

## UKRAINE & TRAUMA: RESILIENCE AND EUCHARISTIC HOPE

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### *Introduction*

The history of Ukraine holds a series of painful events and tragedies that have marked the nation of Ukraine with deep and lasting grief. This paper will discuss three tragic events in the last century that affected the people of Ukraine and how those tragedies caused deep wounds and trauma still felt in succeeding generations.

Part of the church's task is to help reframe the human experience with the good news of the gospel. But sometimes, human experience can eclipse the teachings of the church especially when churches over-emphasize doctrine and neglect bodies. Traditional narratives of redemption may be inadequate for trauma victims engaged in the difficult, slow, and sometimes unresolved work involved in healing deep wounds. Tragedies many of us face affect us not only emotionally and spiritually but also physically and so, part of the church's task is to bodily address the deep pain and suffering of those to whom they minister. This work requires sustained practices that shape our language, thoughts and behavior in order to help reframe experiences and create space to be present and to focus on healing. Because language is deeply connected with memory, the rhythm of language and practices in the church deeply matter. Liturgies can never be Band-Aids we use to cover over human experiences. Rather, the liturgies we form alongside bodily practices, particularly the Eucharist in Christian practice, can help us engage and transform the wounds of isolation, distrust, and fragmentation for ongoing healing and integration.

The purpose of this research is three-fold. I will first explore trauma in Ukraine and its ongoing effects throughout society. I will then address current studies around Eucharist and trauma. Finally, I will offer three Eucharist-centered practices that can serve to mitigate isolation, distrust and fragmentation, and move people toward healing.

Ultimately, to talk about healing is to talk about renewing a sense of identity. Renewing identity requires being seen and heard, something Ukrainians have long sought. As a society, being seen and heard has been a centuries long struggle for independence. The struggle to be recognized is felt every time a Ukrainian must clarify how to pronounce Ukraine (yooKRAINE not YOOkraine), why saying "*the* Ukraine" is not only grammatically incorrect but also politically offensive, and the proper and political pronunciation and spelling of Kyiv, the capital city. These seemingly minor details are deeply connected to the identity of a nation that longs to separate itself from the Russian empire. Names, of course, matter and have a profound effect on whether or not we are valued and taken seriously. At the heart of the need to be seen is the desire to also be known and understood. For those who delve into Ukraine's history, this task is not for the faint of heart. My hope is that ministers in Ukraine would learn more about trauma and its effects in order to better help persons reconnect to self, others and God.

## *Ukraine: Trauma In the Making*

### *Understanding Trauma*

There is no universal definition of trauma. The complexity and range of trauma is particular to every person. The reality of this is reflected not only in the constantly changing definitions but also in the constant emergence of new research.

The American Psychological Association (APA) defines trauma as “an emotional response to a terrible event” such as an accident, sexual violation, or a natural disaster.<sup>1</sup> Each of these situations can produce varying responses that can be either short-term or prolonged. This basic definition falls short for many who believe it does not address the suffering experienced by many trauma victims.

Judith Herman, the most respected trauma specialist, sees trauma in terms of power structures:

“Psychological trauma is the affliction of the powerless. At the moment of trauma, the victim is rendered helpless at the overwhelming force. When the force is that of nature we speak of disasters. When the force is that of other human beings we speak of atrocities. Traumatic events overwhelm the ordinary systems of care that give people a sense of control, connection and meaning.”<sup>2</sup>

Psychologist Jennifer Beste defines trauma as “The experience of terror, loss of control, and utter helplessness during a stressful event that threatens ones physical or psychological integrity.”<sup>3</sup> Somatic therapist, Peter Levine, offers the most concise definition of trauma: “When the ability to respond to threat is overwhelmed.”<sup>4</sup> These last three definitions all capture the primary emotion felt by trauma victims, the quality of being overwhelmed.

While many nations of the twentieth century witnessed firsthand the tragedy and horrors of two world wars and the holocaust, Ukraine was greatly affected. Beginning in the 1920s and into the 1940s new radical political policies would begin to shape the identity of Ukrainians in overtly oppressive ways. In just a short brief period Ukraine would uniquely be the only large country to experience a kind of double colonization first by the Soviet occupation of 1939-41,

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<sup>1</sup> “Trauma,” American Psychology Association, accessed Dec. 1, 2019, <https://www.apa.org/topics/trauma/>.

<sup>2</sup> Judith L. Herman, *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence – from Domestic Abuse to Political Terror* (New York: Basic Books, 1992), 33.

<sup>3</sup> Jennifer Beste, “Receiving and Responding to God's Grace: A Re-Examination in Light of Trauma Theory,” *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics* 23, no. 1 (Spring/Summer 2003): 6, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23561526>.

