

SANCTUARIES FOR THE SUFFERING: TRAUMA AND IMAGINATION IN APOLOGETICS

Jesse Childress on Psychological Elements
That Influence Worldview

A sanctuary is a physical space that is sacred and used for worship. Sanctuaries have traditionally been places of safety, places within which it was forbidden to commit acts of violence. There is a sense of the word “sanctuary” that does not refer to a physical space but to the idea of safety itself. To be within a sanctuary, to have sanctuary, could mean to experience the sense of being safe.

What is the role of safety, of sanctuary, in apologetics? It may be the case that a key component of how our beliefs are formed is whether or not we feel safe, particularly whether or not our *bodies* feel safe. Belief formation, as it is pursued through apologetics, is often thought of as an intellectual process, but our bodies have much more to do with how we form beliefs than we might think. Even further, our imaginations, which are shaped by both our minds and our bodily experiences, affect what we experience as safe. Traumatic experiences, felt in our bodies and fueled by our

imaginative conceptions of God, the world, and ourselves, influence how we form and hold our beliefs.

Trauma should not be thought of as a niche topic within apologetics; trauma can function as a lens on apologetics, helping us understand how to integrate the imagination's effect on belief into how we approach apologetics. If apologetics is not understood through the lens of trauma, it will miss many in its intended audience. Trauma, to one degree or another, is a common human experience; our default expectation should be that trauma experiences are basic, orienting parts of people's lives.

Since the Enlightenment, the intellectual elites of western culture have assumed that we form our beliefs about what is true through our intellects. A characteristic example of this sort of thinking is René Descartes's attempt to find a purely rational basis for all of his beliefs in *Discourse on Method*.¹ Descartes predated the Enlightenment by a couple of generations, but his method of treating belief and knowledge as if they can and should be formed by purely rational means expanded to become a normative way of thinking for 18th century intellectuals.

If the Enlightenment model of belief formation is assumed, conversation about either safety or bodies has no place in apologetics. But research in neuroscience, such as that which is presented by a group of psychiatric researchers in *A General Theory of Love (AGTOL)*, shows

¹ René Descartes, "Discourse on the Method of Rightly Conducting the Reason, and Seeking Truth in the Sciences," *Project Gutenberg*, July 1, 2008, accessed February 14, 2022, <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/59/59-h/59-h.htm>.

that the Enlightenment model is far from correct.² As it turns out, our minds are not the logical, rational, reality-comprehending machines post-Enlightenment culture has taken them to be. To an extent, we may understand the world and develop beliefs through our intellects, but major parts of our brains are not in the business of understanding the world rationally. Instead, those parts of our brains are constructing their own view of how the world “really” is (a view possibly in conflict with our rational view), and, as eminent trauma researcher and clinician Bessel Van Der Kolk explains, “the rational brain is basically impotent to talk the emotional brain out of its own reality.”³ We cannot simply use the rational parts of our brains to command our emotional, imaginative view to change. In addition to our minds, our bodies have ways in which they “see” the world and shape our beliefs.

Each person “imagines” the world in a way particular to themselves, not just based on their intellects, but also based on the unconscious parts of their brain, physiological states, and life experiences. Traumatic experiences, with their bodily experiences of the lack of safety, change and mold the way we imagine the world to be. The combination of influences on how a person views the world that are separate from the mind’s conscious and rational understanding of the world will herein be called “the imagination.” The power of the imagination to help or hinder the formation of a robust Christian faith

² Thomas Lewis, Fari Amini, and Richard Lannon, *A General Theory of Love* (New York: HarperCollins, 2002), 33.

³ Bessel Van Der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma* (New York: Penguin Books, 2015), 47.

must be taken into account if apologetics is to adequately address obstacles to faith.

WHAT THE IMAGINATION IS

The concept of “the imagination” has a history that reaches back to Samuel Taylor Coleridge.⁴ The concept was further developed by Christian thinkers like George MacDonald, C.S. Lewis, and James K.A. Smith in the late 19th through the 21st century. In the study of cognitive neuroscience, some researchers have (unintentionally) echoed this concept of imagination.⁵ The imagination is our foundation for understanding meaning, begins developing from birth and develops unconsciously, and is intimately connected to our bodies.

