... Salvation requires love.... Healing love touches the hidden wounds of violation, lances the places of stored trauma, restores glimpses of soul.” ⁴⁷⁴

⁴⁶⁸ Lakoff, *Moral Politics*, 136-137.

⁴⁶⁹ Sanders, *Embracing Prodigals* 86.

⁴⁷¹ Lakoff, *Moral Politics*, 116.

⁴⁷² Sanders, *Theology in the Flesh*, 149.

⁴⁷³ The third moral priority in the Nurturant Parent model is moral self-nurturance, knowing that you cannot care adequately for others if one does not also care for oneself.

⁴⁷⁴ Brock and Parker, *Proverbs of Ashes*, 250.

While more research needs to be done specifically utilizing Lakoff's models as related to God concepts, one can see the difference in how abuse survivors who seem to lean toward a Nurturant Parent model understand God as part of their healing journey versus those featured above in the Strict Father chart view God in their journey.

If the Nurturant Parent model is better for abuse survivors, at least for some survivors as noted in this research and for other people as noted in the research studies cited in chapter one, how might ministers breathe life into this model? The remainder of this chapter will briefly sketch a the*logical model of God, rooted in a Nurturant Parent model, that takes relational abuse seriously and integrates the concept of Jesus Christ as trauma survivor.⁴⁷⁵ It is offered so that those in ministry may consider elements of this the*logical concept in working with Catholic women relational abuse survivors who may lean toward a Nurturant Parent model of God in order to assist their healing journey.⁴⁷⁶

⁴⁷⁵ I offer the following theological sketch with humility in light of the mystery of God, knowing that any cognitive model or theological concept does not adequately represent God and is only one possible perspective. Elizabeth Johnson describes the need to recognize the limited nature of our theological inquiry and, in referencing her reading of Aquinas, writes "...that for knowledge of anything, some sort of mental image or species [need] be formed of what is known, an image that is always necessarily definite and finite. There can be no such image of the infinite. God is positively misrepresented if any one image is thought to be adequate." Elizabeth A. Johnson, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse* (New York: Crossroad, 1996), 109.

⁴⁷⁶ It is important to note that looking at scripture, particularly at Jesus Christ, through a trauma hermeneutic is not new, although pairing it with a Nurturant Parent hermeneutic using Lakoff's work is new. In fact, "In recent decades biblical scholars have increasingly come to regard the concept of trauma as a powerful interpretative lens...." Moreover, biblical interpreters recognize manifold aspects of trauma, which include not only the immediate effects of events or ongoing situations but also mechanisms that facilitate survival, recovery, and resilience. Trauma hermeneutics is used to interpret texts in their historical context as a means of exploring the appropriation of texts, in contexts both past and present." Elizabeth Boase and Christopher G. Frechette, eds., *Bible through the Lens of Trauma* (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2016), 1, 2.

Survivor The*logy: A Trauma-Informed The*logy of God in a Nurturant Parent Model⁴⁷⁷

God is love. This statement is often used as one way to describe God. However, both a Strict Father model and Nurturant Parent model of God could state that God is love. Using Lakoff's cognitive models can help explain what type of love; how that love is shared and understood. Love may be a starting point but what type of love and how it is experienced is critical to understanding the cognitive model undergirding the*logies. For purposes of this brief the*logical sketch below, I have elected to use modifying terms to help name the type of love for each aspect of the triune God (Presencing Love, Incarnational Love, Resilient Love), in addition to the fuller description based on the cognitive model that follows each term.

For example, I name one aspect of the triune God as *Presencing Love*. First, *Love* is a helpful the*logical model to explore for relational abuse survivors because so often their experience of human relations, that ideally should be characterized by loving relations, has been broken by the experience(s) of abuse. Herman notes, "The core experiences of psychological trauma are disempowerment and disconnection from others."⁴⁷⁸ In turn, God as Love, particularly the triune God that points to relationality, "provides a model for human love."⁴⁷⁹ As such, God as love provides an example of what loving human relations could be in relationship with oneself, with others, and with God. As survivors in their own spirituality come to understand God as love, that love can become the type of love that they seek to model in their own lives. As Henry Nouwen

⁴⁷⁷ I call this brief the*logical sketch of God "survivor the*logy" for two reasons: because it is a the*logy of God who, in Jesus Christ, is a trauma survivor and it is a the*logy *for* survivors.

⁴⁷⁸ Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 133.

⁴⁷⁹ Herbert Anderson, "Loving," in *Wiley Blackwell Companion to Practical Theology* ed. Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore (Hoboken: Wiley, 2011), 64.

writes, “From the moment we claim the truth of being Beloved, we are faced with the call to become who we are. Becoming the Beloved is the great spiritual journey we have to make.”⁴⁸⁰ Thus, God as love provides not only a model but a hope: a vision of what life looks like through a healed lens, a glimpse of the kin-dom. Second, the word *Presencing* is used because abuse also ruptures a survivor’s sense of presence. Trauma makes it difficult for a survivor to remain present. Memories, nightmares, and triggers bring her back to the abuse. The past is often painfully present. As the*logian Shelly Rambo has written, “theology must account for the excess, or remainder, of death in life that is central to trauma.”⁴⁸¹ A survivor struggles to remain present to herself, to others, and sometimes even to God. Flashbacks, dissociation, significant fears, and other traumatic symptoms keep her from living fully with presence and this affects her relationships. God as Presencing Love provides a vision of what could be, and even more important, what *is*. God’s Presencing Love is available to the survivor, unconditionally and always, awake with her at three in the morning after a nightmare, at her side in the afternoon when she struggles to breath from a trigger, gently guiding her back to presence.⁴⁸² That being said, I appreciate Serene Jones’ reflection that the*logical imagination, particularly when it comes to trauma and healing, is different for everyone. Jones writes, “. . .just as the shattering effects of trauma are painfully particular to each person who suffers them, so the healing power of grace is specific to each imagination it soothes and heals.”⁴⁸³ As

⁴⁸⁰ Henry J.M. Nouwen, *Life of the Beloved: Spiritual Living in a Secular World* (New York: Crossroad, 1992, 2000), 37.

⁴⁸¹ Shelly Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma: A Theology of Remaining* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), 6.

⁴⁸² Not only does Lakoff use the term “Presence” in relation to the Nurturant Parent model of God, but so did many of the participants in this research. See the responses of the participants in chapter three, page 122, whose understanding of God is related to a comforting sense of “constant presence.”

⁴⁸³ Serene Jones, *Trauma and Grace: Theology in a Ruptured World* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), 22.

such, while readers will see specific word choices reflecting broader themes in the the*logical sketch below, readers are invited to consider what words may have most resonance for them or the survivors to whom they are ministering.

God as Presencing Love

The starting point for this brief the*logical sketch may be that of God as Presencing Love.⁴⁸⁴ A Nurturant Parent cognitive model believes that “Divine love comes first...”⁴⁸⁵ and the presence of love continues, even when someone has sinned or been sinned against.⁴⁸⁶ God’s consistent love builds a secure attachment that, from an attachment theory model, provides a more secure base for the healthy development of the child/human.⁴⁸⁷ This loving presence builds a secure bond so that even in moments when someone, including a survivor, may not feel God’s presence, they can trust God’s loving presence remains.⁴⁸⁸ This is contrasted with the Strict Father model where “[r]espect for divine authority comes first” and when that authority is respected or rules obeyed, love is

⁴⁸⁴ I elected to use Presencing with “-ing” to denote God’s active quality. Carter Heyward says, “God is the movement that connects us all, the whole creation, through all that has been and all that will be, now and forever! This energy for justice and compassion goes among us and between us, within us and beyond us...” Carter Heyward, *Saving Justice: Rethinking What it Means to be Christian* (Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 1999), 61. See also Elizabeth Johnson who writes, “Love is the moving power of life...” Johnson, *She Who Is*, 143.

⁴⁸⁵ Sanders, *Theology in the Flesh*, 148.

⁴⁸⁶ For more on the concept of “sinned-against,” see Raymond Fung, “Compassion for the Sinned-Against,” *Theology Today* 37, no. 2 (July 1980): 162-169.; Kevin Considine, “*Han* and Salvation for the Sinned-Against,” *NTR* 26, no. 1 (September 2013), 87-89.

⁴⁸⁷ Lakoff notes that the Nurturant Parent model that tries to provide consistent love—not predicated on obedience, but rather based on secure relationship—is similar to what is called “secure attachment” in the field of psychology known as attachment theory. He writes: “The basic claim of attachment theory, considerably oversimplified, is this: A child will function better in later life if he is ‘secure attached’ to his mother or father or other caregiver from birth. That is, he will be more self-reliant, responsible, socially adept, and confident. Secure attachment arises from regular, loving interaction, especially when the child desires it. Letting a child go it alone and tough it out, denying him loving interaction when he wants it does not create strength, confidence, and self-reliance.” Lakoff, *Moral Politics*, 350.

⁴⁸⁸ This is critical for abuse survivors who may find themselves in significant despair and feel God is absent. However, if there is a secure bond, the survivor can trust that God’s presence remains, even if the survivor may not feel it at times.

the reward.⁴⁸⁹ In this model the love may, indeed, be withdrawn in order to discipline the person. This model has led to one version of an interpretation of the Genesis story in which Adam and Eve do not obey God's commands and are punished for their guilt. However, a Nurturant Parent model would see this story through a different lens. In fact, the theologian Wendy Farley posits, "Radical suffering confronts theology with a problem that cannot be addressed within the context of the myth of the Fall. A theology governed by the thematics of guilt does not have the tools to recognize or respond to the existence of unjust and destructive suffering."⁴⁹⁰ While a Strict Father model of the Fall "governed by the thematics of guilt," as Farley notes, cannot adequately respond to radical suffering and abuse, what might the myth look like through a Nurturant Parent model? Could a Nurturant Parent model reinterpret the Genesis story to speak into the experience of abuse and trauma in our world? One example arises from the theologian Elaine A. Heath who provides an extended reflection on the Genesis story from the perspective of child abuse, rooted in the ideas of St. Irenaeus and Julian of Norwich that viewed "Adam and Eve as immature persons who in their vulnerability and naïveté are the original 'least of these.'"⁴⁹¹ She writes that:

Adam and Eve are trusting of the familiar creature that shares the garden. They are blind to the danger that lurks before them because of their naïveté, so they listen vulnerably to the serpent's deceiving speech.

Good parents do what they can to protect their children from predators.... [but] Little ones from every family are vulnerable to a serpent with a persuasive argument in its mouth and violence in its heart. The serpent comes in the guise of Daddy or Aunt Mary or the grandfatherly man next door.

The Bible says that Eve believed the serpent, saw the fruit was good, and wanted to be like the God who made her. These are normal desires children have:

⁴⁸⁹ Sanders, *Theology in the Flesh*, 149.

⁴⁹⁰ Wendy Farley, *Tragic Vision and Divine Compassion: A Contemporary Theodicy* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1990), 29.

⁴⁹¹ Elaine A. Heath, *Healing the Wounds of Sexual Abuse: Reading the Bible with Survivors* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2011, 2019), 19.

to eat something sweet and to be like Mom or Dad. What is not normal, what is diabolical, is the manner in which the serpent manipulates Adam and Eve through their normal bodily appetites and familial affections....

When Adam and Eve eat the fruit, they swallow a cancerous shame that begins with their sexuality.... The shame and pain of what has happened to them spread from their sexuality to every part of life. Their precious freedom to trust God, each other, and themselves is broken. Their unselfconscious playfulness is gone. The natural world that used to be a safe space is now filled with danger and threat. A sequence of death-dealing consequences is unleashed. No aspect of life is left untouched.

...Adam and Eve have been caught in a terrible web of deception, wounds, and sin. These same dynamics will be handed on to subsequent generations. This is not a story about original sin as much as it is a story about original wounds.⁴⁹²

Indeed, in the Nurturant Parent model, God does not want Adam and Eve to suffer but they are still wounded by those who sin, by those who harm. This is an important distinction of the Nurturant Parent model. God does not want women or anyone to suffer. The*logian Carter Heyward writes that “It is not that God is evil but that evil—betrayal, exploitation, violence upon violence—takes place in God’s world *despite* the goodness of God.”⁴⁹³ Heath clearly separates out evil and the desire for suffering from that of God.