<sup>4</sup> Shelly Rambo, “Living in the New Normal: Refiguring Resurrection in the Aftermath of Trauma,” Lecture, Boston College, March 13, 2017, video of lecture, accessed October 15, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XHcto2vcTso&t=351s>.

and later the German occupation of 1941-44.<sup>5</sup> In his bestseller, *Bloodlands: Europe Between Hitler and Stalin*, Snyder concludes that the destruction of the double occupation made the Holocaust possible. Though I do not include the Holocaust in this paper, the Holocaust occurred largely in this region where the majority of Jews lived. The Holocaust also shortly followed Holodomor, the first atrocity I will address. Given the merging of these events Snyder states, “There is no comparable European tragedy on a territory. Ukraine is the most dangerous place to live not only in Europe but in the world between 1933 and 1945.”<sup>6</sup> The reality of the first of those events is before you.

### *The Isolating Fear of Holodomor*

From 1932-33 an estimated 7 million people were slowly starved to death in Ukraine, the breadbasket of the former Soviet Union. This tragedy now known as *Holodomor* means murder by starvation. The famine occurred in conjunction with the implementation of Stalin’s five-year plan for economic growth in the Soviet Union. Holodomor scholar, James Mace, states that Stalin believed he had to annihilate Ukraine, the second largest Soviet Republic to reach centralized control – its intelligencia, its language, and history. “Such a policy is Genocide in the classic sense of the word.”<sup>7</sup> Stalin’s plan included eliminating successful peasants, stripping farmers of all possessions known as dekulakization, collectivization, impossibly high quotas for grain and punishment when those quotas were not met, prohibition to travel, and suppression of any rebellions among farmers. Millions starved as Soviet troops raided villages and stole any harvest, including food baking inside ovens. The stories of desperation are haunting including families who succumbed to eating their own children to survive. Men, women and children could be arrested for picking a handful of ears of grain from fields according to a law that became known as the Law of Five Ears of Grain. At the peak of the famine, 25,000 died daily, wiping out 20-25 percent of the population of Ukraine.<sup>8</sup>

Amidst propaganda posters heralding the success of collectivization, fear at every level marked the nation. Though there are stories of heroism and people protecting one another, there are many more where fear and survival strategies forced neighbors to treat each other badly. Murder was a threat to anyone attempting to keep any grain or speak out against these atrocities. The truth of the famine would emerge only later by foreign reporter, Gareth Jones, who dangerously risked entering Ukraine illegally for the purpose of getting at the truth. But for Ukrainians, the cost of telling the truth was death. The fear and horror of Holodomor extended

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<sup>5</sup> Timothy Snyder, *Bloodlands: Europe Between Hitler and Stalin*. (New York: Basic Books, 2012), 168. While Ukraine was the largest country, the double occupation occurred also in parts of Poland, the Baltic countries, and Belarus as well.

<sup>6</sup> Timothy Snyder, Interviewed by *LibMod-Zentrum Liberale Moderne*, Nov. 11, 2017, accessed November 4, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5Ny6j5clPOs>.

<sup>7</sup> “Explanations for the Genocidal Famine,” Holodomor Research and Education Consortium, accessed November 11, 2019, <https://education.holodomor.ca/teaching-materials/quotations/>.

<sup>8</sup> Anna Alekseyenko, et al., *Holodomor: Ukrainian Genocide in the early 1930’s* (Kyiv, Ukraine: The Ukrainian Institute of National Memory), accessed October 17, 2019, <http://www.memory.gov.ua/sites/default/files/2222.pdf>.

into the future as victims were kept from speaking about the circumstances and their trauma, since telling the truth was itself a death sentence.

A recent study published in 2015 by Brent Bezo found that victims of the Holodomor experienced trauma that was later transmitted to second and third generations. Participants of this study were living in survival mode long after the famine with a range of emotions that included

“horror, fear, mistrust, sadness, shame, anger, stress and anxiety, decreased self-worth, stockpiling of food, reverence for food, overemphasis on food and overeating, inability to discard unneeded items, an indifference toward others, social hostility and risky health behaviours. In both of these cases, trauma transmission is found both in families and society, which highlights the importance of multi-framework approaches for studying and healing collective trauma.”<sup>9</sup>

The ongoing inability for survivors to make sense of the tragedy due to the suppression of the truth allowed their trauma to go unresolved, allowing this range of emotions to remain and be transmitted to succeeding generations so evident in everyday life in Ukraine.

