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Collective Betrayal in John 14–16: A Cross-Disciplinary Dialogue Between Biblical Theology and Behavioral Sciences in Developing a Hermeneutic of Trauma

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Introduction

This paper argues that the narrative block framing John 14–16 offers a ripe paradigmatic case for a cross-disciplinary approach uniting behavioral sciences and biblical theology. Recent work on trauma demonstrates the value of such an approach when reading biblical narratives of mental distress often overlooked by surface readings. Drawing from the behavioral sciences—especially psychology, sociology, and related literary and cultural studies—this paper employs a “hermeneutic of trauma” that attends to perceptions of threat, disrupted attachment, and moral injury in the biblical text.

Set within an evangelical biblical theology that affirms Scripture’s authority and the centrality of Christ according to the Bible’s own terms, the paper argues that Jesus’s disciples experienced a group-wide, collective-anguish of abandonment, anxiety, and the destabilization of their community in John 14–16, reflective of modern trauma studies. Jesus’s announcement that he is “going” to the Father intensifies their traumatic moral injury, as the prospect of life in a hostile world without their leader triggers fear, grief, and a sense of betrayal. By correlating close exegesis of the Farewell Discourse with contemporary trauma research, the paper demonstrates that the disciples’ collective experience exemplifies how group devotion to a leader can magnify psychological and spiritual distress. Moreover, by illuminating the internal turmoil of early followers of Jesus, a hermeneutic of trauma sheds light on the ongoing impact that traumatic biblical narratives often have on readers whose own loyalties and communities have been shaken.

Ultimately, this paper offers a cross-disciplinary approach—holding in balance biblical theology’s emphasis of historically conditioned progress of God’s self-revelation and behavioral science’s focus on deep emotional complexities—to offer a hermeneutic sensitive to the subtleties of mental distress and human suffering in biblical texts intended to push the reader to deeper faith in Christ.

Trauma and Moral Injury as an Interpretive Lens

As necessary historical and linguistic insights are for understanding Scripture, an additional element is particularly useful for its cases of trauma and suffering.¹ Recently, scholars have begun to appropriate forms of “trauma hermeneutics” that help bring to life the humanness of mental suffering in the Bible,

¹ Parts of this section were adapted from my article, “The Hermeneutics of Moral Injury,” *Didaktikos* 5.1 (Sep 2021): 41–42.

which in turn minister to readers who suffer today.² Acutely helpful for understanding biblical themes of mental anguish is the developing sub-field within trauma studies on the unseen wounds of suffering called Moral Injury (MI). This new subset of trauma research offers promising interdisciplinary collaboration of trauma theory and biblical studies, one that helps bring to life the real humanness of suffering in Scripture.³

Originating within fields of psychology and related disciplines, the term “moral injury” emerged in the mid 1990s as a way to verbalize crises of personal identity when a person’s moral values are compromised. Whereas previous trauma studies such as PTSD focused on fear-based physiological impairments, MI focuses on axiological violations or wounds of conscience.⁴ Brad Kelle explains, “In its origins, moral injury functioned as a working designation meant to highlight certain unspecified, and often loosely defined, effects of war participation not covered by clinical diagnoses such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).”⁵ Inner struggles of shame, guilt, betrayal, and doubt have been typical findings from MI, extending past the customary fear resulting from a traumatic experience.⁶ These mental scars are often caused by submitting to immoral orders from a superior, conflicted tensions within one’s occupation, or, as will be the focus of this paper, witnessing and/or participating in seeming acts of betrayal. Such wounds of conscience, often associated with acts of remorse, have been routine findings from MI research, offering fresh insights on the mental trauma lying behind many of Scripture’s most noted characters. These modern insights explaining the humanness of varied mental suffering illuminates a common human experience transcending time and culture.