Additionally, it is worth briefly mentioning how evil is framed in Heath’s interpretation. She speaks of evil “with a persuasive argument in its mouth and violence in its heart.” It is an important reminder that abuse takes multiple forms, one of them being that it tries to reframe another’s reality. Indeed, psychologist Judith Herman, speaks of the role that lies, or the “persuasive argument...with violence in its heart,” plays in abuse. She writes that those who engage in violence and abuse “lie constantly, not so much to deny their crimes (although that is one reason) as to assert that reality is whatever the tyrant says it is.”⁴⁹⁴ The*logian Robert Schreier has also pointed to the role

⁴⁹² Heath, *Healing the Wounds of Sexual Abuse*, 20-21.

⁴⁹³ Heyward, *Saving Jesus*, 90.

⁴⁹⁴ Herman, *Trauma and Repair*, 35.

of lies in experiences of violence. He writes, “Violence tries to destroy the narratives that sustain people’s identities and substitute narratives of its own. These might be called narratives of the lie, precisely because they are intended to negate the truth of a people’s own narratives.”⁴⁹⁵ Evil wants its own version of reality, a reality in which it has coercive power-over and denies the freedom of the other. The*logian Elizabeth Johnson concurs, “Whereas in the history of Western thought a preponderance of definitions of evil has concentrated on human disobedience to divine law and thus on ‘sin,’ some feminist ethical analysis now argues that women’s experience identifies the most fundamental evil to be the phenomenological conditions of pain, separation, and helplessness” and, for purposes of this paper, one might add abuse.⁴⁹⁶ Indeed, evil in this interpretation is not centered on disobedience to God as it may be within a Strict Father model, but in this Nurturant Parent interpretation that takes seriously abuse and the suffering in our world, evil manifests in those who want coercive power over another.

Briefly, it is important to say a few more words on the evil of coercive power-over. While Heath’s interpretation reflects the narrative through the lens of the serpent as sexual predator of children because her readers were sexual abuse survivors, the serpent could more generally be seen as an embodiment of the danger in those who seek coercive “power-over,” and thus seek to abuse anyone. This interpretation opens the story to speak more broadly to all survivors of abuse and reflects the reality that humans throughout their lives are vulnerable to abuse, both in relationships that are theoretically “peer” relationships such as friendships or intimate partners, as well as relationships with

⁴⁹⁵ Robert J. Schreier, *Reconciliation: Mission and Ministry in a Changing Social Order* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1992), 34.

⁴⁹⁶ Johnson, *She Who Is*, 269.

inherent power differentials such as those of an employee with an employer. While adults have agency, it is a vulnerable agency.⁴⁹⁷ With this Nurturant Parent interpretation of the Genesis story, it is not that humans disobeyed God and were punished through suffering (reflecting the Strict Father model), but rather that humans, despite our agency and freedom, may still be vulnerable to individuals and systems that seek power-over, rather than power-with. In this interpretation, sin is not tethered to disobedience. Sin is that which harms.

In this Nurturant Parent model, sin is what harms and may be likened to an “original wound” that is passed along each time humans harm one another or God’s creation. Unhealed harm can cause more harm. This is the cycle of violence and the legacy of trauma, the history of sin.⁴⁹⁸ In the midst of this, in the Nurturant Parent model, God’s presencing love does not turn away.

Jesus as Incarnational Love

It is into the cycles of wounding in which God steps in the person of Jesus who is Incarnational Love.⁴⁹⁹ From a Nurturant Parent model that prioritizes empathy, God’s

⁴⁹⁷ See Michelle Becka’s work that is rooted in Hille Haker’s idea of vulnerable agency in Michelle Becka, “Sexual Abuse in the Church and the Violation of Vulnerable Agency” in *Doing Theology and Theological Ethics in the Face of the Abuse Crisis*, eds. Daniel J. Fleming, James F. Keenan, Hans Zollner, SJ (Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2023), 11-25.

⁴⁹⁸ It is important to note that the Strict Father model is more likely to see sin as an individual challenge to overcome, with its moral priority being strength. The model believes in self-discipline and the ability of an individual to “overcome” the odds with enough hard work and grit. Even if the system is stacked against you, if you work hard enough, you should be able to overcome any obstacles. If you do not, then you may be considered weak. This contrasts with the Nurturant Parent model that, because of its moral priority of empathy, can take the perspective of others and better understand their plight, recognizing the harm and significant obstacles that individuals, communities, and even countries face, individually and systemically. See Sanders, *Embracing Prodigals*, 86.

⁴⁹⁹ The*logian James Poling also has envisioned a new understanding of God after his research and work with survivors of sexual violence. He posits that in contrast to substitutionary atonement, we need a “theory of incarnational atonement [that] strives for the truth of God’s radical identification with the world. Its image of a God who suffers with the world in the death of Jesus is that of a relational God.” James Newton Poling, *The Abuse of Power: A Theological Problem* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1991), 176.

abundant empathy for humans is revealed not as an empathy from afar, but as an incarnational empathy, *a love that suffers with*,⁵⁰⁰ including with abuse survivors.⁵⁰¹ In the person of Jesus, God reveals Nurturant Parent love, full of empathy and nurturance, showing “that God loves the in-group and the out-groups and shows indiscriminate love to all before they change their ways. God’s grace is given to everyone. The early followers of Jesus will use these teachings to transform the idea of the ‘people of God’ from that of an ethnic group with its tribal God to one that includes all nationalities and tribes.”⁵⁰² Jesus’ love—reflective of the Nurturant Parent moral priorities of empathy and nurturance—is for everyone, the Jew and Samaritan and Gentile alike; the sinner and the sinned against. Nobody is outside God’s reach of nurturing grace. This model of God contrasts with those who hold a Strict Father model of God who believe that those “who failed to live the way God commanded did not deserve hospitality or acceptance...”⁵⁰³ For those with a Strict Father model, you must obey God in order to be rewarded with God’s love. The Nurturant Parent model of God also contrasts with that of a “Permissive Parent” who believes that people should do whatever they want. Rather, in the Nurturant Parent model Jesus recognizes that “‘sinners’ have problems and do not live the way God desires—he says they are ‘sick’ and he wants to restore them to health.”⁵⁰⁴ God still has strength and authority in a Nurturant Parent model, but rather leads with empathy and

⁵⁰⁰ Feminist theologians have tried to give voice to this model of God and have done so successfully. Elizabeth Johnson writes, “Feminist theologians are grappling for language to give voice to this understanding of power arising from women’s experience. Neither power-over nor powerlessness, it is akin to power-with.” Johnson, *She Who Is*, 270.

⁵⁰¹ More could be done to explore whether the doctrine of impassibility may be loosely predicated upon a Strict Father model of God, whereas the*logy that understands a suffering God may be loosely predicated upon a Nurturant Parent model of God. I have explored this idea in a final paper for a course by Prof. Robin Ryan at CTU.

⁵⁰² Sanders, *Embracing Prodigals*, 19-20.

⁵⁰³ Sanders, *Embracing Prodigals*, 18.

⁵⁰⁴ Sanders, *Embracing Prodigals*, 18.

nurturance first. God wants to nurture and heal the wounded, whether the sinner or sinned against, in order to bring about justice and restore right relations between all created beings in God's kin-dom, even though full reconciliation, full salvation—our fullest healing—may only be in God's fullness of time.⁵⁰⁵

Jesus, in a Nurturant Parent model, is an innocent victim of abuse and suffering. Even before the crucifixion, Jesus may have suffered trauma from the arrest and later beheading of his cousin John. In fact, his decision to begin his public ministry could be a part of a "survivor mission," a stage in the healing process that Herman has identified.⁵⁰⁶ We read in the Gospel of Mark, "After John had been arrested, Jesus came to Galilee proclaiming the gospel of God...."⁵⁰⁷ In the face of horror, Jesus raises its remedy: God's healing grace and resilient love.⁵⁰⁸ There are possible other events that may have caused Jesus suffering or even trauma, but one can only imagine these: perhaps as a son who loses his father that leads to his use of the term "Abba" for God, or as a young man who lives in poverty as part of a religious minority under colonial rule.⁵⁰⁹ The trauma of which one may be more certain, however, is that surrounding his crucifixion.

As the*logians have noted, the suffering and almost certain trauma of the crucifixion arose not only from the actual crucifixion. Rather, Jesus "suffer[s] nearly every conceivable form of abuse in the events that culminated in his crucifixion: betrayal trauma, physical abuse, verbal abuse, emotional and psychological abuse, sexual abuse,

⁵⁰⁵ "The fragmentary realization of any reconciliation reminds Christians that reconciliation is ultimately the work of God and the gift of God." Robert J. Schreiter, C.P.P.S. *The Ministry of Reconciliation: Spirituality and Strategies* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1998), 12.

⁵⁰⁶ Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 207-211.

⁵⁰⁷ Mark 1:14

⁵⁰⁸ "Resisting evil with resilient love is the core message of Jesus." Andrew Sung Park, *From Hurt to Healing: A Theology of the Wounded* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2004), 67. "...if God is in solidarity with violated women, the call to resist is born at the very core of faith." Johnson, *She Who Is*, 271.

⁵⁰⁹ Jesus might even be considered someone who is a model of trauma stewardship.

shunning, and neglect.”⁵¹⁰ Jesus suffered deeply from multiple forms of abuse. Moreover, there is a deepening sense of possible traumatic response as Jesus is subjected to these. We hear that “Jesus gave him no further answer” when Pilate is questioning him.⁵¹¹ This may suggest a trauma response: “When a person is completely powerless, and any form of resistance is futile, she may go into a state of surrender,” notes Herman.⁵¹² Ultimately, in the Gospel of Mark, Jesus appears to feel abandoned like so many abuse survivors have, crying out, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”⁵¹³ Jesus is a victim of abuse and suffers trauma, not as part of the will of God, but at the hands of those who sinned or were caught in systems of sin.⁵¹⁴ This is not the Strict Father model in which Jesus obeys God and then is “rewarded” with a triumphant resurrection.⁵¹⁵ Rather, in this Nurturant Parent model, Jesus suffers as an innocent victim of abuse. He had empathized with the suffering of people and, in turn, sought to “...challenge...the social and political order of his day.”⁵¹⁶ He rejected “power-over,” he rejected the narrative of the lie.⁵¹⁷ In doing so, he suffered and likely experienced trauma.

⁵¹⁰ Charles Kiser and Elaine A. Health, *Trauma-Informed Evangelism: Cultivating Communities of Wounded Healers* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdsman's Publishing Company, 2023), 78.

⁵¹¹ Mark 15:5

⁵¹² Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 42.

⁵¹³ Mark 15:34. In fact, Jürgen Moltmann points to early manuscripts of the Gospel of Mark that express even more anguish from the mouth of Jesus, saying, “‘Why hast thou exposed me to shame?’ and ‘Why hast thou cursed me?’” Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom: The Doctrine of God* (San Francisco: Harper and Row Publishers, 1981), 78.

⁵¹⁴ It is important that suffering is not glorified as part of God’s will. As Dolores Williams cautioned: “As Christians, black women cannot forget the cross, but neither can they glorify it. To do so is to glorify suffering and to render their exploitation sacred. To do so is to glorify the sin of defilement.” Dolores S. Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1996), 167.

⁵¹⁵ “Instead of focusing on Jesus as a victor, we recognize Jesus as a victim and a survivor.” Kim and Shaw, *Surviving God*, 12.

⁵¹⁶ Kim and Shaw, *Surviving God*, 13.

⁵¹⁷ More could be explored in the scripture story of Jesus’ desert experience as an example of Jesus rejecting the Strict Father model of power-over (Matthew 4: 1-11, Luke 4:1-13)

While Jesus may be considered a victim of abuse and its resulting trauma, the resurrected Christ may be conceived as a survivor⁵¹⁸ and those who witnessed his suffering are also survivors.⁵¹⁹ It must be noted that there are different understandings of how the resurrected Christ may be understood. *One possible way of understanding is that the resurrected Christ serves as symbol of the collective survivorship of the Christian community and their ongoing healing.*⁵²⁰ The four canonical gospels offer a glimpse of how some of those who witnessed or heard about Jesus' crucifixion processed the grief and trauma. Over time, we see an increasing capacity, a resiliency, among the early Christian community to address the crucifixion and to make meaning of the deep wounds of trauma as represented in the figure of Christ in the Gospel of John.⁵²¹ It is important to note that in this gospel, Christ is depicted *with* his wounds, "as clinical work with trauma suggests that wounds must surface in order for them to be addressed."⁵²² John's Gospel that depicts Christ with wounds is important for many survivors because they too

⁵¹⁸ "...survivor, a word which literally means 'one who lives on,' ..." Kiser and Health, *Trauma-Informed Evangelism*, 80.