In a different study, Elena Cherepanov concluded that sometimes we receive messages from our ancestors about how to move forward in the world. Because many of the messages originated under extreme circumstances of survival, their meaning can lose effect over time causing generations down the line to not really understand why they are acting the way they are acting. “In Russia under Stalin, there was a widely circulated set of survival recommendations developed by and for labor camp prisoners: Don’t trust, don’t fear, and don’t ask for help.”<sup>10</sup> Many people in Ukraine continue to live by these exact survival messages created in Stalin’s time and these messages are passed on to family members. Initially developed in response to a specific traumatic situation, survival messages may become maladaptive in changed circumstances and, in fact, may increase trans-generational vulnerabilities or become a barrier to trauma recovery.<sup>11</sup> This would explain the ongoing general sense of grief and depression one might witness in Ukraine.

### *Chernobyl: An Explosion of Distrust*

On April 26, 1986 a nuclear reactor exploded shooting high levels of radioactive matter into the air and across the northern hemisphere. The reactor was located in Chernobyl, Ukraine, located near Pripyat, a thriving city of 50,000 inhabitants and a mere 134 kilometers from Kyiv, the capital city of Ukraine. This event remains the worst nuclear power plant accident in history.

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<sup>9</sup> Brent Bezo and Stefani Maggi, “Living in ‘Survival Mode’: Intergenerational Transmission of Trauma from the Holodomor Genocide of 1932-1933 in Ukraine,” *Social Science & Medicine* <sup>[1]</sup> *Journal* 134, (2015), 87-94, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2015.04.009>.

<sup>10</sup> Elena Cherepanov, “Psychodrama of Survivorship,” *Journal of Group Psychotherapy, Psychodrama and Sociometry* 63, no. 1 (March 2015): 22, <https://doi.org/10.12926/0731-1273-63.1.19>.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.* 20.

The tragedy of this event was compounded by the government's denial and refusal to admit the truth about the catastrophe in the days and months that followed. For example, while estimated deaths related to Chernobyl start at 4000, official records since 1987 still state that only 31 persons died as an immediate result of Chernobyl. The decision of the Soviets to keep its citizens dangerously in the dark at such a grave time is known by many as the beginning of the end of the Soviet Union. Until then, many Soviet citizens truly believed that the government had their best interest in mind. Chernobyl proved otherwise and the Soviet Union would collapse within five years.

Researcher Ekatherina Zhukova makes the case that Chernobyl caused Ukrainian society to shift from ontological security based on Soviet ideology to ontological insecurity that was then transformed into cultural trauma.<sup>12</sup> Distrust of the government was acute in the years that followed. In *Notes on trauma and community*, Kai Erikson argues that “collective trauma is ‘a blow to basic tissues of social life that damages the bonds attaching people together and impairs the prevailing sense of commonality’”<sup>13</sup>

To add to the trauma of scarcity that Holodomor survivors felt, they were now forced to face the daunting truth that a whole range of things once considered safe were no longer safe including nuclear energy, scientific knowledge, and technology. The more disorienting reality was that now even the most basic daily elements of water to drink, air to breathe, food to eat, fertile ground to grow food, berries and mushroom hunting now became a threat. New habits would need to be formed amidst the grief that comes from such great loss. “Where collective trauma is related to experiences, cultural trauma is linked to a struggle over meaning in a public sphere about the nature of the pain, victims and perpetrators.” Zhukova argues that Ukrainians would experience cultural trauma as continuous, as they tried to assign blame, and retrospectively following Ukraine's independence.

The concept of ontological insecurity in Zhukova's study is understood as “a feeling of disorder, dis-continuity, stress, anxiety and negative emotions.”<sup>14</sup> Continuous trauma occurred in initial protests against the political system. Then, in 1991, when Ukraine gained its full independence, it experienced retrospective trauma in that it was now allowed to openly revisit the true events of Chernobyl. One could argue that the recent and chilling HBO documentary, Chernobyl, that aired in 2019 has allowed for further retrospective trauma not only on survivors who lived through that time but on younger generations discovering for the first time or rediscovering the fuller truths about the tragedy and the reality of the Soviet cover up.

### *Revolution of Dignity: Battling Trauma*

In February of 2014, after ongoing protests and acts of violence between the citizens of Ukraine and the riot police that killed over 100 civilians, Ukrainian revolutionists managed to overthrow the government and then President, Viktor Yanukovich. Despite earning its

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<sup>12</sup> Ekatherina Zhukova, “From Ontological Security to Cultural Trauma: The Case<sup>[SEP]</sup> of Chernobyl in Belarus<sup>[SEP]</sup> and Ukraine,” *Acta Sociologica* 59, no. 4 (July 2016): 332–346. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0001699316658697>.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid. 335.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid. 335.

independence in 1991, post-Soviet political elites failed to offer real reform. Corruption and inefficiency prevailed as old and emerging oligarchs continued to manage in Soviet style ways that benefited their own pockets with little to no efficient policymaking. Known as the Revolution of Dignity, this was Ukraine's latest push for real independence, a long held desire to fully break from the yoke of the Russian empire. But the revolution would come at a cost as hundreds died in the city center, mercilessly gunned down by government forces. Before Ukrainians even had a chance to celebrate their victory, Russia invaded Crimea, seized the territory, and began a war in Eastern Ukraine that continues today. Crimea currently remains occupied territory not recognized by the majority of world leaders. Much of the trauma that participants and the nation experienced occurred in the senseless beatings and deaths of peaceful protestors. Victory came, but at a great cost.