Recent Scholarly Trends Appropriating Moral Injury to Biblical Theology

Within biblical scholarship, several recent appropriations of trauma and MI have begun to appear. A common trait among them is specifically the personal trauma of betrayal or seeming betrayal, which is relevant to this paper. For example, in his monograph entitled *The Bible and Moral Injury*, Brad Kelle appropriates moral injury theory to Saul in the OT as a more human or horizontal way to explain Israel’s first king’s descent into madness and finally suicide.⁷ Viewed through the lens of MI, Kelle suggests Saul’s demise resulted from his perceived betrayal by Samuel and even Yahweh.⁸

Jill Firth has offered a primer of moral injury in relation to the prophet Jeremiah.⁹ Because of Jeremiah’s disrupted social setting where violence and war enveloped his ministry, vocabulary embedded with themes of shame, dismay, and other expressions of moral injury permeate the book. Firth suggests

² Christopher G. Frechette and Elizabeth Boase, “Defining ‘Trauma’ as a Useful Lens for Biblical Interpretation,” in *Bible Through the Lens of Trauma*, Semeia Studies 86, ed., Elizabeth Boase and Christopher G. Frechette (SBL Press, 2016), 1–23, esp., 13–17.

³ A thorough survey of Moral Injury trends in current scholarship is Brad E. Kelle, “Moral Injury and Biblical Studies: An Early Sampling of Research and Emerging Trends,” *Currents in Biblical Research* 19.2 (Feb 2021): 121–144.

⁴ See the pioneering works of Veterans Affairs psychologist Johnathan Shay, *Achilles in Vietnam: Combat Trauma and the Undoing of Character* (Touchstone, 1994); and Shay, *Odysseus in America: Combat Trauma and the Trials of Homecoming* (Scribner, 2002).

⁵ Brad E. Kelle, “Moral Injury and Biblical Studies,” 122.

⁶ See the compendium of essays in Brad E. Kelle, ed. *Moral Injury: A Guidebook for Understanding and Engagement* (Lexington Books, 2020).

⁷ Brad E. Kelle, *The Bible and Moral Injury: Reading Scripture Alongside War’s Unseen Wounds* (Abingdon, 2020).

⁸ *Ibid.*, 43–68.

⁹ Jill Firth, “Spirituality from Depths: Responding to Crushing Circumstances and Psychological and Spiritual Distress in Jeremiah,” in *The Bible and Mental Health: Towards a Biblical Theology of Mental Health*, ed., Christopher C.H. Cook and Isabelle Hamley (Westminster John Knox, 2020), 115–127.

that while the prophet's sense of "right and wrong" is never transgressed by his own actions, the book underscores the moral complexities involved when a leader is caught between God and the people.¹⁰ Moral injury helps to uncover Jeremiah's experiences that seem analogous to that of a soldier who has moral discomfort, highlighted by the prophet's complaints of confusion and deception, even possibly feeling betrayed by God at points.¹¹

Appropriations of MI are no longer restricted to texts highlighting contexts of war and violence. Non-martial settings, such as troubling family environments, employer and employee relations, as well as other community group settings have now been enlightened by MI research.¹² Gabrielle Lettini points out that, "People develop moral injury not because they are soldiers, but because they are human beings with a moral conscience."¹³ As such, due to the social tensions Jesus and the disciples experienced, the Gospels in particular offer prime potential for engagement with moral injury theory in literature; though, to date, not much interdisciplinary work has been done.¹⁴

One of the few to approach the New Testament through MI is Warren Carter, who offered a perspective on the differences between Peter's and Judas's betrayals of Christ.¹⁵ Viewed through the lens of MI, Carter draws insightful observations regarding Peter and the internal injury of conscience he endured surrounding his denials of Jesus, followed by his "repair" by Christ in the concluding chapters of John. Participating firsthand in the act of betraying Jesus, Carter shows that Peter suffered personal guilt and shame to the extreme that only a personal visitation by Jesus' could restore him and bring relief.