⁵¹⁹ For reflections on witnessing, see Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma*, 81-110. See also Karen O'Donnell, "Surviving Trauma at the Foot of the Cross" in *When Did We See You Naked?: Jesus as a Victim of Sexual Abuse*, eds. Jayme R. Reaves, David Tombs, and Rocío Figueroa (London: SCM Press, 2021), 260-277.

⁵²⁰ While the first responses to the crucifixion reflect initial responses to trauma, I believe we witness intergenerational trauma and healing through the development of the four gospels as outlined in Nicole Sotelo, "All Should Rise Together": *Community, Trauma, and What Holds us Together*, Benedictine Heritage Lecture 2021, Benedictine University. See also Bernard Cooke's reflections on "non-patriarchal salvation" that includes "the continuing sacramentality of Jesus' death and resurrection: it is the Christian community, and in somewhat differing fashion all humans of good will, that extends and fleshes out the sacramentality of Jesus himself as the risen one. Thus, 'Christ as savior' refers to what sometimes is called 'the whole Christ,' the risen Jesus and those who with him take up one body which is the Church." Bernard Cooke, "Non-Patriarchal Salvation" in *Women's Spirituality: Resources for Christian Development* ed. Joann Wolski Conn (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1986), 279.

⁵²¹ For those in ministry, see Kevin Considine's work on "analogy of the wound" as a way that Christian communities can address wounds through salvific communication of the wound. Kevin P. Considine, *Analogy of the Wound: A Theology of Communication for Healing and Social Transformation* (New York: T&T Clark, 2025).

⁵²² Shelly Rambo, *Resurrecting Wounds: Living in the Afterlife of Trauma* (Waco, Baylor University Press, 2017), 13.

continue to carry wounds.⁵²³ Professor Beth R. Crisp, who works at the intersection of social work and religion, writes of this importance, noting that survivors “will often carry marks of the wounds inflicted on them, whether physical, psychological or spiritual, for the rest of their lives. As such, resurrection is not about the removal or ignoring of scars but of embracing a future that offers hope.... [without] romanticizing or trivializing what are often devastating effects....”⁵²⁴ Christ’s resurrection *with* wounds may provide hope for survivors that they can persist, even with their wounds too.⁵²⁵ Additionally, a Christ with wounds provides hope that the Christian community as a whole can move forward with its wounds, not ignoring them but rather seeking to heal their own and those of a wounded world, seeking to bring about the kin-dom.⁵²⁶ Wounds also help with truth-telling. When wounds are visible, as they were in the Gospel of John, it means the wounds have not been silenced or erased, but rather reflect the horrors of the traumatic experience. It means that evil has not triumphed by covering up the harm that it caused. The narrative of the lie has not prevailed. Rather, a survivor is able to speak her truth and the moral community is able to respond to help heal the wounds. Herman posits, “The fundamental premise of the psychotherapeutic work is a belief in the restorative power of

⁵²³ “The danger in erasing these wounds is that the erasure occludes a testimony to what is most difficult about traumatic histories, whether personal or collective: that the wounds remain.” Rambo, *Resurrecting Wounds*, 42.

⁵²⁴ Beth R. Crisp, “Jesus: A Critical Companion in the Journey to Moving on from Sexual Abuse” in *When Did We See You Naked?: Jesus as a Victim of Sexual Abuse*, eds. Jayme R. Reaves, David Tombs, and Rocío Figueroa (London: SCM Press, 2021), 256.

⁵²⁵ “Jesus’s survival is hopeful for survivors of sexual abuse because we see that God affirmed Jesus as a survivor. We too can be resurrected and transformed....” Kim and Shaw, *Surviving God*, 13.

⁵²⁶ The Strict Father model tends to need an either/or of death or life, crucifixion or recovery. However, the Nurturant Parent model helps attend to the ongoing wounds of trauma. Rambo reflects this by saying, “I am seeking a picture of redemption that adequately accounts for traumatic suffering, that speaks to divine presence and power in light of what we know about trauma. This picture of redemption cannot emerge by interpreting death and life in opposition to each other. Instead, theology must account for the excess, or remainder, of death in life that is central to trauma.” Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma*, 6.

truth-telling.”⁵²⁷ Wounds speak truth: both the truth of the harm but also the truth of the hope for healing.

It is important to note that Christianity emerged in the wake of trauma and continues to wrestle with the wounds of trauma.⁵²⁸ Because of Christianity’s deep ties to trauma, it has the patho-theological potential to repeat that trauma which is not what God intended.⁵²⁹ The Gospel of John also reminds us that Jesus came “so that they might have life and have it more abundantly.”⁵³⁰ While not often named, the healing journey from trauma is an important aspect of the Christian mission toward salvation.⁵³¹ Sanders writes, “Salvation is not merely something that God does for us. It is also something we do with God to redeem our communities.”⁵³² The resurrection, and the ongoingness of the healing journey,⁵³³ is held in the body—the community of believers—of Christ.⁵³⁴

⁵²⁷ Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 181.

⁵²⁸ “Christianity bears the marks of unresolved trauma. Jesus’ resurrection and the continuation of his movement are not triumphs, but a glimpse of the power of survival....” Nakashima Brock and Parker, *Proverbs of Ashes*, 250.

⁵²⁹ While it is outside the scope of this paper, see David Carr’s summary of Christianity’s concerning focus on martyrdom as a repetition of trauma in David M. Carr, *Resilience: The Bible’s Traumatic Origins* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), 240-243.

⁵³⁰ John 10:10

⁵³¹ It is worth noting that different communities interpret the Risen Christ’s final encouragement in different ways; ways that I believe may have to do with the cognitive models being employed and their stages of healing from trauma. For example, the Risen Christ in the Gospel of Matthew encourages the disciples toward what today is commonly considered an evangelism path, “teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.” (Matthew 28:20), whereas the Gospel of John encourages the disciples toward a healing path via peace and forgiveness, “Peace be with you.... Receive the holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained.” (John 20:21, 23).

⁵³² Sanders, *Embracing Prodigals*, 60.

⁵³³ I use the word “ongoingness” in the way of Shelly Rambo. See Rambo, *Resurrecting Wounds*, 5.

⁵³⁴ “...the Moses story provided a guide for the Jesus community. The vindication of Moses, God’s ‘servant,’ came not in his own resurrection. His life and death were vindicated by the ongoing life of his community, which entered Canaan and lived on as Israel. So also the hymn in 1 Peter and the Gospel of Mark do not emphasize Jesus’ resurrection. The suffering Jesus they depict is vindicated in the redeemed community that survives him. The church’s survival, its ongoing life and flourishing, becomes a testimony to the healing and making-righteous that Jesus’ death accomplished. Not only Jesus but the whole community, the whole Jesus movement, stands as proof of the failure of Roman imperial terrorism.” Carr, *Resilience*, 170.

*Holy Spirit as Resilient Love*⁵³⁵

Jesus Christ's life, death, and resurrection, the fullness of the paschal mystery, point toward a resilient love, an ability to rise again in the aftermath of wounding and trauma. Theologian Andrew Sung Park writes that "Resisting evil with resilient love is the core message of Jesus."⁵³⁶ That spirit of resilient love is carried on in the Christian community, a community that, at its best, follows the path of Jesus Christ by tending its own wounds and the wounds of the world, with the help of the Holy Spirit, to bring forth justice, forgiveness, healing, and reconciliation.⁵³⁷ Christ ensures that his community knows that while Jesus may no longer be with them in the flesh, God's love remains.

Theologian Rambo writes that Jesus:

promises the disciples that they will not be alone. In his absence, he will send them an advocate, a witness, who will teach them and guide them in relationship to the events of the past.... It appears in the farewell discourse to communicate something about God's presence beyond the physical presence of Jesus. This paraclete is both the promise of his continued presence and the memory of him in his absence.⁵³⁸

The Holy Spirit as Resilient Love is a reminder of God's ongoing presence even in the midst of the ongoing harm in the world; that love survives and that resilience—that helps

⁵³⁵ While the theological concept of Jesus Christ as trauma survivor is bookended in this section of this thesis project by concepts of God and the Holy Spirit and may seem to appear in a hierarchical order—God, Jesus, and then Holy Spirit—it should be noted that the trinity is one of communal relations. As Johnson writes, "the various scriptural options make it possible to conceive of the trinitarian persons in different patterns of relation from a set series of sequential processions." Johnson, *She Who Is*, 195.

⁵³⁶ Sung Park, *From Hurt to Healing*, 67. Similarly, James Newton Poling writes, "The revelation of God in Jesus Christ is that God's love and justice are resilient in the face of evil, but its concrete actuality depends on the partnership of all in the web." Poling, *The Abuse of Power*, 178.

⁵³⁷ When I use the term "forgiveness," I am referencing a trauma-informed forgiveness. See Nicole Sotelo, *Pray Your Way Through Forgiveness: Reflections, Prayers, and Actions for Healing* (New London: Twenty-third Publications, 2020), 9-14. When I use the term reconciliation, I want to be clear that abuse does not require reconciliation in this world. Since justice is a prerequisite of reconciliation and true justice—including transformation of the perpetrator and transformation of the systems of wounding that support abuse—is often elusive, reconciliation is more often an eschatological hope.

⁵³⁸ Shelly Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma*, 101.

heal—can be cultivated.⁵³⁹ The American Psychological Association defines resilience as “the process and outcome of successfully adapting to difficult or challenging life experiences, especially through mental, emotional, and behavioral flexibility and adjustment to external and internal demands” and that resilience “can be cultivated and practiced.”⁵⁴⁰ The Spirit, still from a Nurturant Parent model, provides empathic, nurturing grace that buoys the community’s capacity to heal and practice love as God loves.⁵⁴¹ Resilience builds the capacity for healing and “...tries to formulate the capacities that make resistance possible and help to sustain it.”⁵⁴²

Elizabeth Johnson, using other words, reflects a similar sentiment about the Trinity’s love that aids in resisting evil. She writes:

Jesus was not ultimately abandoned. The victory arrives through the living communion of love, overcoming evil from within. To say this is not to rationalize suffering or to find a solution to the problem of evil or to offer cheap consolation. The cross and resurrection scandalize and cannot be reconciled theoretically. Rather, this event deepens the mystery of how God’s solidarity with the suffering world brings about a future even for the most godforsaken. It points to the real mystery of the trinitarian God as an ally against suffering and moves the community to the practice of love that corresponds to this mystery. The presence of the living God, even when darkly intuited in the mode of absence, offers new possibilities to the situation from within.⁵⁴³

Johnson makes clear, “...God [serves] as an ally *against* suffering and moves the community to the practice of love.” (italics mine) The Christian community is invited to

⁵³⁹ The idea that love survives is an important point for ministry with survivors and others affected by abuse, including those who mourn loved ones who have been killed or committed suicide in the context of abuse. Even though a person may be a victim of violence and their body does not survive, the love of the relationship lives on.

⁵⁴⁰ American Psychological Association, “APA Dictionary of Psychology,” Definition of Resilience, Updated April 19, 2018, <https://dictionary.apa.org/resilience>.

⁵⁴¹ Wendy Farley writes of this, saying, “Compassion is that power which survives to resist tragic suffering.” Farley, *Tragic Vision and Divine Compassion*, 29.

⁵⁴² Robert J. Schreiter, “Reading Biblical Texts through the Lens of Resilience,” in Elizabeth Boase and Christopher G. Frechette, eds. *Bible through the Lens of Trauma* (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2016), 195.

⁵⁴³ Johnson, *She Who Is*, 268-269.

participate in God's ways of loving and to resist evil as best as possible to *prevent* more suffering. When suffering does happen, God is there to accompany the survivor on the healing journey and, at its best, so is the Christian community. This must be made clear, especially for those who have suffered abuse, that God did not want Jesus to suffer and does not want God's creatures to suffer either.⁵⁴⁴ God invites the abuse survivor and all God's creatures to experience and heal from God's incarnational (empathic), resilient love and to work with others for justice so there is less abuse, less wounding, in the future. Johnson boldly proclaims, "The close correlation between divine pathos and prophetic act in the Bible indicates that responsible action for resistance, correction, and healing are among the truest expressions of living faith."⁵⁴⁵ Indeed, healing oneself and helping others in their healing, is a constitutive aspect of the Christian journey toward salvation.