Soldiers and internally displaced persons, as well as those who witnessed the violence and murders during the revolution, are the most susceptible persons to experience trauma with post-traumatic stress an ever-present danger. The Soviet system often used psychiatrists to punish dissidents by declaring them insane in order to try to break persons. Viewing psychology as taboo coupled with "a general lack of understanding about your environment can lead to depression and suicide. It is a huge problem. Eastern Ukraine is collectively traumatized," says Ukrainian psychologist Tatjana Grida<sup>15</sup>

'The Soviet mentality of never asking for something is deeply anchored here. People from eastern Ukraine are not used to making their needs known. We are not able to formulate why we feel depressed. We would rather suffer than ask for help.'

Ukrainians, long suspicious of psychological assistance, are vulnerable to the ongoing effects of trauma, but one cannot underestimate the resilience required to simultaneously struggle and fight for a new way of life.

On the one hand, the Revolution of Dignity was an attempt to break free of this suffering. The pervasive insecurity and depression felt by many was palpable as they gathered the courage to collectively speak. In many ways this revolution served to overthrow not just the current regime, but to overthrow the patterns of history that served to undermine Ukraine identity. Ukrainians were tired of the old narratives that condemned them as second-class citizens of the Russian Empire. One of the common threads in each of these traumatic events is the constant struggle to do battle with the power structures of each time period. They were ready to speak out and speak up, but again, this came at a cost. They were ready to fight for the right to remember their history rightly, to tell the stories with accuracy and without fear of arrest and further oppression. During the revolution the people were learning what it meant to truly appropriate their democratic status. One of the many challenges of this latest revolution is that it requires that they also battle with new forms of trauma and PTSD, putting further strains on survivorship.

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<sup>15</sup> Michiel Driebergen, "Meet the Volunteers Breaking Ukraine's Trauma Taboo," *New Internationalist*, May 1, 2017, <https://newint.org/features/2017/05/01/breaking-the-trauma-taboo>. 12 October 2019.

### *Current Discoveries in Trauma Recovery*

For many years, trauma was primarily relegated to clinical settings of psychoanalysis until more recently as historians, philosophers, theologians, and neurobiologists have engaged in more interdisciplinary work.

In her groundbreaking book, *Trauma and Recovery*, Judith Herman states that the natural response to atrocities is to ignore them because they are often too terrible to even speak of.<sup>16</sup> But trauma has an active life force that refuses to be hidden no matter how much persons may try to suppress the memory. Trauma works in such a way that any unresolved trauma not only continues to affect the individual but also affects society. The necessity for the study of trauma began in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century following World War I and especially following the Holocaust. Individuals and communities have continued to experience disastrous and catastrophic events. Twenty-four hour new cycles connect us to that trauma impacting us personally and as societies. Everyone is touched by trauma. So, the awareness and work of trauma recovery is critical for the life of the world and should therefore be a priority for those in ministry.

There are multiple factors that contribute to a person not being able to recover from trauma. A main symptom is the inability for persons to integrate the event in daily life, such that life is overwhelming and becomes reorganized around the trauma. Life becomes about preventing the trauma from happening again, causing persons to live with continual fear, distrust and an inability to ask for help.

Trauma recovery has to do with the way persons remember their trauma. Herman believes this work involves safety, history, memory, reconstruction of the trauma story, truth-telling and restoring the connection between survivors and their community. Herman ultimately narrows down trauma recovery to three stages: safety, memory and mourning, and reconnection to ordinary life. Key to these stages is that trauma recovery cannot happen in isolation.

One of the most significant breakthroughs in trauma studies comes from Dr. Bessel van der Kolk who discovered that the frontal lobe is impaired in traumatic experiences, and this is because trauma occurs in the limbic system not the frontal lobe as was previously thought. Shelly Rambo explains that, “When the alarm bell of the emotional brain (limbic) keeps signaling that you are in danger, no amount of insight will silence it.”<sup>17</sup> This finding is changing the landscape of trauma studies because we now know that trauma is felt in the body and that if healing is to take place, it may first need to take place in the body and not the brain. For those in pastoral ministry, this means that bodies matter and that bodily practices the church engages in are critical to the healing and recovery of trauma.

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<sup>16</sup> Judith L. Herman, *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence—From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror* (New York: Basic Books, 1997), 1.