As these recent works demonstrate, the trajectory of moral injury studies suggests that it is not only possible, but beneficial to integrate the insights of trauma research with biblical-theological studies. Moreover, as it relates to this paper, they each signify "betrayal" as a common injury to one's morals in contexts of high-tense situations. These examples and others reveal the biggest strength of trauma hermeneutics is that it offers an often-overlooked perspective taking into account the full humanness of mental suffering in Scripture, helping readers to slow down and consider the real inner trauma that real historical people must have experienced that lay outside the scopes of retribution theology or simple sin/forgiveness paradigms. In so doing, readers today resonate with the commonly shared bond of human suffering endured by God's people throughout the ages.

¹⁰ Jill Firth, "Spirituality from Depths," 123–124.

¹¹ See Jill Firth, "Moral Injury and the Book of Jeremiah," paper presented at the annual Society of Biblical Literature Meeting, San Diego, 2019.

¹² See Brandon J. Griffin, Natalie Purcell, Kristine Burkman, Brett T. Litz, Craig J. Bryan, Martha Schmitz, Claudia Villierme, Jessica Walsh, and Shira Maguen. "Moral Injury: An Integrated Review." *Journal of Traumatic Stress* 32.3 (June 2019): 350–362. For multiple cases examined, see, Patricia K. Kerig, ed., *Journal of Traumatic Stress*, International Society for Traumatic Stress Studies, Wiley Online Library, <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/journal/15736598>.

¹³ Gabriella Lettini, "Moral Injury and Its Causes, Symptoms, and Responses," in *Moral Injury: A Guidebook for Understanding and Engagement*, 35.

¹⁴ There are several dissertations beginning to emerge that approach NT texts through the lens of moral injury. One example is my own dissertation on the theme of suffering believers in John that incorporates extensive moral injury research to cases of mental trauma in the Fourth Gospel (the first to do so in Johannine studies of which I am aware). It has also come to my attention that Morling College in Sydney currently has one or two PhD candidates writing on MI in the Pauline literature.

¹⁵ Warren Carter, "Peter and Judas: Moral Injury and Repair," in *Exploring Moral Injury in Sacred Texts, Studies in Religion and Theology*, ed. Joseph McDonald (Jessica Kingsley, 2017), 151–168.

The Elevation of Trauma in John 14–16

Throughout John 14–16, a theme of suffering elevates from inner angst to physical death. Various terms and phrases are used to depict the turmoil, grief, and afflictions promised to believers as a community. The pericope begins by recognizing the disciples’ “troubled” or “shaken” mental state in 14:1, which is repeated later in v. 27 and accompanied by the warning of “horrific fear” (δειλιάω).¹⁶ In chapter 15, the group is promised both “hatred” and “persecution” from the world due to their loyalty to Jesus (vv. 18–21).

The theme of suffering elevates throughout chapter 16, advanced by the most extreme promises of agony as they will be “excommunicated” from their worship assemblies (ἀποσυναγώγους) and even “put to death” (ἀποκτείνω) on account of their faith in Christ (v. 2; cf. 15:21).¹⁷ This theme continues as the disciples, representing the nascent church, are promised “sorrow” and “weeping” (16:6, 20), expressed in great “lament” (v. 20; cf. 22) as they would be left without Jesus in their midst who was leaving the world for the Father (v. 28). The pericope then ends by tying its completion of suffering promised to the completion of its purpose with the FG’s most definitive statement on tribulation expected for believers: “In the world you [will] have affliction. But take heart; I have overcome the world” (v. 33).¹⁸ With this declaration, the private discourse begun in John 13 is now complete.¹⁹

Collective Betrayal in John 14–16

The Gospel of John betrays a traumatic narrative in chapters 14–16.²⁰ A single day was all that separated Jesus from his crucifixion at this point in the Fourth Gospel (FG), signaling that he would no longer be present among the disciples (as he had been up to that point). Jesus was now going alone to the Father, leaving the disciples to confront the world without Him in their midst (13:33; 16:28). The group needed warning and instruction from their leader who would no longer display his power, such as healings, in public view. Restricting Jesus’s final teaching exclusively to the disciples, the narrative running from John 13–17 frames a block of statements and predictions that leave the reader with little ambiguity that a disciple of Jesus is to expect hardship for their faith in Christ.²¹