In the section above this one, it was noted that a concern was raised by some of the research participants. While each participant felt the concept of Jesus Christ as trauma survivor could be helpful to them and comforting to other survivors, there was also concern raised about how the the*logical concept might be understood by some. One participant shared, "...I feel that there are people who don't really want to think about [abuse] too much, and would say, 'Well, if Jesus could get over it, why can't you?'"⁵⁴⁶

⁵⁴⁴ It is important that the Church not glorify suffering, but rather weep over it, support survivors in their healing, and seek to prevent future suffering at a systemic level. "It is crucial that we see this issue of sexual violence and abuse in its true context – an abusive society maintained and supported by the dominant mythologies of the day, foremost among them being Christianity with its sacralizing of a patriarchal, hierarchical system of domination and submission,; with its mixed messages of servanthood and forgiveness; and with its glorification of suffering through its teaching and theology, its liturgies and its rituals. We have been conditioned to see violence as episodic, an anomaly in a basically civilized culture. The reality is, as Mary Hunt pointed out in a recent lecture, that violence is contextual and justice is episodic." Carlson Brown, "Because of the Angels: Sexual Violence and Abuse," 4.

⁵⁴⁵ Johnson, *She Who Is*, 268.

⁵⁴⁶ B175

Gratefully, through a Nurturant Parent cognitive model of God, Jesus Christ as trauma survivor does not “get over it” nor does this model tell survivors to “get over it.” Rather, the Gospel of John relates that Christ comes back *with* his wounds and offers a model for survivors of how to live *with* wounds, too. Christ points toward the way of healing; points toward salvation. With the Spirit, the Christian community is encouraged to seek healing for themselves and others, and to work together to resist evil such as systemic sin that causes more suffering; to practice resilient love as a way to strive with God’s presencing love for the kin-dom where all will be healed.

Conclusion

This chapter, grounded in the meta-method of justice, began by looking at four insights from the interviews and the pastoral implications of those insights. These were:

- 1) **First, Catholic women who are relational abuse survivors—like the general population—hold cognitive models. As suggested by Lakoff and Sanders, these cognitive models may relate to their understanding of God and how God interacts with them.** *Catholic ministers could help Catholic women who are relational abuse survivors by learning about cognitive models and how they relate to the*logy and spirituality.*
- 2) **Second, Catholic women who are relational abuse survivors can identify what makes them feel safe or unsafe in their spiritual lives.** *Catholic ministers could help Catholic women who are relational abuse survivors by listening to and practicing what makes them feel safe in their spiritual lives, since safety is the foundational stage of healing.*
- 3) **Third, bringing cognitive models and safety together, it was found that some Catholic women relational abuse survivors who hold Nurturant Parent cognitive models feel more safe when presented with Nurturant Parent cognitive models in the*logical concepts and less safe when presented with Strict Father cognitive models in the*logical concepts.** *Catholic ministers could help these survivors feel safer—the foundational stage of healing—by using Nurturant Parent models in the*logical concepts in ministry with them.*

- 4) **Fourth, understanding Jesus Christ as a trauma survivor may be a comforting and helpful concept for Catholic women relational abuse survivors with Nurturant Parent cognitive models.** *Catholic ministers could help these survivors by using this concept in ministry with them when shared through a Nurturant Parent model.*

More research is needed with Catholic women relational abuse survivors with Strict Father models to see how the insights among those with Nurturant Parent models compare to those who hold a different cognitive model. For example, there is some indication that Catholic women relational abuse survivors with Nurturant Parent cognitive models feel less safe when presented with Strict Father models in the*logical concepts. Do those with Strict Father cognitive models also feel less safe when presented with Nurturant Parent models in the*logical concepts? Moreover, there is some indication that Catholic women relational abuse survivors with Nurturant Parent cognitive models feel that the the*logical concept of Jesus Christ as trauma survivor may be a comforting and helpful the*logical concept for themselves and other survivors in some contexts. Is that also true for Catholic women relational abuse survivors with Strict Father cognitive models? Or is it more difficult for Catholic women relational abuse survivors with a Strict Father model to find comfort in Jesus Christ as a trauma survivor due to the Strict Father model's moral priorities of strength and authority?

Nonetheless, the preliminary insights of this project seem to point toward the fact that those in ministry can help some Catholic women relational abuse survivors who hold a Nurturant Parent model by being mindful of the interplay between cognitive models, the*logical concepts, and safety. Moreover, the the*logical concept of Jesus Christ as trauma survivor when presented through a Nurturant Parent model may be comforting and helpful to some Catholic women relational abuse survivors with a Nurturant Parent model. Knowing this, Catholic ministers may be part of a survivor's moral community

and walk with them in the fourth stage of justice by taking actions to better support them, individually and systemically. One way may be to use elements of the trauma-informed theological sketch of God through a Nurturant Parent model that was offered above.

Ministers can help survivors who have suffered deep wounding to stay connected with God's secure, presencing love; a God who empathizes with their suffering and walks with them on a path of resilient love toward healing, toward salvation.

Moreover, if ministers are attentive to the needs of survivors, they may also be attending to the needs of the wider Church because Christianity as a whole "bears the marks of unresolved trauma."⁵⁴⁷ The entire Church may benefit from a trauma-informed theology rooted in a Nurturant Parent model. As McFague notes, "...for it is only as the basic metaphors in which we imagine the relationship between God and the world change that our way of being in the world will change as well."⁵⁴⁸ In lifting up a Nurturant Parent model, not only will Catholic ministers be helping survivors, they may be helping the entire Church to heal.

⁵⁴⁷ Nakashima Brock and Parker, *Proverbs of Ashes*, 250.

⁵⁴⁸ Sallie McFague, *Metaphorical Theology: Models of God in Religious Language* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982), xi.

Conclusion

“The challenge of ministry is to help people in very concrete situations....to see and experience their story as part of God’s ongoing redemptive work in the world. These insights and experiences heal precisely because they restore the broken connection between the world and God and create a new unity in which memories that formerly seemed only destructive are now reclaimed as part of a redemptive event.”

– Henri Nouwen, *The Living Reminder*⁵⁴⁹

A Review of the Thesis Project

This thesis project has looked at how cognitive models inform humans’ conceptions of God and the*logies, and the impact this may have on Catholic women relational abuse survivors who hold a Nurturant Parent cognitive model. In particular, it explored whether Nurturant Parent conceptions for God may help Catholic women relational abuse survivors who lean toward a Nurturant Parent cognitive model to feel safe and that Strict Father conceptions for God may impede their ability to feel safe

The introduction proposed the focus of the project, sharing that it would be done through the qualitative method of phenomenology and with a meta-method based on the contextualization of trauma and four stages of healing by trauma psychologist Judith Herman.⁵⁵⁰ It stated the researcher’s commitment to feminist the*logies that put women’s well-being at the forefront of this project’s goals and process.

⁵⁴⁹ Henry Nouwen, *The Living Reminder* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1977), 26-27.

⁵⁵⁰ While Herman’s stages of healing were helpful as a meta-method for this project, they may also have the potential to serve as a beneficial method more broadly within the*logy, spirituality, and ministry. Catholicism’s scripture-based origin stories speak of the suffering and trauma experienced by the early disciples, from colonial oppression under the Roman Empire and the beheading of John to the crucifixion. The early disciples were likely people suffering from trauma. One has only to look at the responses of the early disciples to the crucifixion to see potential trauma expressed: some run away in fear, others hide, another commits suicide. But the early disciples were also people learning to heal. In the post-death stories, we discover that Christ offers a path toward forgiveness and healing. Catholicism is well positioned to serve as a healing movement to address suffering and trauma. The Catholic Church could serve as a community that prioritizes the four stages of safety, remembrance and mourning, reconnection, and

The first chapter contextualized the project by introducing the cognitive linguist George Lakoff's family-based cognitive models, termed the Strict Father model and the Nurturant Parent model. Both models have accompanying moral priorities that shape the way that individuals who hold them perceive complex phenomenon and concepts, including concepts of God and the*logy, as explored by Lakoff and the*logian John Sanders. The chapter went on to explore how some feminist the*logians have raised concerns that certain metaphors and models for God are more harmful to women's well-being than others. While these the*logians do not have the language of Lakoff's models, they have concerns about metaphors for God that carry similar moral priorities found within the Strict Father model such as strength, authority, order, and boundaries. Instead, these the*logians advocate for metaphors for God that promote women's well-being and that tend to carry similar moral priorities found within the Nurturant Parent model, such as empathy, nurturance, self-nurturance, and nurturance of social ties. Since humans subconsciously use metaphors and models to understand God and the*logy, feminist the*logian Sallie McFague said, humans "[do] not have the luxury of deciding between models and no models: the question is, which models?"⁵⁵¹ The chapter then explored whether one model may be preferred. Lakoff offers three reasons for why he believes that the Nurturant Parent model is the healthier model, in general, for humans and human

justice—from its liturgies to seminary formation to pastoral care in parishes. Catholicism could help people process and transform their trauma and move out to help others do the same. In this paradigm, evangelization takes on a new meaning. It is not a witness of only belief, but also a witness to the suffering that remains and engagement toward healing and transformation. For examples of trauma in scripture, see Elizabeth Boase and Christopher G. Frechette, eds., *Bible Through the Lens of Trauma* (Atlanta, SBL Press, 2016); David M. Carr, *Holy Resilience: The Bible's Traumatic Origins* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014); Elaine A. Heath, *Healing the Wounds of Sexual Abuse: Reading the Bible with Survivors* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2019).

⁵⁵¹ Sallie McFague, *Metaphorical Theology: Models of God in Religious Language* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982), 105.

communities of belonging. Of his three reasons, Lakoff's third reason for preferring the Nurturant Parent model is because it is less likely to justify harm and, thus, this model seems most salient for this project's focus on Catholic women relational abuse survivors.

The second chapter discussed the research design of the thesis project. First, the chapter expounded upon the meta-method of Judith Herman's first stage of healing which is safety. Since safety is the most critical stage of a survivor's healing, safety also became a guiding light for the design of the research to ensure the experience for the participants would be trauma-informed and, as much as possible, to make the experience a safe one for them. As such, this project utilized Nancy Edelman's Trauma and Resilience Informed Research Principles and Practice (TRIRPP). The chapter reviewed each of Edelman's eight principles and how they were used to shape the research design. The chapter also shared why this thesis project was designed with a phenomenological qualitative approach so that the common meanings of the women's experiences could be explored and the researcher could spend time with each participant and their lived experiences, rather than selecting a quantitative approach that would limit the ability of the researcher to address any potential trigger responses that might arise in a participant during the research. Finally, the chapter reviewed each research question that was used during the interviews in order to share the reasoning behind the questions.

Chapter three was devoted to the interviews and analysis. It looked at Herman's second and third phases in the healing journey that also served as the meta-methods for that section. The second phase, remembrance and mourning, was envisioned as a meta-method for the interviews in which the participants shared their thoughts and experiences in response to the questions. The third phase, reconnection, was envisioned as a meta-

method for the analysis of the interviews. The chapter included a brief introduction to the participants with some demographic data. The chapter then went through each interview question and shared the discoveries and some common themes that emerged from the participants' responses through the use of extensive quotes so that the participants' voices could be the primary truth and text. Based on the participants' responses, all of whom lean toward a Nurturant Parent cognitive model, there seems to be a meaningful connection for some between cognitive models and a sense of safety in relation to one's conception of God and the*logical concepts one may encounter in ministerial settings.

Chapter four looked at the pastoral implications of the research with Herman's fourth stage of healing, that of justice, serving as the meta-method for this chapter. If some Catholic women relational abuse survivors with Nurturant Parent cognitive models feel less safe when presented with the*logical concepts rooted in a Strict Father cognitive model, Catholic ministers who read this project can respond justly, in part, by being mindful of the the*logical models they use in ministry with survivors. While the small scale of the research does not permit firm conclusions, should the research be confirmed in larger studies, four insights were shared from this project's preliminary research with corresponding pastoral suggestions:

- 1) **First, Catholic women who are relational abuse survivors—like the general population—hold cognitive models. As suggested by Lakoff and Sanders, these cognitive models may impact their understanding of God and how God interacts with them.** *Catholic ministers could help Catholic women who are relational abuse survivors by learning about cognitive models and how they relate to the*logy and spirituality.*
- 2) **Second, Catholic women who are relational abuse survivors can identify what makes them feel safe or unsafe in their spiritual lives.** *Catholic ministers could help Catholic women who are relational abuse survivors by listening to and practicing what makes them feel safe in their spiritual lives, since safety is the foundational stage of healing.*

- 3) **Third, bringing cognitive models and safety together, it was found that some Catholic women relational abuse survivors who hold Nurturant Parent cognitive models feel more safe when presented with Nurturant Parent cognitive models in the*logical concepts and less safe when presented with Strict Father cognitive models in the*logical concepts.** *Catholic ministers could help these survivors feel safer—the foundational stage of healing—by using Nurturant Parent models in the*logical concepts in ministry with them.*
- 4) **Fourth, understanding Jesus Christ as a trauma survivor may be a comforting and helpful concept for Catholic women relational abuse survivors with Nurturant Parent cognitive models.** *Catholic ministers could help these survivors by using this concept in ministry with them when shared through a Nurturant Parent model.*

Chapter four concluded with a brief the*logical sketch of survivor the*logy that is an expansion of the the*logical concept of Jesus Christ as trauma survivor through a Nurturant Parent cognitive model, embedded within a trinitarian model of God that takes the healing of trauma as central to the salvation narrative. Elements of the model may be used by Catholics when ministering to abuse survivors who lean toward a Nurturant Parent model.