<sup>17</sup> Shelly Rambo, “Faith in Post-Traumatic Times: Encountering Resurrection Wounds,” Lectures for the Wiley Lecture Series, Point Loma Nazarene University, February 14-16, 2018. <https://www.pointloma.edu/news/wiley-lectures-2018-dr-shelly-rambo>.

Given this brief understanding of key concerns regarding trauma recovery, I will now address how Eucharistic practices of the church might play a role in the recovery work of cultural trauma.

### *Eucharist & Trauma*

Eucharist takes many forms throughout the world. There are many understandings of the Eucharist as memorial, sacred meal, initiation, symbol, the real presence or transubstantiated elements. There are also many misunderstandings about what we are doing and remembering in the practice of the Eucharist.

Christopher Grundy is concerned that our ‘embodied logic of practice’ surrounding the Eucharist is merely a ‘performative memory of unresolved trauma’, and that trauma theory can help the church be more faithful in our practice of the Eucharist. Grundy’s concern was developed while reading Flora Keshgegian, who makes the claim that Jesus’ crucifixion and death was traumatic for the early church and that “the crucifixion remains an unexamined trauma at the core of Christian faith and theology”<sup>18</sup> amidst other religious and political traumas facing the early church. Grundy posits that the readings of crucifixion were “a means of coping for oppressed, dislocated, or persecuted communities”<sup>19</sup> and that this unresolved trauma continues to play out in contemporary practices of the Eucharist. Grundy is concerned that the church acknowledge the trauma of the cross in order to cease our production of “distorted and harmful readings of the crucifixion.”<sup>20</sup> Using Keshgegian’s trauma theory, Grundy suggests that healing narratives of Eucharistic practice are required that include remembering, mourning, transforming trauma through resistance, honoring the acts that led to survival, and “transcending mourning and even resistance for the sake of re-connection and renewed, abundant life.”<sup>21</sup>

Theologians studying trauma are increasingly concerned about the ways the church engages in narratives of redemption that may harm rather than heal. The Gospel message is often rooted in language of freedom. Shelly Rambo points out that inherent in our rush to Easter is the problem of not adequately addressing wounds. But Jesus returned with wounds as the disciples most vividly witnessed. Because our natural tendency is to minimize wounds by making them disappear, in the Christian narrative it means we must produce a perfect resurrected body with no signs of woundedness.

Karen O’Donnell argues that the lens of trauma is so destabilizing that traditional narratives of redemption will have no meaning for trauma survivors when they place the violence

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<sup>18</sup> Christopher Grundy, “The Grace of Resilience: Eucharistic Origins, Trauma Theory, and Implications for Contemporary Practice,” *North American Academy of Liturgy*, Notre Dame, IN, (January 5-8, 2006): 147-159, [https://www.academia.edu/262260/\\_The\\_Grace\\_of\\_Resilience\\_Eucharistic\\_Origins\\_Trauma\\_Theory\\_and\\_Implications\\_for\\_Contemporary\\_Practice](https://www.academia.edu/262260/_The_Grace_of_Resilience_Eucharistic_Origins_Trauma_Theory_and_Implications_for_Contemporary_Practice).

<sup>19</sup> Ibid. 152.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid. 153.

<sup>21</sup> Flora A. Keshgegian, *Redeeming Memories: A Theology of Healing and Transformation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000), 155. Flora Keshgegian is a well-known scholar who applies trauma theory to Christian theology.



of the cross at the center, because of the life/death emphasis. This also poses the danger of sacralizing suffering and abuse. These traditional narratives fall short in part because victims of trauma experience an ongoing crisis of living. “Death persists for the trauma survivor, and they have lost all sense of agency. So any narrative of redemption has to preserve a person’s human agency at all costs. To remove agency from the trauma survivor is to risk re-traumatizing them.”<sup>22</sup> This challenges the many ways we speak of Jesus as hero, or of God’s salvific action in the world with little to no acknowledgement of human participation. O’Donnell also sees the language of wholeness and perfection as the goal of the Christian life as problematic for the trauma victim. Because trauma causes isolation, they feel an enormous amount of disconnection from God, others, and often their own bodies, making them incapable of connecting with others.

Theologian, Shelly Rambo, believes that trauma recovery is difficult, slow work and sometimes unresolved, meaning that some persons may never fully be free from the effects of trauma.<sup>23</sup> She’s concerned that Christians too often rush to Easter or the resurrection, and don’t have the patience to sit in the in between time or what she calls, Holy Saturday, an opportunity to reflect and wait for redemption. Rambo notes that this kind of waiting, between life and death, is exactly where trauma victims find themselves, and also reflects what it means to be present with them in their suffering.