Imagination is our foundation for understanding meaning. C.S. Lewis defined imagination as “the organ of meaning,” in contrast to reason, which he called “the natural organ of truth.”⁶ Imagination is not how we discern what is true but, according to Lewis, how we determine if something has any meaning at all. Lewis writes, “We are not talking of truth but of meaning: meaning which is the antecedent condition both of truth and of falsehood, whose antithesis is not error but nonsense.”⁷ Before we determine something to be true or false (by reason), we must determine whether something is sense or nonsense (by the imagination). To Lewis, the

⁴ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, (London: George Bell & Sons, 1905), 144.

⁵ Van Der Kolk, *The Boy Keeps the Score*, 124.

⁶ C.S. Lewis, “Bluspels and Flalansferes: A Semantic Nightmare,” in *Selected Literary Essays*, ed. Walter Hooper (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2013), 265.

⁷ *Ibid.*

imagination is the organ of perception but not of interpretation.

George MacDonald wrote that “the imagination of man is made in the image of the imagination of God.”⁸ The only reason the imagination is anything but arbitrary is because the human mind is made in God’s image. The imagination allows us to comprehend (although imperfectly) what is sensical and real, giving us “insights into reality itself.”⁹ Without the perceptive function of the imagination, we would have no way to make sense of reality.

James K.A. Smith defines imagination similarly to Lewis but expands its function. Rather than the function of imagination being only perception, Smith takes its function to be both perception and interpretation because, as he argues, the two are inseparable. Smith writes that “we never simply perceive the so-called facts of the matter,” because “perception and evaluation are inextricably intertwined: as soon as I take in a scene, before I ‘think’ about it, I’ve already evaluated it.”¹⁰ When we understand the imagination in this expanded sense, it means the imagination is not only how we determine what means anything at all, but also how we determine what *matters to us*.

The imagination begins developing from birth and develops unconsciously. G.K. Chesterton wrote in 1908,

⁸ George MacDonald, “A Dish of Orts,” *Project Gutenberg*, last modified October 10, 2016, Accessed April 21, 2021, <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/9393/9393-h/9393-h.htm>.

⁹ Malcom Guite, *Faith, Hope and Poetry: Theology and the Poetic Imagination* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 145.

¹⁰ James K.A. Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom: How Worship Works*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), 34.

“My first and last philosophy, that which I believe in with unbroken certainty, I learnt in the nursery. I generally learnt it from a nurse.”¹¹ Decades later, neuroscience began to prove Chesterton right: how we experience the world and what we end up believing about the world starts in our earliest moments and is mostly defined by our relationships with our primary caregivers.

From birth, before a person is consciously forming beliefs, their imagination is being shaped by their physiological experiences and relationships. As the authors of *AGTOL* explain, in their first 18-24 months, a child has not developed any explicit memory capacity, but implicit memory is “operational before a baby is born,” meaning that a person will remember implicitly instead of explicitly what they “learn” in the first stage of their life.¹² Even in the absence of explicit memories, the way that a baby’s primary caregiver relates to them in their earliest years will orient them in their relationships for the rest of their lives. A baby “will see herself and come to understand herself primarily through what she witnesses in her mother’s responses [to her].”¹³ This experience is stored in the child’s implicit memory and body because “connection between an infant and an adult is transmitted and translated first through her physicality.”¹⁴ Before a child has any understanding of the *word* safety, they are coming to understand the world

¹¹ G.K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy in Collected Works, Volume 1*, (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1986,) 252.

¹² Lewis, Amini, and Lannon, *A General Theory of Love*, 113.

¹³ Curt Thompson, *Anatomy of the Soul* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2010), 117.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 110.

in terms of their physical sensations of safety and unsafety, particularly in relation to other humans.

The study of how children develop relationships with their primary caregivers is called attachment theory. Van Der Kolk explains that attachment styles categorize the emotional actions and reactions of children to the world they live in.¹⁵ Because humans are inherently social creatures, attachment provides the bedrock for how we see the world. As Van Der Kolk puts it, “Early attachment patterns create the inner maps that chart our relationships throughout life ... Our relationship maps are implicit, etched into the emotional brain and not reversible by understanding how they were created.”¹⁶ No matter how hard one tries, one *cannot* change the bedrock of how they see other persons (including God) just by *thinking about it*. Reason alone cannot change how we see the world.