Potential Broader Implications

Lakoff's work in cognitive linguistics, particularly his work on cognitive models, is an important conversation partner with the*logy, as well as ministry and spirituality. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza has noted that "The question of how to speak about the Divine is at the heart of Christian the*logy which literally means G*d-talk. How to imagine and speak about the Divine has become the central the*logical question in modernity and post-modernity."⁵⁵² If how we talk about God is critical to our the*logical

⁵⁵² Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *The Power of the Word: Scripture and the Rhetoric of Empire* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 31.

times, as Schüssler Fiorenza has noted, then cognitive models may help theologians, ministers, and Christians in general, learn more about what undergirds God-talk and the way it is understood. The ways that humans imagine, speak about, and understand God are drawing upon deeper, subconscious cognitive models. Moreover, these cognitive models that impact God concepts, in turn, impact human behavior. For example, as noted by the research team in a national study of people in the United States and their God beliefs, "...the type of God Americans believe in has a dramatic impact upon their moral attitudes..." and, thus, how they engage with the world.⁵⁵³ For example, in their research, they found that the type of God one believes in is related to one's views on abortion, homosexuality, war, and a number of other practical societal issues. Indeed, as Elizabeth Johnson has noted, "Speech about God shapes the life orientation not only of the corporate faith community but in this matrix guides its individual members as well.... The holy mystery of God undergirds and implicitly gives direction to all of a believing person's enterprises, principles, choices, system of values, and relationships. The symbol of God functions."⁵⁵⁴ Another way to say this, with the added perspective of cognitive linguistics, would be to say that "the cognitive model of God functions." Cognitive models are subconsciously shaping the lives of believers and communities, inside and outside church doors.

Looking specifically at Catholic women who are relational abuse survivors, one's cognitive model for God functions in terms of how a survivor processes the trauma, as

⁵⁵³ Christopher Bader, Kevin Dougherty, Paul Froese, Byron Johnson, F. Carson Mencken, Jerry Z. Park, and Rodney Stark, *American Piety in the 21st Century: New Insights to the Depth and Complexity of Religion in the U.S., Selected Findings from the Baylor Religion Survey* (Waco: Baylor Institute for Studies of Religion, September 2006), 31.

⁵⁵⁴ Elizabeth A. Johnson, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse* (New York: Crossroad, 1996), 4.

noted in the charts in chapter four. Subsequently, the question for Catholic ministers becomes what cognitive model may best help survivors heal? Theologians Grace Ji-Sun Kim and Susan M. Shaw state:

The question for us is not what a belief is but rather what it does. Does it make us kinder? Does it make us more loving? Or does it justify our violence, our uses of power, and our hierarchies? For us, surviving God means deconstructing old notions that are part of the problem of sexual violence and imagining new ways of thinking about God that help us heal and be better people in the world.⁵⁵⁵

While not using the language of cognitive models, they point toward the fact that the symbol of God—the cognitive model of God—functions and impacts how survivors heal. Will a survivor be faced with a Strict Father cognitive model of God that encourages obedience and surrender as a pathway to healing, a similar pattern as that of her abusive experience? Or will a survivor be faced with a Nurturant Parent cognitive model of God that offers unconditional, empathic love as a pathway to healing? The cognitive model of God functions and Catholic ministers have a role to play in how that model functions for the well-being of survivors.

For Catholic ministers who care about preventing further harm against abuse survivors and helping survivors heal, they may desire to lean toward a God concept that is similar to Lakoff's Nurturant Parent model of God. While the research for this stance is affirmed through the studies outlined toward the end of chapter one, this is also affirmed by Thomas Doyle, O.P. who writes about the healing steps necessary for survivors of clergy and religious abuse. He believes that transforming one's image of God:

is perhaps the most fundamental and radical dimension of the healing process. Upon it hinges the victim's concept of Church, sin and even self. Catholic theology is rooted in a theistic notion of the Higher Power. God is a supernatural,

⁵⁵⁵ Grace Ji-Sun Kim and Susan M. Shaw, *Surviving God: A New Vision of God through the Eyes of Sexual Abuse Survivors* (Minneapolis: Broadleaf Books, 2024), 13.

personal being who controls all aspects of life. It is possible to move to a concept of God that does not lend itself to the toxic beliefs about guilt, suffering, sin and punishment.⁵⁵⁶

Doyle notes that Catholic the*logy impedes a survivor's healing when it promotes a the*logy of God that is all-powerful, punishing, and prioritizes obedience. Without using Lakoff's language, Doyle seems to point toward the fact that a survivor's healing is greatly assisted when they can move away from a concept of God that resembles elements that tend to be associated with a Strict Father model. The*logian Sanders agrees that moving away from a Strict Father model of God toward a Nurturant Parent model of God is an important pivot for Christian ministers to make. After reviewing a range of research, Sanders states, "The Nurturing way of life produces better people, better congregations, and better societies."⁵⁵⁷ Catholic ministers have the ability not only to help survivors, but to help move individuals and congregations away from Strict Father conceptions of God and, instead, engage Nurturant Parent conceptions of God. Catholic ministers can help "move the church toward a beloved community that is safe, welcoming, liberatory, and transformative."⁵⁵⁸ This is good news, indeed, not only for survivors but for all God's people.

⁵⁵⁶ Thomas P. Doyle, "The Spiritual Trauma Experienced by Victims of Sexual Abuse by Catholic Clergy," *Pastoral Psychology*, 58 (2009), 255.

⁵⁵⁷ Sanders, *Embracing Prodigals*, 126. Sanders contrasts this with a powerful statement about the potential harm of the Authoritarian, or what he calls "Authoritative," God concept that overlaps with Lakoff's Strict Father model. He writes: "This contrasts sharply with harmful Authoritative religion that is fear-based, exclusionary, intolerant, untrusting, anxiety-ridden, and allows only one view on any topic. It fosters authoritarian leadership rather than democracy. It demands conformity and punishes those who cross boundaries. It distorts divine love into 'If you obey me, then I will love you.' It perverts divine justice and twists the good news of Jesus into a moral accounting scheme directed by a very strict judge. It rejects Jesus' teaching about doing good to those who harm you and forgiving others. Hence, it is not surprising that Authoritative thinkers develop doctrines such as penal substitution and hell as an eternal torture chamber, and champion political policies that favor a few individuals over the common good. They do not worship the God Jesus revealed." Sanders, *Embracing Prodigals*, 126.

⁵⁵⁸ Kim and Shaw, *Surviving God*, 5.

Feminist the*logians, among other liberation the*logians, have been leading the way toward God concepts that will be safe and life-giving for all. Sally McFague writes, “The current resistance to inclusive or unbiased language, for instance, both at the social and religious level, indicates that people know instinctively that a revolution in language means a revolution in one’s world.”⁵⁵⁹ Adding insights from Lakoff’s work, one might say that it is not only a revolution in language, but a revolution in the cognitive models underneath the language that will mean a revolution in the world. Changing models changes lives.

Conclusion

The few who work in the fields of both cognitive linguistics and the*logy posit “that cognitive linguistics research is indispensable to the theological debate concerning metaphors for God.”⁵⁶⁰ Sanders affirms the need for more attention to cognitive models in the*logy. He notes that, “Though some may believe that understanding God using our anthropogenic perspective diminishes the divine mystery we have no other option. The only real debate is which anthropogenic concepts we believe appropriate to attribute to God.”⁵⁶¹ For purposes of this project, one may say the debate, or even the ministerial imperative, is to continue the conversation about what concepts or models for God will most help Catholic women relational abuse survivors, and others who are suffering, in their healing. From this project’s preliminary research among those who lean toward a Nurturant Parent model, it seems that the Nurturant Parent model of God and its

⁵⁵⁹ Sallie McFague, *Metaphorical Theology: Models of God in Religious Language* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982), 9.

⁵⁶⁰ Mary Therese DesCamp and Eve E. Sweetser, “Metaphors for God: Why and How Do Our Choices Matter for Humans? The Application of Contemporary Cognitive Linguistics Research to the Debate on God and Metaphor,” *Pastoral Psychology* 53, no. 3, (January 2005): 208.

⁵⁶¹ Sanders, *Theology of the Flesh*, 262.

enfleshed the*logical concepts will help them feel more safe and, thus, aid in their healing journey. Moreover, the concept of Jesus Christ as trauma survivor may be a comforting and helpful one when shared through a Nurturant Parent model. As such, Catholic ministers may consider using elements of a survivor the*logy, rooted in a Nurturant Parent model, when ministering to Catholic women relational abuse survivors, particularly those who lean toward a Nurturant Parent model. Catholic ministers, with an understanding of cognitive models, can be part of the necessary conversation that is “reimagining a God who can help survivors heal.”⁵⁶²

This is a conversation not only for the benefit of Catholic women relational abuse survivors, but of all the people of God who inevitably experience suffering, and often trauma, as part of the human condition. Finding a model of God that promotes healing could be at the heart of the Christian mission in a world of suffering. If cognitive models shape beliefs and behaviors, as has been discussed in this thesis project, then engaging a Nurturant Parent model of God may better serve the Catholic community in orienting our the*logy, ministry, and spirituality toward the healing that our suffering world needs. A Strict Father model of God who only offers love after surrender and obedience can be a dangerous relational pattern, particularly for abuse survivors when what is known about abuse is that it follows a similar pattern of coercive control.⁵⁶³ Instead, the Catholic community could move toward a Nurturant Parent model of God whose presencing love empathizes with human suffering and trauma, and through its incarnational model of

⁵⁶² Kim and Shaw, *Surviving God*, 71.

⁵⁶³ See Judith Herman’s chapter, “The Rules of Tyranny,” that discusses the patterns of power over and submission that are at the core of abusive relationships, both interpersonal ones and societal ones. Judith L. Herman, MD, *Truth and Repair: How Trauma Survivors Envision Justice* (New York: Basic Books, 2023), 25-37.

Jesus, offers a path to heal ourselves and our world: to live a life in the spirit of resilient love. This is a model of God that heals. This is a God who is for survivors.

Appendix A: Outline of Cognitive Models and Descriptions of God

Brief Outline of Cognitive Models and their Top Four Moral Priorities

For use as a reference, below are Lakoff’s Two Cognitive Models, along with their accompanying top four moral priorities. Note that Lakoff lists additional moral priorities that may be found in his book, *Moral Politics*.^{564, 565}

Strict Father Model	Nurturant Parent Model
Strength	Empathy
Authority	Nurturance
Order	Self-Nurturance
Boundaries	Nurturance of Social Ties

Descriptions of God through the Cognitive Models by Lakoff and Sanders

Both Lakoff and Sanders describe God through the Strict Father and Nurturant Parent cognitive models. Below are samples from their writings of how each author describes God through these models. It should be noted that each author has described God through the cognitive models in varying ways and that the descriptions below have been selected for their brief but relatively comprehensive description.

Lakoff’s Strict Father God Description

God is understood as punitive—this is, if you sin you are going to go to hell, and if you don’t sin you are going to go be rewarded. But since people tend to sin at one point or another in their lives, how is it possible for them to ever get to

⁵⁶⁴ George Lakoff, *Moral Politics: How Liberals and Conservatives Think* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996), 65-140.