O’Donnell argues that in the Eucharist narrative, we don’t just speak of the cross, especially considering that when he instructed his disciples to remember he hadn’t yet died. Instead, O’Donnell insists that we tell the *whole* story. So we speak not just the resurrection but of the incarnation, because Jesus’ entire life was redemption. O’Donnell also notes that “ancient liturgies were infused with the scent of trauma and trauma recovery” and can aid in the recovery from what she names as ruptures in bodily integrity, time, and language that define trauma.<sup>24</sup>

Each of these current views of Eucharist and trauma newly challenge the church to stretch the boundaries of traditional redemption narratives and work toward creating new narratives and practices that engage not only our minds but our bodies. Grundy, Keshgegian, Rambo and O’Donnell are all concerned with memory and how we tell the story and each caution us to examine the ways in which we narrate the story of God and his redemptive acts. O’Donnell believes that redemption narratives simply cannot help some victims of trauma when they center the story on the violence of the cross and remove all human agency. Shelly Rambo wants to avoid triumphalist narratives of redemption and leans into a theology of remaining, and in particular urges the church to see itself as a ministry of remaining with others to bring about redemption. For this paper I rely heavily on the concerns of all of these researches while leaning a bit more on the ministry of remaining at the table in community.

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<sup>22</sup> Karen O’Donnell, “Trauma and the Impossibility of Redemption,” Paper presentation at Spirituality, Theology & Health. Durham, UK, Dec. 8, 2016, video of presentation, accessed November 28, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dA0d0-SfhdM>.

<sup>23</sup> Shelly Rambo, “Living in the New Normal: Refiguring Resurrection in the Aftermath of Trauma,” Lecture, Boston College, March 13, 2017, video of lecture, accessed Oct. 15, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XHcto2vcTso&t=351s>.

<sup>24</sup> Karen O’Donnell, *Broken Bodies: The Eucharist, Mary and the Body in Trauma Theology*, (London: SCM Press, 2018), 3.

*Resilience and Eucharistic Hope in Ukraine*

Having looked at trauma theories and recovery, as well the intersection of Eucharist and trauma, I will now suggest three ways the church can offer transformative practices inherent in a faithful practice of the Eucharist to help mitigate cultural trauma. These practices address three primary aspects of cultural trauma in Ukraine: isolation; distrust as a result of silencing of the victims by alternative and oppressive political narratives; and the challenge of integrating trauma into daily living.

To address isolation, I propose that the church community must see itself as family of caring relationships. To address distrust, the church must commit to being a community of memory. And finally, in order to address fragmentation, the church must learn to celebrate and practice resurrection.

In many ways these three suggested practices reflect Judith Herman’s three stages of recovery while also taking into account new theories that address the body and trauma:

<b>Judith Herman’s Stages of Recovery</b>	<b>Suggested Practices:</b>
The establishment of safety	Church as family – table ministry
Remembrance and mourning	Communities of memory – table fellowship
Reconnection with ordinary life	Communities that celebrate and practice resurrection - proclaiming

*Church as Family: Eating Together*

As previously mentioned, catastrophic events and survival deeply affected relational connections causing many to distrust others outside the home leading to isolation. By intentionally creating a family environment of caring relationships, the church can counter the effects of isolation and distrust.

Too often the Eucharist is received as a meal completely unrelated to any other meals we eat. There is much that happens when families gather together to eat at the family table. Eating together not only sustains our bodies but marks daily rhythms, creates opportunities to reconnect, to celebrate one another, to honor holidays, special occasions, and rites of passage. These same meaningful rituals that can be practiced in our homes can occur whenever the church gathers and celebrates the Eucharist meal that was always meant to be a meaningful ritual of connection, remembering, and celebration. At the table of the Eucharist, we practice what it means to be family by eating, sharing, remembering, and proclaiming.

When the church in Ukraine was just beginning in the early 90s, they adopted a popular Nazarene phrase at the time - “Our church can be your home”. Without knowing it, this phrase was instrumental in drawing people to the church and developing relationships. The Soviet Union had just collapsed and the people had long been formed to believe that trusting strangers and acquaintances could be dangerous. People tended to trust only those in their home. So when the church claimed that word – home – they were making a statement about the kind of

community they wanted to create; a loving, trusting, and safe community. Not surprisingly then, the early community of strangers quickly became family and many congregations still use the term *family* to describe why they love our church so much.

Dr. Elena Cherepanov, a certified trauma specialist who studies survivorship, has come to question whether individual survivorship exists at all. Cherepanov found that when an individual in a family goes through a traumatic event, the whole family is involved affecting the family dynamics and system for many generations. “Similarly, family exposure to an external event, such as famine, war, or a refugee experience affects individual family members whether they were personally traumatized or not.”<sup>25</sup> Cherepanov believes that people can cope with almost any event if they have strong personal and community support.