There is much leading up to chapter 14 that would cause the disciples great angst. They had just learned there was a traitor in their ranks (13:21). Peter, “the rock,” who earlier enjoyed having his feet washed by his leader, was now told in front of the group that he would succumb to cowardice. This he would do by denying his association with Jesus multiple times before the night was through (v. 38). Most

¹⁶ Johannes P. Louw and Eugene A. Nida, ed., *Greek–English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains*, Second Edition (United Bible Society, 1989), 25.267, defines the word in terms of “cowardly” fear.

¹⁷ Jesus’s promise of martyrdom for the group here likely forecasts his prediction of Peter’s death in 21:18–19.

¹⁸ Commenting on the perfect form of λελάληκα in 16:33, Michael G. Aubrey, “The Greek Perfect-Tense Form: Understanding Its Usage and Meaning,” in *Linguistics and New Testament Greek: Key Issues in the Current Debate*, eds., David Alan Black and Benjamin L. Merkle (Baker Academic, 2020), 73, states that “pragmatically, in such a context, the perfect has the effect of tying the completion of the speech to the completion of its purpose.”

¹⁹ See C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John* (S.P.C.K., 1956), 415.

²⁰ Contrary to those who argue for aporias present in this narrative block evidencing redaction (e.g., Rudolf Bultmann), Scott L. Kellum, *The Unity of the Farewell Discourse: The Literary Integrity of John 13:31–16:33*, JSNT Supp. 256 (T&T Clark, 2006) offers a persuasive argument for its unity and sole authorship by way of an intentional Johannine pattern of implied movements throughout the narrative.

²¹ Within the macrostructure of John 13–17, chapters 15 and 16 are linguistically structured by the pattern of an imperative linked to a purpose statement, either concluded or initiated by the phrase, Ταῦτα λελάληκα/ἐντέλλομαι ὑμῖν, (“these things I have spoken/command to you”) (15:11, 17; 16:1, 25, 33). Cf. Michael Rudolph, “John,” in *Discourse Analysis of the New Testament Writings*, ed. Todd A. Scacewater (Fontes, 2020), 145.

crushing of all was Jesus's repeated claim that he was about to depart from them, indeed from the world, and leave for a place where they could not follow (vv. 13, 36–37). As Murray J. Harris aptly describes the mood entering John 14, "The minds and emotions (καρδία) of the disciples were now in turmoil."²² This group, who constituted the Christian church in seed form, was experiencing collective mental trauma as John 14 unfolds; distress they must resolve before Jesus would deliver to them promises of affliction that would characterize their remaining lives as believers (15:20–21).

Shared Mental Trauma

As the narrative unfolds, the disciples respond with dismay over Jesus's departure in death, announced in 13:31–32. They were particularly jarred by Jesus's statement that follows in v. 33: "Where I am going, you cannot come." A tone of shock can be sensed in the pericope as Peter entirely ignored Jesus's command to "love one another" immediately following in vv. 34–35. Instead, Peter chose to respond with two questions of his own that placed the focus back on Jesus's departure. The narrative heightens Peter's bewilderment with questions fronted with historical present verb "he says" (λέγει), when he asked: "Lord where are you going?" (v. 36), and "Lord, why can I not follow you now?" (v. 37). Peter's predicted denials then follow in v. 38, which stopped him from speaking again for the rest of the narrative block. His continued silence among the group speaks for itself as the reader is left with a somber impression over the angst of this usually brash spokesman. Peter will not return in the narrative until he reappears with a sword five chapters later in 18:10.