⁵⁶⁵ I found that at one point in the book Lakoff references empathy as the top moral priority, page 114, but later makes nurturance the top moral priority and empathy the second, as noted in a list found on page 135. For purposes of this paper, I elected to go with his first note of empathy as the top moral priority, recognizing how he says they are intertwined on page 116.

heaven? The answer in conservative Christianity is Christ. What Jesus does is offer them a chance to get to heaven. The idea is this: Christ suffered on the cross so much that he built up moral credit sufficient for all people, forever. He then offered a chance to get to heaven—this is, redemption—on the following terms, strict father terms: If you accept Jesus as your savior, that is, as your moral authority, and agree to follow the moral authority of your minister and your church, then you can get to heaven. But that is going to require discipline. You need to be disciplined enough to follow the rules, and if you don't, then you are going to go to hell. So Jesus, with his moral credit that he gained from suffering, can pay off your debts—that is, your sins—and allow you to get into heaven, but only if you toe the line.⁵⁶⁶

Lakoff's Nurturant Parent God Description

Liberal Christianity sees God as essentially beneficent, as wanting to help people. The central idea in liberal Christianity is grace, where grace is understood as a kind of metaphorical nurturance. In liberal Christianity, you can't earn grace—you are given grace unconditionally by God unconditionally. But you have to accept grace, you have to be near God to get his grace, you can be filled with grace, you can be healed by grace, and you are made into a moral person through God's grace.

In other words, grace is metaphorical nurturance. That is, just as nurturance feeds you, heals you, takes care of you, just as a nurturant parent teaches you to be nurturant and allows you to be a moral being, just as you can't get nurturance unless you are close to your parents, just as you must accept nurturance in order to get it, so all of these things about nurturance are true of grace in liberal Christianity. Nurturance comes with unconditional love, in the case of grace, the unconditional love of God. What makes a religion nurturant is that it metaphorically views God as a nurturant parent. In a nurturant form of religion, your spiritual experience has to do with your connection to other people and the world, and your spiritual practice has to do with your service to other people and to your community.⁵⁶⁷

Sanders' Strict Father God Description

In the God Is an Authoritative Parent model, God sets out rules that humans are to obey. God wants people to develop moral strength and uphold the moral order. Respect for divine authority comes first, and then God rewards those who obey with acceptance. Each individual has failed to obey, and so must suffer the consequences in order to learn responsibility. Jesus, however, takes the punishment due each of us and is condemned in our place. In this way, the divine moral accounting between obedience and disobedience is balanced because someone pays the price and is punished for disobedience. God gives those who

⁵⁶⁶ George Lakoff, *Don't Think of an Elephant! Know Your Values and Frame the Debate* (White River Junction, VT: Chelsea Green Publishing, 2004), 102.

⁵⁶⁷ Lakoff, *Don't Think of an Elephant*, 102-103.

accept Jesus' atonement a fresh start. God wants each of us to be upstanding children who follow the instructions of those higher up in social and religious institutions. For the Authoritative God model, sin is primarily understood as breaking rules and atonement is payment for wrongdoing.⁵⁶⁸

Sanders' Nurturant Parent God Description

In the God Is a Nurturant Parent model, divine grace is seen as primary for nurturance. Divine love comes first, which results in respect for divine authority. God accepts people into the divine family, and through love, empowers them to transform sinful ways of living to loving ways. Jesus is the divine-human exemplar showing us how to live a life of love toward others and who liberates us from enslaving powers and returns us to God. God demonstrates that God is trustworthy and is, in significant ways, a model for humans to imitate. God wants to produce communities where people are nurtured in the ways of grace and love for others. For the Nurturant God model, sin is primarily understood as harming others and atonement is restoration to loving relations.⁵⁶⁹

⁵⁶⁸ John Sanders, *Theology in the Flesh: How Embodiment and Culture Shape the Way We Think about Truth, Morality, and God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2016), 149.

⁵⁶⁹ Sanders, *Theology in the Flesh*, 148-149.

Appendix B: Flyer Used in Recruitment*

Are you a woman
who has experienced
relational abuse in the past?
Do you identify as Catholic?



Consider participating in a research study into conceptions of God and family beliefs; the study results may help abused women in the future.

This study is being conducted by a Doctor of Ministry candidate at Catholic Theological Union, Chicago, IL.

Participants will need access to Zoom and be willing to share an hour of time. To learn more or to volunteer, contact nsotelo@student.ctu.edu by September 1, 2025.

*Note that the deadline to respond changed over the summer, in order to recruit enough participants.

Appendix C: Consent and Eligibility Form

You are being invited to participate in a research study titled, *Jesus Christ, Trauma Survivor*. The Faculty Advisor for this study is Prof. Christina Zaker at Catholic Theological Union.

What the Study is About

The purpose of this research is to explore what conceptions for God may be helpful for Catholic women who are relational abuse survivors. Included in the study will be an exploration of how parenting style beliefs may relate to conceptions of Human-Divine connection.

What You Are Invited to Do

Research participants will be invited to take part in a Zoom call for approximately one hour. The researcher will ask questions of the participants about names, characteristics, roles, and beliefs about God, as well as a few questions about beliefs about parenting. Participants will need to be able to understand and speak English, use an email address, and have reliable access to a computer or phone that has a camera, as well as that has the Zoom app. If you agree to participate in this research and meet the eligibility criteria, an interview will be set up for a mutually convenient time for you and the researcher between July 1, 2025 and July 26, 2025. The researcher will provide the Zoom link for you via email to the email you provide.

Risks and Discomforts

While no questions will be asked about a participant's experience of abuse, there is the potential that a participant in hearing or speaking about God or remembering their own abuse may experience feelings of sadness, anxiety, or in other ways feel triggered. While no research can guarantee 100% confidentiality, every effort will be made to protect your privacy.

Benefits

A research participant may indirectly benefit from participating by having time to reflect on one's understanding of the Divine in her life. The participant may also indirectly benefit by knowing that her responses to the research may in the future be used to help Catholic leaders better minister to other woman who are abuse survivors.

Audio/Video Recording

The Zoom interview will be recorded. The recordings will be used by the researcher to analyze the data. The recordings will be downloaded and transcribed. After the data is gleaned for the research, the original recordings and transcriptions will be placed onto a storage device that is not accessible via the internet in order to secure the data. For purposes of sharing the data in the research project, the participant's name and identifying information will *not* be shared. Please sign below if you are willing to have this interview recorded, which is a requirement of participation in the study.

- I do not want to have this interview recorded.
 I am willing to have this interview recorded.

Signed: _____
Date: _____

Privacy/Confidentiality/Data Security

The participant's privacy is a priority in this research and the recording will not include the participant's name on the Zoom screen. The recordings will be downloaded and transcribed. This information will be placed onto a storage device that is not accessible via the internet in order to secure the data. For purposes of sharing the data in the research project, the participant's name and identifying information will *not* be shared.

Only the researcher and the faculty advisor will have ordinary access to the recordings. The researcher will do her best to keep your participation in this research study confidential to the extent permitted by law; however, it is possible that other people may need to review the research records and may find out about your participation in this study. For example, the following people/groups may check and copy records about this research:

- Catholic Theological Union's Institutional Review Board (a committee that reviews and approves research studies) and the Office for Research Integrity and Assurance.

Please note that the research interview will be conducted on Zoom, a company not affiliated with Catholic Theological Union and with its own privacy and security policies that you can find at its website. We anticipate that your participation in this survey presents no greater risk than everyday use of the Internet.

To participate in this research, you will be in contact with the researcher via email. Please note that email communication is neither private nor secure. Though the researcher is taking precautions to protect your privacy, you should be aware that information sent through email could be read by a third party.

Taking Part is Voluntary

Your involvement is voluntary and you may refuse to participate before the study begins, discontinue at any time, or skip any questions that may make you feel uncomfortable, with no penalty to you, and no effect on the relationship with the researcher, the faculty advisor, or Catholic Theological Union.

Follow Up

After the interview, the researcher will provide a list of healing resources via email, should the participant need or want to pursue support for her healing journey. Should the researcher have future studies, she may contact you again to request your participation in a follow-up study. As always, your participation will be voluntary and you will be asked for your explicitly for consent to participate in any follow-up studies.

If You have Questions

The main researcher conducting this study is Nicole Sotelo, a graduate student at Catholic Theological Union. Please ask any questions you have at nsotelo@student.ctu.edu. If you have any questions or concerns regarding your rights as a participant in this study, you may contact Dr. Scott Alexander, Institutional Review Board, Catholic Theological Union at scalexan@ctu.edu.

Statement of Consent

I have read the above information, and have received answers to any questions I asked. I consent to take part in the research study.

Your Signature _____ Date _____

Your Name (printed) _____

Your Email Address (required for research communication) _____

Signature of person obtaining consent _____ Date _____

Printed name of person obtaining consent _____

Questions to Qualify for Participation

If you are open to participating in this research study, please read the following questions and check the box to the answer that best reflects your response:

Yes /No Are you a woman who has suffered relational abuse as a child, youth, or adult? For purposes of this study, the abuse could have been physical, verbal, psychological, and/or sexual. You may have suffered primary abuse (being the direct victim) or secondary abuse (having witnessed a family member or other close contact who was the direct victim).

Yes /No Have you been outside of the abusive relationship(s) for more than five years?

Yes /No Have you had some form of help to process the abuse experience(s) for at least a year? (i.e. spoken with a counselor, a minister, a spiritual director, etc.)

Yes /No Are you currently under the care of a professional counselor or do you have a trusted person to speak with should emotions arise for you during or after the interview?

Yes /No Do you identify yourself as a woman? (While the researcher respects all those along the gender spectrum, for purposes of this study, a participant needs to identify as a woman versus identifying as a man, binary, or another designation).

Yes No Do you belong to one of the following protected categories of people in research? If so, please circle the following category if it applies to you: Prisoner, Pregnant Woman, Child

Yes No Do you identify yourself and practice your faith as a Catholic? (The researcher is aware of the harm that many Catholic women have experienced in parish settings and other Catholic environments and that you may practice your faith outside of a traditional parish setting, but still live a Catholic spirituality).

Thank you for taking the time to fill out this form. The researcher will be in touch with you within a week's time to notify you if you have been selected to participate in this research.

Thank you!

Appendix D: Project Script for Interviews

Opening

Welcome the participant. As a soft opening, inquire where the participant learned about the research project. Before the recording is begun, say:

I am going to read a script, so that I am sharing the same information with each participant in this study, but I invite you at any time to stop me with questions or comments. Thank you so much for being here today and helping explore this topic of conceptions of God and how these may relate to our ideas about families and parenting. I value your time and the spirit within you that prompted you to volunteer.

As you know from the consent form, this interview will take approximately one-hour. It is a mix of both open-ended questions and multiple choice.

I am going to make you a co-host of this interview and recording so that both of us can start or stop the recording at any time. You are welcome to pause the recording for a few moments or stop the interview completely should you wish. If at a later time this week you wanted to return to the interview again, you could contact me and we could reschedule a time. Additionally, I would like to offer you the opportunity to erase your name from the zoom so that it is not recorded if you wish to remain confidential. My priority is to ensure you feel comfortable and safe.

Allow time for participant to remove name and help her if she needs someone to talk her through the steps. If she needs help removing her name, tell her to hover over the screen with her image. Click on the three dots in the upper right and press "Rename."

May I make you a co-host now and also begin recording, or is there anything you want to ask or say before I start the recording?

Click on participant box and make cohost.

Start recording to cloud.

Then press "Share Screen."

Safe Participation and Names for the Divine

To start, in a sentence or a few sentences, please share how you currently practice your Catholic faith, if you do? If you don't, what causes you not to?

Are there things that make you feel safe in church? (or did make you feel safe in church?)

Are there things that make you feel unsafe in church? (or made you feel unsafe in church?)

People give the Divine many names, what name for the Divine feels most comfortable and safe to you? For example, God, Jesus, Spirit, or perhaps another descriptive or non-descriptive name for the Divine? And why?

Is there a name for the Divine that I mentioned – God, Jesus, or Spirit – that makes you feel less comfortable or less safe? And if so, why?

In your own words, how would you describe ____ and how ____ interacts with you?

Safe-Making Characteristics

What are one or two characteristics that you associate with _____? And tell me what they mean to you. And if you can't think of any at this moment, that's fine. In the next screen, I will offer some examples.

Looking at this list of possible characteristics for _____, what would you select as **two** characteristics that you closely associate with _____?

Caring

Mighty

Listening

Strong

Close to Me

Empathetic

Powerful

Above Me

What do each of your selections mean to you?

Safe-Making Roles for the Divine

In addition to characteristics, many people also associate different roles with _____. What roles do you associate with _____? And tell me what they mean to you. And if you can't think of any at this moment, that's fine. In the next screen I will offer some examples.

Looking at this list of roles for _____, what would you select as **two** roles that you most closely associate with _____?

Community Organizer

Mother

King

Lord

Counselor

Judge

Father

Friend

Healer

Ruler

What do each of your selections mean to you?