The process of attachment occurs in the limbic brain, the sub-rational part of the brain that processes emotions, desires, and bodily states.¹⁷ One implication of this is that we should consider safety not just as something we understand cognitively and rationally but as a physical state. Safety is a physical experience more than a cognitive experience. Because the limbic brain drives attachment, it is a primary player in the formation of a person’s imagination. *AGTOL* tells us that the limbic brain controls “the development of the brain itself — and that means that attachment determines the ultimate

¹⁵ Van Der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score*, 118.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 124.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 55.

nature of a child's mind."¹⁸ What we are inclined to believe or disbelieve about reality begins in our limbic brains before we develop explicit memories. When Chesterton wrote, "my first and last philosophy. . . I learned in the nursery," he was right, even if he did not know why.

Our imaginations are intimately connected with our bodies. How we experience the world is inseparable from our existence as embodied creatures. Smith explains that "emotion and the body are at the irreducible core of experience . . . Feeling is not just an add-on, a flavored coating for thought: it is at the heart of our being, and reason emanates from the central core of the emotions."¹⁹ In direct contradiction to the Enlightenment view of how thought and emotion relate, Smith asserts that how we reason is directed by how we feel.

Our concepts of reality are inextricably connected to our physicality: "The visceral and kinesthetic sensation of how our bodies are met [by the outside world] lays the foundation for what we experience as 'real.'"²⁰ This applies from birth in the process of attachment, and Smith observes that our bodies remain one of the major players in how we see the world, and what we do regularly and repeatedly with our bodies makes us who we are. He writes, "The body carries a kind of acquired, habituated knowledge or know-how that is irreducible

¹⁸ Lewis, Amini Lannon, *A General Theory of Love*, 87.

¹⁹ Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom*, 35.

²⁰ Van Der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score*, 115.

and inarticulable, and yet fundamentally orienting.”²¹ Imagination and reason ought to live in balance, not in conflict. Facts always come through the filter of imagination, implying that each person’s imagination holds significant power over their beliefs.

THE POWER OF THE IMAGINATION

Through our imaginations, we develop a story to make sense of ourselves and of the world. By default, we interpret everything through our own story. How we see the world and how we see ourselves is intimately connected to our imaginations.

The story that shapes our view of the world is developed in the neocortex, the part of the brain that controls language, sense of time, and abstract thinking.²² In addition to our conscious, neocortical construction of our stories, our stories also develop in our limbic brains and physiologies.²³ Even when we are unaware of the process, our imagination is being shaped by our physical and emotional actions and reactions. We are not in full conscious control of our emotional and physiological reactions to the world, but they nevertheless play a significant role in the development of our stories.

The way our imaginations are shaped by our limbic brains, implicit memories, and physiologies means that the stories by which we understand the world are more than what we consciously and explicitly understand. All our relationships are shaped not just by how we *think* about other people but by what we learned early in life

²¹ Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom*, 45.

²² Thompson, *Anatomy of the Soul*, 40.

²³ Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom*, 17.

that is stored in implicit memory. If Christianity is in part a relationship with God Himself, how we attach to other persons has implications for how we “attach” to God. Just as a felt lack of safety makes it difficult to form secure relationships with humans, we can suppose that a lack of safety would make it difficult to form a secure relationship with God. What might be the consequences for a person’s faith if they lack the feeling of safety with God? Thompson asserts that “our brains, through the forces of various emotional states and implicit as well as explicit memory, construct our experience of God — sometimes in ways that contradict what we assent to theologically.”²⁴ We may have all our theology correct, but without “sanctuary” our deepest feelings about God may not line up with our beliefs about him.

Attachment theory also holds implications for how our beliefs develop within religious communities. Religious communities can be places where secure attachment happens, and secure attachment prepares a person to cultivate lasting belief. However, religious communities can be part of the problem. It is far more difficult for a person to develop a sense of their own faith if they lack secure attachment with those in their religious community. The lack of secure attachment is felt in the body and seeps into belief. Smith argues that “it’s not just trivial or mundane beliefs that are ‘carried’ in the body . . . it is also our ultimate beliefs, our defining beliefs, our ‘most precious values.’”²⁵ It is no overstatement to say our ultimate beliefs are carried in

²⁴ Thompson, *Anatomy of the Soul*, 118.

²⁵ Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom*, 88.

our bodies, bodies that are conditioned by the relationships within our communities of faith.