Thomas also responded with a question to Jesus's statement of departure, and like Peter before him, there is a sense of panic inferred from the narrative. The usual focus on Thomas's question is to view it merely as a segue to Jesus' penultimate "I Am" statement in 14:6.²³ For purposes here, however, it is helpful to consider the angst Thomas shared with his fellow disciples. Thomas's question is, like Peter's before him, fronted by the historical present verb "he says" (λέγει), stressing its prominence and heightening the scene's vividness²⁴: "Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?" (14:5). After at least three years of enjoying the physical company of their leader, the prospect of life without Jesus in their midst was likely gripping Thomas. Coupled with oncoming loneliness, J. Lanier Burns likens the scene to one reflecting abandonment, fear, and anxiety as Thomas and the group expressed a desire for wisdom in an "inexplicable circumstance."²⁵

Finally, Phillip betrayed his own confusion in 14:8, particularly boggled by statements that combined Jesus with the Father in v. 7, which advances Jesus's earlier idea of departing. Again, like the others, the narrative fronts Philip's retort with a historical present verb of speaking "he says" (λέγει), bringing out the liveliness of a scene steeped in anxiety progressively unfolding: "Lord, show us the Father, and satisfy us" (v. 8). Though most scholars rightly call attention to Phillip's obvious misunderstanding, what should not be missed is that it is a misunderstanding stemming from severe angst in the room. As Merrill Tenney observed, "[Phillip] is totally at a loss for an answer when Jesus stepped from the realm of

²² Murray J. Harris, *John*, Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament (B&H Academic, 2015), 255.

²³ C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John*, 382, reflects the consensus on 14:5 when he commented: "Thomas appears in John as a loyal but dull disciple, whose misapprehensions serve to bring out the truth" (emphasis added). Going further than Barrett, Raymond Brown, *The Gospel According to John XIII–XXI*, 29A (Doubleday, 1970), 624–630, completely neglects any treatment on Thomas's question in 14:5, choosing instead to skip over it by focusing on vv. 1–3 and v. 6.

²⁴ Cf. Lidija Novakovic, John 11–21, *A Handbook on the Greek Text* (Baylor University Press, 2020), 117.

²⁵ J. Lanier Burns, "John 14:1–27: The Comfort of God's Presence," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 172 (July–September 2015):

the material into the realm of the spiritual.”²⁶ Phillip’s “loss” is not alone. The same is expressed by both Thomas’s and Peter’s questions, all three of which reflect a shared mental anguish in the room.²⁷

Each of these reactions are ultimately in response to Jesus’s announcement of “going” in 13:33. In fact, the entirety of the disciples’ state of mental suffering, as well as promises of their future afflictions, were subsumed under this repeated declaration, forming an *inclusio* of sorts (13:33; 16:28).²⁸ The repeated verbs used throughout the narrative for Jesus “go[-ing]” (ὑπάγω, πορεύομαι, ἀπέρχομαι) provide cohesion, tying the unit together while exposing a blanketed theme.²⁹ Jesus was about to depart from his community of followers, leaving them to experience hardships without his physical presence. Framed by Jesus’s oncoming physical absence or “going to the Father,” moral injury is now the shared experience among this group, who collectively shared one “heart” (καρδίᾳ) (14:1). As such, this section of suffering becomes the most relatable for readers who likewise confront the world’s trouble without Jesus physically among them.

Traumatic Impact on the Reader

As mentioned already, recent trauma studies have provided scholars a fresh interpretive lens for biblical passages depicting various shades of mental distress, such as those experienced in John 14–16.³⁰ Adele Reinhartz contends that “Trauma theory, like other methods, provides a way of looking with fresh eyes at a familiar text, and perhaps providing a new way to imagine the impact that this text might have had on its original audiences.”³¹ A hermeneutic of trauma remains sensitive to mental distress in literary characters not obvious from a simple reading that often involves perceptions of threats effecting one’s psyche. This is the case whether the violation is actual or not. “Such responses,” note Christopher G. Frechette and Elizabeth Boase, “may also occur in persons who are not experiencing the overwhelming threat themselves but who witness others who are.”³² John’s personal style of capturing a scene’s vividness by use of the so-called historical present verb in speeches, such as with the three instances above, supports this literary strategy (e.g., 13:31, 36, 38; 14:5, 6, 8, 22; 16:29). The reader is intended to be brought into the scene as if he or she were part of it and shares in its tenor. This has particular relevance for what the disciples must have *felt* as a group in John 14–16 and how readers of the scene are intended to *feel* as well (leading to 20:31).