Safe-Making Concepts for the Divine

People believe many things about the Divine and these beliefs are put into concepts that you may hear people say in everyday conversation, read in spirituality books, or sing about in church. I invite you to imagine being at church and a minister says the following statements. Tell me if the following statements help you to feel more safe or less safe by indicating: *Very Safe, Somewhat Safe, Neither Safe nor Unsafe, Somewhat Unsafe, Very Unsafe*

11. Surrender yourself to Jesus.
12. Jesus became human to show us how to obey God's commands.
13. Jesus became human to show us how to care for others.
14. In times of suffering, God is testing us to make us stronger.
15. Not my will, but God's will.
16. The Spirit helps us strongly stand up to evil and resist temptations.
17. Give yourself to Jesus.
18. In times of suffering, God empathizes with us and shows compassion for us.
19. God listens to me and helps me know what to do.
20. The Spirit helps us understand and care for others.

Jesus Christ as Trauma Survivor

There are Christian scholars who recognize that Jesus can be viewed as a trauma survivor due to the crucifixion. These scholars recognize that Jesus may be a model for abuse survivors to show a path toward healing and how to live with one's wounds.

Is it comforting or not comforting to know that Jesus is a trauma survivor?

Whether or not it is helpful for you, do you think that the idea of Jesus as a trauma survivor could help other survivors?

Do you think that the idea could be useful for the wider church, for those who minister in the church and/or other Catholics?

Family and Parenting Beliefs for Cognitive Models

We have about about ___ minutes left and I have a final series of questions to ask you. Since this study is looking at people's conceptions of God, and sometimes they are related to ideas about families and parenting, I would like to ask you the following questions. Please let me know if tend to agree or disagree with the statement by indicating: *Strongly Agree, Somewhat Agree, Neither Agree or Disagree, Somewhat Disagree, or Strongly Disagree.*

1. Siblings should receive parental support in accordance to their individual needs.
2. It's fine for children to have secrets and hide things from their parents.
3. Tending to the needs of others is not a sign of responsibility in children.
4. While other people must not be one's concern, within a family, everyone should look after each other.
5. I'd rather see my child play cooperatively than play competitively.
6. It's not important for parents to explain to their children why they set certain rules and limits.
7. Sometimes it's okay to let bad behavior in children go unpunished.
8. Children shouldn't feel obligated to care about the well-being of people they do not know.
9. Parents should empower children as much as possible so that they may follow their dreams.
10. In order to truly nurture children, one needs to be empathic.
11. When in doubt, parents should err on the side of lenience rather than strictness.
12. Parents shouldn't handicap their children by making their lives too easy.
13. Obedience must be instilled in children.
14. Children must be disciplined through strict rules at home.
15. Bad behavior in children must be punished sufficiently.
16. Children should learn to understand others needs and attend to them.
17. I will not have my child talk back to me.
18. Children will grow up to be happy adults if parents encourage them to follow their curiosity.
19. Learning to understand others and accepting them for who they are is not important for children to learn.
20. Knowing how to care for others is not a central thing for a child to learn.
21. At times it's okay for children to disobey their parents.
22. Children need to be disciplined in order to build character.
23. Parenting means nurturing the child's true nature
24. It's not critical for children to learn to take the perspective of others into account.
25. Children must be taught that people get what they deserve.
26. When grownups talk, children ought to be quiet.
27. "Tough love" is required to raise a child right.

28. Children must always be on time.
29. Children must learn to see the world through other people's eyes.

Closing

Thank you so much for your time and all that you shared today. I am truly grateful to you for your courage to respond to the flyer and share your wisdom. Your insights will potentially help others in the future. After our time today, I will send you an email with some healing resources and if you have any questions, you are welcome to follow up with me in the future. Do you have any questions or comments before we conclude our time together?

Stop Sharing Screen.

X out of Zoom to Stop Meeting.

Researcher Steps After Interview

1. Immediately after Zoom interview, email the participant and thank them for participating and send them the document with healing resources.
2. Download the data from the surveys
3. Transcribe the interview and save

IF PARTICIPANT FEELS TRIGGERED DURING THE INTERVIEW

Should the participant indicate that she is feeling triggered in some way, the researcher would say something along the lines of:

I appreciate you letting me know. Would it help to take a moment to do some deep breathing with me or would you prefer to end the interview at this time? You are in control. You can make the decision that is best for you.

If the participant would like to end the interview, I will end the recording or let her end it, and let her know that if she wishes to reconvene at another time this week that we could arrange that. In the meantime, I will ask if there is anything I can do to help her, encourage her to reach out to someone she trusts to talk about how she is feeling, and I will also commit to sending her the list of healing resources.

If the participant seems to be triggered in some way that is visible to me, the researcher could say:

I am wondering how you are feeling? *And see what comes and follow a process similar to the one mentioned above.*

Appendix E: Resources for Healing from Abuse

Thank you for participating in the research study titled, *Jesus Christ, Trauma Survivor*.

I deeply appreciate your participation which will hopefully, in turn, help women in the future.

I am offering a list of resources to everyone who participated in the study. Please feel free to use this list according to your need. These represent a sample of the resources available. If you pursue a resource on this list, I encourage you to explore that which feels right to you and to leave those that may not feel right for you.

Should you have any follow-up questions, please feel free to reach out to me at nsotelo@student.ctu.edu.

With gratitude,
Nicole

Hotlines

National Domestic Violence Hotline
800.799.SAFE (7233) or 800.787.3224 (TTY)

RAINN (Rape, Abuse, and Incest National Network) Sexual Assault Hotline
800.656.HOPE (4673) Herman, Judith, MD, *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence--from Domestic Abuse to Political Terror*. New York: Basic Books, 1997.

Counselors, Pastoral Counselors, and Spiritual Directors

A step-by-step guide to finding a therapist

<https://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2023/07/02/1185661348/start-therapy-find-therapist-how-to>

Association for Clinical Pastoral Education, Pastoral Counselor Directory
www.profile.acpe.edu/publicmemberdirectory

Between Friends, a local center for abused women that also offers counseling
www.betweenfriendschicago.org/our-programs/counseling/

Good Therapy, Therapist Finder
<https://www.goodtherapy.org/>

Mental Health America, Community health for low-income individuals and families
<https://arc.mhanational.org/find-affiliate>

Psychology Today, Therapist Finder
www.psychologytoday.com/us/therapists

Sensorimotor Psychotherapy Institute (body-centered counselors), Therapist Directory
www.sensorimotorpsychotherapy.org/therapist-directory/

Spiritual Directors International, Spiritual Director Finder
www.sdicompanions.org/find-a-spiritual-director-companion/

Organizations

Awake Community, for survivors and allies of those who have experienced abuse by Catholic officials

www.awakecommunity.org/

414.235.7807

Between Friends, for survivors of domestic/relational abuse

www.betweenfriendschicago.org

773.274.5232

Connections for Abused Women and their Children (CAWC)

<https://www.cawc.org/>

773.489.9081

Sarah's Inn, for survivors of domestic/relational abuse

<https://sarahsinn.org/>

708.386.3305

SNAP, the Survivor's Network of those Abused by Priests (and other religious leaders)

www.snapnetwork.org

312.321.4770

Books

Bass, Ellen, and Laura Davis. *Courage to Heal: A Guide for Women Survivors of Child Sexual Abuse*. New York: Harper Collins, 1994.

Bouclin, Marie Evans. *Seeking Wholeness: Women Dealing with Abuse of Power in the Catholic Church*. Liturgical Press, 2006.

Fortune, Marie. *Keeping the Faith: Guidance for Christian Women Facing Abuse*. San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1987.

Hanrahan, Maura. *Spirit and Dust: Meditations for Women with Depression*. Chicago: ACTA Publications, 2009.

Heath, Elaine A. *Healing the Wounds of Sexual Abuse: Reading the Bible with Survivors*. Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2011.

Schmidt, Kenneth W. *You have set us free: Scriptural Reflections for Trauma Survivors*. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2016.

Sotelo, Nicole. *Women Healing from Abuse: Meditations for Finding Peace*. Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2006.

A fellow participant in this study, after her interview, recommended the following book for this resource list that has been helpful for her:

Bancroft, Lundy. *Why Does He do That? Inside the Minds of Angry and Controlling Men*. New York: Berkeley/Penguin Books, 2003.

Bibliography

- American Psychological Association. "APA Dictionary of Psychology." Definition of Resilience. <https://dictionary.apa.org/resilience>
- Anderson, Herbert. "Loving." In *Wiley Blackwell Companion to Practical Theology*, edited by Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore, 61-69. Hoboken: Wiley, 2011.
- Aquinas, Thomas, *Summa Theologica*, Vol. 1. New York: Benziger Brothers, Inc., 1947. 1
- Bader, Christopher, Kevin Dougherty, Paul Froese, Byron Johnson, F. Carson Mencken, Jerry Z. Park, and Rodney Stark. *American Piety in the 21st Century: New Insights to the Depth and Complexity of Religion in the U.S., Selected Findings from the Baylor Religion Survey*. Waco: Baylor Institute for Studies of Religion, September 2006.
- Baldwin, Jennifer. *Trauma-Sensitive Theology: Thinking Theologically in the Era of Trauma*. Eugene: Cascade Books, 2018.
- Becka, Michelle, "Sexual Abuse in the Church and the Violation of Vulnerable Agency." In *Doing Theology and Theological Ethics in the Face of the Abuse Crisis*, edited by Daniel J. Fleming, James F. Keenan, and Hans Zollner, SJ, 11-25. Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2023.
- Boase, Elizabeth and Christopher G. Frechette, eds. *Bible through the Lens of Trauma*. Atlanta: SBL Press, 2016.
- Brown, Carlson, "Because of the Angels: Sexual Violence and Abuse." In *Violence Against Women*, Concilium 1994/1 edited by Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza and Mary Shawn Copeland, 3-10. London: SCM Press, 1994.
- Basile, Kathleen C., Sharon G. Smith, Marcie-jo Kresnow, Srijana, Khatiwada, and Ruth W. Leemis, "The National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey: 2016/2017 Report on Intimate Partner Violence," *National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*, June 2022, https://www.cdc.gov/nisvs/documentation/NISVSReportonIPV_2022.pdf.
- Carr, David M. *Resilience: The Bible's Traumatic Origins*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014.
- Chen, Ying, ScD, Jess Haines, Ph.D, MHSc, RD, Brittany M. Charlton, ScD, and Tyler J. VanderWeele, Ph.D. "Positive parenting improves multiple aspects of health and well-being in young adulthood." *Nature Human Behavior* 3, no. 7 (July 2019): 684-691.

- Considine, Kevin P. *Analogy of the Wound: A Theology of Communication for Healing and Social Transformation*. New York: T&T Clark, 2025.
- Considine, Kevin. "Han and Salvation for the Sinned-Against." *NTR* Vol. 26, No. 1 (September 2013): 87-89.
- Cooke, Bernard. "Non-Patriarchal Salvation." In *Women's Spirituality: Resources for Christian Development*, edited by Joann Wolski Conn, 274-286. Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1986.
- Creswell, John W. *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches*, Third Edition. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2013.
- Crisp, Beth R. "Jesus: A Critical Companion in the Journey to Moving on from Sexual Abuse." In *When Did We See You Naked?: Jesus as a Victim of Sexual Abuse*, eds. Jayme R. Reaves, David Tombs, and Rocío Figueroa, 249-259. London: SCM Press, 2021.
- DesCamp, Mary Therese and Eve E. Sweetser. "Metaphors for God: Why and How Do Our Choices Matter for Humans? The Application of Contemporary Cognitive Linguistics Research to the Debate on God and Metaphor." *Pastoral Psychology*, 53, no. 3 (January 2005): 207-238.
- Doehring, Carrie. *Internal Desecration: Traumatization and Representations of God*. Lanham: University Press of America, 1993.
- Doehring, Carrie. "Spiritual Care after Violence: Growing from Trauma with Lived Theology." *The Table, Biola University Center for Christian Thought*, June 23, 2014, <https://cct.biola.edu/spiritual-care-violence-growing-trauma-lived-theology/>.
- Doyle, Thomas P. "The Spiritual Trauma Experienced by Victims of Sexual Abuse by Catholic Clergy," *Pastoral Psychology*, Vol. 58 (2009): 239-260.
- Edelman, Natalie L. "Trauma and resilience informed research principles and practice: A framework to improve the inclusion and experience of disadvantaged populations in health and social care research." *Journal of Health Services Research & Policy* 28, no.1 (2023): 66-75.
- Farley, Wendy. *Tragic Vision and Divine Compassion: A Contemporary Theodicy*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1990.
- Farley, Wendy. *The Wounding and Healing of Desire: Weaving Heaven and Earth*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005.