Since the imagination is more than just what we *think*, for faith to flourish, there needs to be a concord between how we feel about God and what we think about God. The whole of the Christian story must be comprehended and accepted by both imagination and reason, but many people likely do not believe consciously *and* feel limbically that the Christian story is true. When a person's experiences of the world (or God) have lacked the sense of safety, it is likely that their theological beliefs, held intellectually, will not line up with their beliefs formed by the imagination through their bodies.²⁶ This incongruity becomes particularly conspicuous when a person has experienced trauma. Traumatic experiences can violate a person's imagination in ways that make it extremely difficult to make sense of and affirm the Christian story.

TRAUMA AND THE IMAGINATION

According to a large-scale study completed by Kaiser Permanente and the Center for Disease Control, two-thirds of Americans have had traumatic experiences.²⁷ What most people think of as trauma is an experience that is violent, distressing, and debilitating. However, trauma is not always so easily identifiable. Traumatic events do not have to be physical: "chronic emotional abuse and neglect can be just as devastating as physical abuse and sexual molestation."²⁸ Neither do traumas

²⁶ Thompson, *Anatomy of a Soul*, 118.

²⁷ Van Der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score*, 147.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 89-90.

have to be major, catastrophic events. The authors of *AGTOL* write, “What could be more natural than assuming that the traumas that tower in memory have affected us most? Some of them do leave their marks, but the slow and surreptitious implicit system is the true scribe of emotional learning.”²⁹ Small, repeated traumas can carve their way into a person’s imagination and body as effectively as large traumatic events.

Not all experiences that can be considered traumatic would necessarily earn a label like PTSD. There are many experiences deserving to be recognized, in a lesser but still significant sense, as traumatic. Growing up in a household with a parent who is subtly yet consistently verbally abusive will change how a person imagines the world as reliably, if not as dramatically, as something like physical or sexual abuse. Even people who have not experienced the extreme, debilitating, highly disruptive symptoms of clinical trauma may, to a lesser degree, experience the changes in perception and imagination that severely traumatized people experience.

A traumatic experience is one in which a person feels themselves to be in danger, yet helpless and abandoned with no recourse to safety.³⁰ While singular or even multiple traumatic experiences will not necessarily traumatize a person severely, it is important to understand that in any such situation in which a person has no recourse to safety (which is physiologically experienced as the inability to either flee or fight), the

²⁹ Lewis, Amini, and Lannon, *A General Theory of Love*, 116.

³⁰ Adam Young, “What Makes Trauma Trauma,” *Adam Young Counseling*, accessed January 31, 2022, <https://adamyoungcounseling.com/2019/12/11/what-makes-trauma-trauma/>.

body responds with a trauma reaction.³¹ Such trauma experiences distort a person's perception and interpretation of what is real, true, and meaningful.

Trauma theologian Serene Jones explains that trauma "lives in our bodies and our unconscious minds and actions" and "reconfigures the imagination," which, as Van Der Kolk notes, makes a traumatized person see and experience the world in a wholly different manner.³²

³³ Traumatic memories are intrusive, springing unbidden into a traumatized person's mind, forcing them to relive their past trauma. As Van Der Kolk explains, "long after a traumatic experience is over, it may be reactivated at the slightest hint of danger."³⁴ When people remember their trauma, it is replayed in the brain's neural connections as if it were really happening again. In a study of traumatic memory, researchers at Harvard Medical School discovered that when the brain recalls a trauma it is "as if the trauma were actually occurring."³⁵ Traumatic memories compel the body and brain both to respond as if the trauma were happening again.

This means that when people relive trauma, it is not "all in their heads." It is also in their bodies, as their bodies react to the traumatic memories. When people were vividly reminded of their trauma, the memory "reactivated the same physiological responses that had occurred during the [trauma]."³⁶ Physiologically, trauma

³¹ Lewis, Amini, and Lannon, *A General Theory of Love*, 116.

³² Van Der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score*, xii.