Pertinent insights informed by collective trauma studies reveal that shared group experiences of suffering are common among intimate communities, especially when a perception of abandonment becomes overwhelming.³³ Modern refugees and displaced peoples bonded by a connection to a cause,

²⁶ Merrill C. Tenney, *John: The Gospel of Belief: An Analytic Study of the Text* (Eerdmans, 1963), 216.

²⁷ Judas (not Iscariot) in 14:22 also reflected the group’s shared confusion expressed in the same verbal pattern, but space limits a fuller treatment.

²⁸ The sole outlier is the final one in 16:33, that in the world they have affliction.

²⁹ These verbs depicting Jesus “going/leaving” occur a total of fifteen times from 13:33 to 16:28. They appear at: 13:33, 36 (2x); 14:5, 12, 28 (2x); 16:5 (2x), 7 (3x), 17, 28. The verb ἀφίημι (“I leave”) occurs once and is used in conjunction with πορεύομαι (“I go”) at 16:28.

³⁰ It should be noted that trauma studies and moral injury (MI) studies, while distinct to a point, are overlapping disciplines and are used interchangeably in this paper. See Brad E. Kelle, “Moral Injury and Biblical Studies: An Early Sampling of Research and Emerging Trends,” 121–144.

³¹ Adele Reinhartz, “Incarnation and Covenant: The Fourth Gospel through the Lens of Trauma Theory,” *Interpretation* 69.1 (2014): 48.

³² Christopher G. Frechette and Elizabeth Boase, “Defining ‘Trauma’ a Useful Lens for Biblical Interpretation,” 4.

³³ Kai Erikson, *A New Species of Trouble: Explorations in Disaster, Trauma, and Community* (Norton, 1994); Joshua Pederson, “Speak Trauma: Towards a Revised Understanding of Literary Trauma Theory,” *Narrative* 22 (2014): 333–353.

leader, or land have been popular case studies.³⁴ A common finding is that they are “vulnerable to the effects of traumatic events arising from persecution, conflict and displacement.”³⁵ The concept of “refugee” is appropriate to use of Jesus’s disciples in John 14 as they were bonded to one another and were about to roam the world as strangers without their master. Like refugees feeling abandoned or betrayed by their leader, deep states of depression, confusion, and angst could set in as they tried to visualize a life without their customary support. Such a picture is later recalled by Peter who would use the phrase “sojourners [πάροιχος] and refugees [παρεπίδημος]” to describe Christians whose ultimate home is in heaven (1 Peter 2:11).³⁶

Throughout the FG, the disciples are portrayed as a group as tight as any community could be.³⁷ They were collectively bonded by their individual belief in Jesus over the course of three separate Passover years and were even ready to die with him (John 11:16). The prospect of their leader departing from them now, much like those betrayed by a leader of their cause, communicates a sense of abandonment. Such a perceived threat was underscored by the disciples’ relentless questioning, “Where are you going?” and, “Why can we not come as well?” (13:36–37; 14:5; cf. 14:27–28; 16:6).³⁸ The scene’s intensity is heightened by the (historical) present active phrase, Λέγει αὐτῷ (“He says to him”), which in each instance precedes the proper noun and is fronted to draw specific attention to the tone of the questioning (13:36, 37; 14:5). The verb forms and constituent order suggest that the FG views the disciples’ questions to Jesus in a manner characterized by great angst, or in other words, mental trauma / moral injury.