The church as family is exactly what Paul had in mind when he spoke of the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:27; Rom. 12:1-5). Greg Mamula maintains that the idea of kinship and more specifically, siblingship, is the foundational image for the gathering church. By studying the term *adelphoi*, he found that this word is used 271 times in the New Testament, which far exceeds more popular descriptions of the church, such as ‘body of Christ.’<sup>26</sup> He notes that Jesus himself declares that all who follow in God’s ways are brothers and sisters (Mark 3:31-35). When the church sees itself as family, they are in fact appropriating the kind of relationship Jesus was calling them to enact. Families are not perfect, love and patience is required, but the family that is committed to God’s ways strengthens one another.

### *Communities of Memory: The Stories We Remember Together*

The core of the Christian faith requires that we read narratives through the lens of memory. We do that work whenever we read the Word, preach or hear sermons, and proclaim the mystery of the sacraments. To remember the story well is our task, even as it’s meaning continues to unfold, expand and deepen over time. It is the story of salvation that we are remembering and retelling again and again – God’s saving action that occurred in and through the life of Jesus Christ. The church embodies that memory every time it gathers, tells the story, and participates in bodily practices that proclaim the mystery of the faith. The ways in which we remember are critical to our understanding and experience of the Eucharist and the story of redemption.

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<sup>25</sup> Elena Cherepanov, “Psychodrama of Survivorship,” *Journal of Group Psychotherapy, Psychodrama and Sociometry* 63, no. 1 (March 2015): 21, <https://doi.org/10.12926/0731-1273-63.1.19>.

<sup>26</sup> Greg Mamula, “Welcome to the Family Table: A Study of How Table Fellowship Fosters Biblical Siblingship within the Local Church” (DMin diss., Northern Baptist Theological Seminary, Lisle, 2018), 1, Academia. [https://www.academia.edu/35996848/WELCOME\\_TO\\_THE\\_FAMILY\\_TABLE\\_A\\_STUDY\\_OF\\_HOW\\_TABLE\\_FELLOWSHIP\\_FOSTERS\\_BIBLICAL\\_SIBLINGSHIP\\_WITHIN\\_THE\\_LOCAL\\_CHURCH?email\\_work\\_card=title](https://www.academia.edu/35996848/WELCOME_TO_THE_FAMILY_TABLE_A_STUDY_OF_HOW_TABLE_FELLOWSHIP_FOSTERS_BIBLICAL_SIBLINGSHIP_WITHIN_THE_LOCAL_CHURCH?email_work_card=title). Mamula notes that “Paul specifically uses the term “siblings” in reference to the gathered church community 122 times, compared to only 45 uses of “church”, 5 uses of “called”, and only 4 uses of “body of Christ.”

Flora Keshgegian powerfully states that, “Often marginalized and dispossessed groups do not know enough of their histories to give voice to story because their pasts have been subsumed under ‘master narratives’ written by the historical winners and dominants.”<sup>27</sup> In Ukraine’s case, while the truth might have been known or guessed at, the truth was always dominated by the regime’s narrative. Telling the truth would uncover difficult realities the government did not want the general public to know, Chernobyl being the most recent disastrous example of this reality. For the trauma survivor, recovery of the truth is a critical part of the process.

One of the most helpful mottos the church would do well to adopt comes from the medical profession – do no harm. Sometimes the church wants to cover over trauma rather than uncover trauma.<sup>28</sup> But the church must resist, just as the church must resist softening or covering over realities of the gospel narratives that are difficult to tackle. O’Donnell believes that trauma survivors must negotiate “with memory to construct a narrative that makes sense of what has happened to them. It is a narrative of remembering strong enough to carry forward into the future. Crucially, recovery can’t happen in a vacuum. It has to take place in a community of witnesses who will hear and validate the narrative.”<sup>29</sup> Thus, the church’s task is to help the community and individuals to rightly remember. This requires that the faith community learn to listen well.

For the trauma survivor, memory has the power to wound and to liberate. This is true also for the church; the ways we remember have the power to harm or liberate, which is why telling the story straight, in all its fullness, is necessary. In Keshgegian’s words, “Redemption is the practice of remembrance and hope to effect witness and transformation.”<sup>30</sup> Redemption narratives carry not only the story of Jesus, but also the stories of all those who suffer, struggle, live and die.<sup>31</sup> As we remember, we are also acknowledging resilience; the resurrection is about the power of life to persist and to prevail. It is the affirmation of life even when death seems more powerful. The emphasis is not on survival of the individual but on the continuation of life itself made possible in and through community, a critical movement Keshgegian notes, when we understand witness as ‘witness’ allowing us to participate in the redemption.<sup>32</sup> Keshgegian also implores that our remembering is for transformation, not only for ourselves but for the world also. So, when we gather, we gather to remember rightly by telling the story of God in ways that

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<sup>27</sup> Flora A. Keshgegian, *Redeeming Memories: A Theology of Healing and Transformation*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000), 25.