- Feinberg, Matthew, Elisabeth Wehling, Joanne M. Chung, Laura R. Saslow, and Ingrid Melvaer Paulin. "Measuring Moral Politics: How Strict and Nurturant Family Values Explain Individual Differences in Conservatism, Liberalism, and the Political Middle." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology Advance Online Publication* (June 27, 2019). Shared with this author by Matthew Feinberg via email.
- Figueroa, Rocío and David Tombs. "Recognizing Jesus as a Victim of Sexual Abuse: Responses from Sodalicio Survivors in Peru." *Religion and Gender* 10, no.1 (2020): 57–75.
- Figueroa, Rocío and David Tombs. "Seeing His Innocence, I See My Innocence." In *When Did We See You Naked?: Jesus as a Victim of Sexual Abuse*, edited by Jayme R. Reaves, David Tombs, and Rocío Figueroa, 287-312. London: SCM Press, 2021.
- Frawley-O'Dea, Mary Gail. "God Images in Clinical Work with Sexual Abuse Survivors: A Relational Psychodynamic Paradigm." In *Spiritually Oriented Psychotherapy for Trauma*. eds. David F. Walker, Christine A. Courtois, and Jamie D. Aten, 169-188. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2015.
- Froese, Paul and Christopher Bader. *America's Four Gods: What we say about God and what that Says about Us*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010.
- Fung, Raymond. "Compassion for the Sinned-Against." *Theology Today* 37, no. 2 (July 1980): 162-169.
- Gebara, Ivone. *Longing for Running Water: Ecofeminism and Liberation*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999.
- Gelles, Richard J. and Murray A. Straus. *Intimate Violence: The Causes and Consequences of Abuse in the American Family*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1988.
- Gerlsma, Coby, Paul M.G. Emmelkamp, and Willem A. Arrindell. "Anxiety, depression, and perception of early parenting: a meta-analysis." *Clinical Psychology Review* 10, no. 3 (1990): 251-277.
- Gilligan, Carol and David A.J. Richards. *The Deepening Darkness: Patriarchy, Resistance, and Democracy's Future*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009.
- Griffiths, R. Marie. *God's Daughters: Evangelical Women and the Power of Submission*. Berkeley, University of California Press: 2000.
- Heath, Elaine A. *Healing the Wounds of Sexual Abuse: Reading the Bible with Survivors*.

- Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, [2011] 2019.
- Herman, Judith Lewis, M.D. *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence-From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror*. New York: Basic Books, 1992.
- Herman, Judith L. *Truth and Repair: How Trauma Survivors Envision Justice*. New York: Basic Books, 2023.
- Heyward, Carter. *Saving Justice: Rethinking What it Means to be Christian*. Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 1999.
- Hunt, Mary. *Fierce Tenderness: A Feminist Theology of Friendship*. New York: Crossroad, 1994.
- Hyun Kyung, Chung. *Struggle to be the Sun Again: Introducing Asian Women's Theology*. Maryknoll: Orbis, 1990.
- Imbens, Annie and Ineke Jonker. *Christianity and Incest*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992.
- Isasi-Diaz, Ada Maria. *Mujerista Theology: A Theology for the Twenty-First Century*. Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1996.
- Jankowski, Peter J., Steven J. Sandage, Miriam Whitney Cornell, Cheryl Bissonette, Andy J. Johnson, Sarah A. Crabtree, and Mary L. Jensen. "Religious Beliefs and Domestic Violence Myths." *Psychology of Religion and Spirituality* 10, no. 4 (2018): 386-397.
- Ji-Sun Kim, Grace and Susan M. Shaw. *Surviving God: A New Vision of God through the Eyes of Sexual Abuse Survivors*. Minneapolis: Broadleaf Books, 2024.
- Johnson, Elizabeth. *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse*. New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, [1992] 2001.
- Johnson, Katherine A., Yexin Jessica Li, Adam B. Cohen, and Morris A. Okun. "Friends in High Places: the Influence of Authoritarian and Benevolent God-Concepts on Social Attitudes and Behaviors." *Psychology of Religion and Spirituality* 5, No. 1 (2013): 15-22.
- Jones, Serene. *Trauma and Grace: Theology in a Ruptured World*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009.
- Kaufman, Gordon D. *In Face of Mystery: A Constructive Theology*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993.
- Kippert, Amanda. "16 Reasons Why She Stayed and How You Can Help."

DomesticShelters.org. <https://www.domesticshelters.org/articles/identifying-abuse/16-reasons-why-she-stayed-and-how-you-can-help>.

Kiser, Charles and Elaine A. Health. *Trauma-Informed Evangelism: Cultivating Communities of Wounded Healers*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdsman's Publishing Company, 2023.

Knapik, Gregory P., Donna S. Martsolf, and Claire B. Draucker. "Being delivered: spirituality in survivors of sexual violence." In *Issues in Mental Health Nursing* 29, no. 4 (April 2008): 335-350.

van der Kolk, Bessel A. M.D., *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma*. New York: Penguin Books, 2014.

Kunkel, Mark A., Stephen Cook, David S. Meshel, Donald Daughtry, and Anita Hauenstein. "God Images: A Concept Map." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 38, no. 2 (1999): 193-202.

Lakoff, George. *Don't Think of an Elephant! Know Your Values and Frame the Debate*. White River Junction, VT: Chelsea Green Publishing, 2004.

Lakoff, George and Mark Johnson. *Metaphors We Live By*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1980.

Lakoff, George. *Moral Politics: How Liberals and Conservatives Think*, 2nd ed. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2002.

Leslie, Kristin J. *When Violence is No Stranger: Pastoral Counseling with Survivors of Acquaintance Rape*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002.

Library of Congress. "Doing Consumer Research: A Research Guide." <https://guides.loc.gov/consumer-research/market-segments/generations>.

Masud, Hamid, Muhammed Shakil Ahmad, Ki Woon Cho, and Zainab Fakhr. "Parenting Styles and Aggression Among Young Adolescents: A Systematic Review of Literature." *Community Mental Health Journal* 55 (2019): 1015–1030.

McFague, Sallie. *Metaphorical Theology: Models of God in Religious Language*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982.

Moltmann, Jürgen. *The Trinity and the Kingdom: The Doctrine of God*. San Francisco: Harper and Row Publishers, 1981.

Meyer, Joyce. "You are Not Damaged Goods." Joyce Meyer Ministries, Accessed December 19, 2025. <https://joycemeyer.org/DailyDevo/2025/06/27-You-Are-Not-Damaged-Goods>.

- Meyer, Joyce. "Freedom from the Pain of Abuse." Joyce Meyer Ministries, Accessed December 19, 2025. <https://joycemeyer.org/Grow-Your-Faith/Articles/Freedom-from-the-Pain-of-Abuse>.
- Meyer, Joyce. "Embracing Life Beyond Abuse through Faith." Joyce Meyer Ministries, Accessed December 19, 2025. <https://joycemeyer.org/Grow-Your-Faith/Articles/Life-Beyond-Abuse?sr>.
- Nakashima Brock, Rita and Rebecca Ann Parker. *Proverbs of Ashes: Violence, Redemptive Suffering, and the Search for What Saves Us*. Boston: Beacon Press, 2001.
- NORC at the University of Chicago. "General Social Survey." <https://gssdataexplorer.norc.org/variables/338/vshow>
- Nouwen, Henry J.M. *Life of the Beloved: Spiritual Living in a Secular World*. New York: Crossroad, 1992, 2000.
- Nouwen, Henry. *The Living Reminder*. New York: The Seabury Press, 1977.
- O'Donnell, Karen. "Surviving Trauma at the Foot of the Cross." In *When Did We See You Naked?: Jesus as a Victim of Sexual Abuse*, edited by Jayme R. Reaves, David Tombs, and Rocío Figueroa, 260-277. London: SCM Press, 2021.
- Olsen, Ted. "Go Figure." *Christianity Today* 53, no. 12 (December 2009): 14-18. 4p.
- Petrowski, Katja, Elmar Brähler, and Marcus Zenger. "The relationship of parental rearing behavior and resilience as well as psychological symptoms in a representative sample." *Health and Quality of Life Outcomes* 12, no. 95 (2014). Open access article.
- Pinquart, Martin and Jana Lauk. "Associations of parenting styles with substance use in the offspring—A systematic review and meta-analysis." *Drug Alcohol Review* 44 (2025):133-143.
- Poling, James Newton. *The Abuse of Power: A Theological Problem*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1991.
- Rambo, Shelly. *Resurrecting Wounds: Living in the Afterlife of Trauma*. Waco, Baylor University Press, 2017.
- Rambo, Shelly. *Spirit and Trauma: A Theology of Remaining*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010.
- Reaves, Jayme R., David Tombs, and Rocío Figueroa, eds. *When Did We See You*

- Naked?: Jesus as a Victim of Sexual Abuse*. London: SCM Press, 2021.
- Sanders, John. *Theology in the Flesh: How Embodiment and Culture Shape the Way We Think about Truth, Morality, and God*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2016.
- Sanders, John. *Embracing Prodigals: Overcoming Authoritative Religion by Embodying Jesus' Nurturing Grace*. Eugene: Cascade Books, 2020.
- Schreiter, Robert J., C.P.P.S. *The Ministry of Reconciliation: Spirituality and Strategies*. Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1998.
- Schreiter, Robert J. "Reading Biblical Texts through the Lens of Resilience." In *Bible through the Lens of Trauma*. edited by Elizabeth Boase and Christopher G. Frechette, 193-207. Atlanta: SBL Press, 2016.
- Schreiter, Robert J. *Reconciliation: Mission and Ministry in a Changing Social Order*. Maryknoll: Orbis, 1992.
- Schüssler Fiorenza, Elisabeth. *The Power of the Word: Scripture and the Rhetoric of Empire*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007.
- Schüssler Fiorenza, Elisabeth. *Wisdom Ways: Introducing Feminist Biblical Interpretation*. Maryknoll: Orbis, 2001.
- Second Vatican Council. *Gaudium et spes* (1965).
https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html.
- Singer, Pete. "Toward a More Trauma-Informed Church Equipping Faith Communities to Prevent and Respond to Abuse." *Currents in Theology and Mission* 51, no. 1 (January 2024), 66, 67.
- Smith, Shanell T. "'This is My Body': A Womanist Reflection on Jesus' Sexualized Trauma during His Crucifixion from a Survivor of Sexual Assault." In *When Did We See You Naked? Jesus as a Victim of Sexual Abuse*, edited by Jayme R. Reaves, David Tombs, and Rocio Figueroa, 278-286. London: SCM Press, 2021.
- Sotelo, Nicole. "All Should Rise Together": *Community, Trauma, and What Holds us Together*." Benedictine Heritage Lecture 2021, Benedictine University.
- Sotelo, Nicole. *Pray Your Way Through Forgiveness: Reflections, Prayers, and Actions for Healing*. New London: Twenty-third Publications, 2020.
- Sotelo, Nicole. *Women Healing from Abuse: Meditations for Finding Peace*. Mahwah: Paulist Press, 2006.

- Straus, Murray A., Richard J. Gelles, and Suzanne K. Steinmetz. *Behind Closed Doors: Violence in the American Family*. Garden City: Anchor Books, 1981.
- Sung Park, Andrew. *From Hurt to Healing: A Theology of the Wounded*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2004.
- Tombs, David. "Crucifixion, State Terror, and Sexual Abuse." *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 53, no. 1-2 (1999): 89-109.
- Williams, Dolores S. *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk*. Maryknoll: Orbis, 1996.
- Wojnicka, Katarzyna. "His body, his choice? Patriarchy, discrimination against men and protective masculinity at war" in *NORMA: International Journal for Masculinity Studies* 18, no. 1 (2023): 1-4.

Vita

Nicole Sotelo was born in 1978. She studied at Wellesley College (B.A. in English Literature and Religion, 2000), Harvard Divinity School (M.Div., 2005) and Catholic Theological Union (D.Min., 2026). Her ministry has been in Catholic communications and mission engagement, while also being attentive to the spirituality of abuse survivors through retreats and writing. She is the author of *Women Healing from Abuse: Meditations for Finding Peace* (Paulist Press) and *Pray Your Way Through Forgiveness: Reflections, Prayers, and Actions for Healing* (Twenty-Third Publications).