As in this Johannine scene, texts can and do intentionally witness to suffering or trauma. Such has been demonstrated by literary trauma theory, which argues that trauma may even be encoded within texts or at least function in witnessing to trauma.³⁹ Moreover, texts witnessing to mental suffering may also indicate ways to facilitate recovery and resilience.⁴⁰ Such is the subtle intention of the narrative containing Jesus’s final discourses, as a careful reading of the text exposes an undercurrent of mental trauma suffered by Jesus’s closest followers.⁴¹ The disciples were about to be left alone in a world of conflict between darkness and light, causing them to suffer “inward shock and fear” as suggested in 14:1.⁴² There is, as Mark

³⁴ See the collective study, “Trauma and Mental Health in Forcibly Displaced Populations: An International Society for Traumatic Stress Studies Briefing Paper,” *International Society for Traumatic Stress* (2017): 1–37.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 6.

³⁶ See Walter Bauer, Frederick W Danker, William F. Arndt, and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *Greek English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (University of Chicago Press, 2000), 775, 779.

³⁷ This is especially pronounced in 14:1 by use of the collective singular καρδιά (“heart”) in reference to the disciples as a whole. Though Peter alone is the closest antecedent, the shift to the plural ὑμῶν clearly refers to the entire group. Some may use the term distributive singular for the noun καρδιά here and at 14:27.

³⁸ The present active verb ὑπάγεις in v. 36 may suggest that Peter, representing the entire group, assumed Jesus was to depart at that very moment, thus heightening the angst.

³⁹ Frechette and Boase, “Defining ‘Trauma’ as a Useful Lens for Biblical Interpretation,” 10. The volume contains multiple essays appropriating literary trauma theory to biblical narratives.

⁴⁰ See Christine Berberich, Neil Campbell, and Robert Hudson, eds., *Land & Identity: Theory, Memory, and Practice*, Spatial Practices 13 (Brill, 2012), esp., chs 4–6, for the traumatic power that images and landscape narratives can have on forced displaced peoples, migrants, and refugees as both literary witnesses to trauma, and for resilience in retaining ethnic identity.

⁴¹ Mark L. Bailey, “A Biblical Theology of Suffering in the Gospels,” in *Why, O God? Suffering and Disability in Church*, eds. Larry J. Waters and Roy B. Zuck (Crossway, 2011), 161, cautions readers: “What is often forgotten is that where there is physical suffering, there is also emotional suffering, often unnoticed by the casual observer.”

⁴² See Moisés Silva, ed., “Τάρασσω,” in *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology and Exegesis* (Zondervan Academic, 2014), 4:457–458; cf. John 14:1. Franco Montanari, ed., *Brill Dictionary of Ancient Greek* (Brill, 2018),

Bailey notes, an emotional suffering of fear and mourning permeating the narrative at the prospect of losing Jesus.⁴³ Through the lenses of literary trauma theory, then, the upper room discourse scene may serve as a NT example of a historical narrative encoded with trauma through vivid verbal clues. At places, it is even *designed* for readers to be pulled into a traumatic scene, inviting them to bear some of the trauma experienced by the characters within the literature.

A Purposeful Trauma Narrative

There are lessons to learn from the portraits of mental anguish painted throughout John. In her study on trauma theory and the incarnation in John's Gospel, Adele Reinhartz connected the mental trauma presented throughout the narrative to the reality of a certain type of suffering with its original audiences and today's readers. She states, "Despite the distance in time and space that separates us twenty-first century readers from the people in these stories, our own everyday experience equips us to understand these events as traumas. We can readily identify with the characters and imagine the shock, fear, or astonishment that they felt in these circumstances."⁴⁴ Trauma embedded in the Johannine text, therefore, not only resonates with the FG's original audiences but connects to its readers throughout all times and cultures. As with other Johannine characters examined, slowing down to consider the disciples' inner turmoil yields a resonance toward their stress reactions and increased susceptibility to traumatization.