<sup>28</sup> Shelly Rambo, “Living in the New Normal: Refiguring Resurrection in the Aftermath of Trauma,” Lecture, Boston College, March 13, 2017, video of lecture, accessed Oct. 15, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XHcto2vcTso&t=351s>.

<sup>29</sup> Karen O’Donnell, “Trauma and the Impossibility of Redemption,” Paper presentation, Spirituality, Theology & Health. Durham, UK, Dec. 8, 2016), video of presentation, accessed November 28, 2019. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dA0d0-SfhdM>.

<sup>30</sup> Flora A. Keshgegian, *Redeeming Memories: A Theology of Healing and Transformation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000), 25.

<sup>31</sup> Cynthia Rigby, “Redeeming Memories,” a review of *Redeeming Memories: A Theology of Healing and Transformation*, by Flora A. Keshgegian, *Religious Studies Review*, 29 no. 3, July 2003, <https://www.abingdonpress.com/product/9780687129157/>.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.* 179

reflect his life, death and resurrection, and mirror our own lives, death and resurrections. We gather to tell our stories, and to listen to the stories of others, and to bring them before the one who is with us in our remembering and witness.

*Communities of Proclamation: Practicing Resurrection Together*

Shelly Rambo points out that there are no trauma experts, but that those who work in trauma studies are all witness to two significant things: “the mystery of suffering and the wonder of human persons; that they can move in the world with such resilience.”<sup>33</sup> The longer I live in Ukraine and the more I delve into Ukrainian history and trauma studies the more I am amazed by these survivors of a dark history and ongoing struggle.

In the practice of the Eucharist we are called to remember. But remembering the past does not mean that we remain there. We live in the present, and all remembering is intended to ground us in our identity as siblings in Christ, and guide us in the present and toward a future.

The question of survivorship deals not only with coping mechanisms but also quality of life. Though all trauma survivors are resilient, not all trauma victims recover or live flourishing lives. How can we grow in community without falling into the trap of remaining victims? Keshgegian would have us understand worship as a time when we remember God and God remembers us, drawing us ever closer to each other and to his presence. The power of the table is that every time we practice Eucharist we remember ourselves, and thus re-establish ourselves as the faithful community of God. In *Torture and Eucharist*, William Cavanaugh asserts that when the church in Chile, witnessing torture under Pinochet’s regime, rightly understood the power of the Eucharist, it empowered them “to enact the true body of Christ now, in time.”<sup>34</sup> When we remember the past suffering, it is “for the sake of a present ethical intent.”<sup>35</sup> The community resurrects Jesus’ memory, but the resurrection also shapes community where the gracious and hope-filled presence of God is welcomed and where resilient hope is birthed. This hope is future oriented but it is embodied hope in the now. Keshgegian posits that we must remember in order to re-member Christianity and society for a fuller living as much as is possible. As the church, fed and nourished by God, we go out into the world to practice resurrection in our relationships, our work, our suffering and our play.

In offering these practices I’ve made no mention of other embodied practices that would naturally serve to engage trauma in our lives. Practices such as silence, contemplation, lectio divina, prayer, scripture memory, and song are all forms of worship that could be incorporated into each of these movements. The practice of spiritual disciplines and spiritual direction offer opportunities for bodily practice that form healthy spiritual habits and guidance especially in the in-between moments of life. The importance of prayer for and by victims of trauma is also

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<sup>33</sup> Shelly Rambo, “Living in the New Normal: Refiguring Resurrection in the Aftermath of Trauma,” Lecture, Boston College, March 13, 2017, video of lecture, accessed October 15, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XHcto2vcTso&t=351s>.

<sup>34</sup> William Cavanaugh, *Torture and Eucharist*. (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 1998), 263.

<sup>35</sup> Flora A. Keshgegian, *Redeeming Memories: A Theology of Healing and Transformation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000), 25.

essential. Finally, if during times of extreme oppression and danger, such as the Holodomor or Holocaust, when the very act of breathing served as a form of resistance, then our very breath becomes an act of survival and prayer. In conclusion, it seems appropriate to end this work not with a benediction but an invocation for all that is to come as siblings committed to be a community of memory and resurrection; an invocation written in the plural and meant to be sung in community.

### *Invocation*

Hear us, God, for we are praying.  
Hear us, God, for we are laughing in our joy.  
Hear us, God, for we are crying out to you,  
Wondering what will be, what will be

Speak to us, God, for we are listening.  
Speak to us, God, for we are waiting for your voice.  
Speak to us, God, in our hearts and all around.  
Show us what can be, what can be.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Christopher Grundy. "Invocation" *YouTube*, 22 Nov. 2012, <http://www.christophergrundy.com/video/invocation/>

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