Though subtle, the problem of suffering throughout John is intentional and needed in order to present Jesus as the only solution to the problem.⁴⁵ As Christopher M. Blumhofer observes, "John's characterization of Jesus in this way, and specifically in a discourse concerned with the disciples and their life after Jesus' departure, works to equip readers to understand the hatred they experience as a hostility that is derivative from the opposition that God's chosen leader faced from his contemporaries."⁴⁶ Such is the case in the current pericope as the disciples' mental traumatic suffering provides the very backdrop needed for Jesus to respond in light of their panic in 14:1, 27; that is, that they should not be "troubled" (*παράσσω*). As for the hostility the group would endure after Jesus's departure, Jesus endured first—and conquered it (16:33). Nevertheless, they still suffered over the prospect.

The narrative's use of *παράσσω* ("troubled" or "disturbed") in both 14:1 and v. 27 is directed toward the group, implying the disciples were enduring extreme emotional turmoil and distress triggered by the prospect of Jesus's departure.⁴⁷ The same word is used on five occasions in the FG, three of which are in reference to Jesus himself suffering a great "troubled" or "disturbed" mental state while reflecting on death and betrayal in the world (11:33; 12:27; 13:21). Now, the word is applied twice to the disciples as a

2085, adds as a definition for *παράσσω*, "to throw into disorder, confuse," relating it to several usages depicting armies in Herodotus (5th c. B.C.)

⁴³ Bailey, "A Biblical Theology of Suffering in the Gospels," 165–166.

⁴⁴ Adele Reinhartz, "Incarnation and Covenant: The Fourth Gospel through the Lens of Trauma Theory," 35.

⁴⁵ See Paul N. Anderson, *The Christology of the Fourth Gospel: With a New Introduction, Outlines, and Epilogue* (Cascade, 2010), 158, who states: "Throughout John, one may detect various ways of struggling with the problem of suffering, even in the light of God's sovereign love and goodness."

⁴⁶ Christopher M. Blumhofer, *The Gospel of John and the Future of Israel*, SNTSMS 177 (Cambridge University Press, 2020), Apple Books, 526.

⁴⁷ Compare: BDAG, 990–991; *NIDNTTE*, 4:455–458; Horst Balz and Gerhard Schneider, ed. *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament* (T&T Clark, 1990), 3:335–36.

collective group who likewise felt unsettled, possibly betrayed, and thrown into a state of severe stress at the thought of Jesus leaving them.⁴⁸

A trauma narrative then emerges from the scene as the disciples undergo grave mental affliction as a group, which in turn appeals to a wider audience to identify with their perception of losing Jesus.⁴⁹ Readers are then pressed to resonate with the disciples' moments of stress, and like the disciples, should be incapable of imagining a world where Jesus is not present with them. The sequence of the story then compels the reader of John into deeper trust in Christ, as presented in the FG's purpose statement: "These are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name" (20:31).

Conclusion

By applying a hermeneutic of trauma to John 14–16, the paper explored the disciples' collective feelings of betrayal, grief, and panic over the prospect of their master's imminent departure, resonating with contemporary moral injury research. As demonstrated, such an approach sheds light on the internal distress experienced not only by Jesus's disciples, but also collective groups throughout time whose devotion to a leader is at risk. Also shown was that readers of traumatic literature can likewise be affected, leading to the suggestion that the Johannine narrative intentionally contains traumatic language for the purpose of leading readers to believe in the same Christ as the disciples. Though only a modest exploration utilizing an emerging critical theory, this paper has ultimately sought to demonstrate that trauma insights from the behavioral sciences provide helpful cross-disciplinary engagement with biblical theology when analyzing narratives depicting mental suffering.

⁴⁸ The other usage of *παράσσω* is in reference to the pool of Bethesda being "stirred" in 5:7. It is the sole exception in the FG where the word does not denote personal, mental anguish.

⁴⁹ See Frechette and Boase, "Defining 'Trauma' as a Useful Lens for Biblical Interpretation," 8, who glean routine elements accompanying a "trauma narrative" from Jeffrey Alexander, *Trauma: A Social Theory* (Polity, 2012).