³³ *Ibid.*, 20.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 2.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 40-44.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 41.

repeats. Physiologically, the body “believes” itself to not be safe when triggered by traumatic memory. Feeling unsafe in one’s body is autonomic; a person cannot stop the feeling of danger just by knowing rationally that they are safe: “The rational brain is basically impotent to talk the emotional brain out of its own reality.”³⁷

Trauma can mangle a person’s imagination so that it is nearly unrecognizable; their view of the world might seem totally alien to a person who has not shared in their trauma. Van Der Kolk states that “traumatized people look at the world in a fundamentally different way from other people.”³⁸ The brain’s capacity for perception is fundamentally reorganized.³⁹ A person’s imagination is twisted out of shape or shuts down, and the narrative a traumatized person had previously used to make sense of the world is shattered by the trauma.

The way trauma affects the imagination may not erupt onto the surface of conscious belief, but it will still shape what a person thinks is true at a deeper level. How many people assent consciously to the statement “God loves me” but feel in their bodies and limbic brains “no one loves me” because of the effects of trauma on their body? The implication is that the issues apologetics attempts to address — doubt, full-blown unbelief, apathy — may be rooted in things far deeper than intellectual reasons.

³⁷ Van Der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score*, 47.

³⁸ *Ibid*, 17.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 21.

IMPLICATIONS, APPLICATIONS, AND QUESTIONS FOR APOLOGETICS

Understanding trauma is crucial to doing effective apologetics. Understanding apologetics through the lens of trauma allows us to understand how to integrate the imagination's effect on belief into how we approach apologetics. However, some concerned with defending the faith may disagree with an approach that attempts to integrate an understanding of the body and the limbic brain into our approach to apologetics. They might consider the only aspects relevant to belief formation to be reason and the Holy Spirit, leaving no room for an understanding of how the body or limbic brain shape our beliefs. However, an intellect-and-Spirit-only approach to apologetics is reductive and likely to generate unbelief in the long term. If only the intellect is considered, people will misunderstand how and what they believe, leading to internal conflict and confusion. Our intellects must be taken into account, but human beings are much more than just their minds, and we cannot understand ourselves spiritually if we cannot understand ourselves physically.

One thing we might learn from our study of imagination and body is that apologetics is prone to misidentifying problems by looking only at surface-level issues that are symptoms, not root problems. When only the surface-level symptom is considered, the issue of safety is never considered, yet a lack of safety might be a root cause. A person's doubt may be the apparent problem, but it may be a *symptom* of a deeper problem. It might be that their refusal to plant themselves firmly in faith could be a symptom of insecure attachment, which has made them unable to trust anyone, including God. An

adverse experience within a religious community may have shaped their imagination so that, despite whatever rational explanations they hear, the idea of a good God remains implausible. Doubt, *per se*, is not the problem.

Van Der Kolk writes, “Our gut feelings signal what is safe, life sustaining, or threatening, even if we cannot quite explain why we feel a particular way.”⁴⁰ Whether or not we find sanctuary, the feeling of safety, in our faith has much to do with a physical experience that we cannot explain discursively. What happens to faith if our gut feeling of what is right or safe has been distorted by trauma? For a person with an insecure attachment, what does Jesus *feel* like? Smith argues that our bodies give us accounts of the world “without recourse to discursive, propositional processing;” they tell us on a deep, physical level whether the person of Jesus feels safe and life-giving, and it is not in our conscious control if our bodies feel as if he is not.⁴¹ The conflict created by doubt and unbelief play out in the “theater of visceral experience;” the concept of a sanctuary as a safe place remains the concept of physical spaces, but those physical spaces are our bodies.⁴² Without bodies being sanctuaries, places in which we can experience safety, even those who walk into halls of worship every week may be living without *sanctuary*. They stand within a sacred space but are told by their bodies that they are not safe, God is not safe, the church is not safe.

For apologetics to penetrate deeper than the intellect, it must be done in the context of supportive

⁴⁰ Van Der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score*, 98.

⁴¹ Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom*, 56.

⁴² Van Der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score*, 65.

relationships. *AGTOL* shows that neuroscience supports the biblical admonishments to live in community with its finding that “total self-sufficiency turns out to be a daydream.”⁴³ ⁴⁴ It has shown that supportive and safe relationships make a real difference in our physiologies and therefore in our imaginations — only with the help of such relationships can a person’s imagination be reshaped in a positive way.⁴⁵

Additionally, apologetics needs a new time frame to begin working on people’s imaginations and habits. The authors of *AGTOL* share from the perspective of a neuroscientist that “Long-standing togetherness writes permanent changes into a brain’s open book . . . Who we are and who we become depends, in part, on whom we love.”⁴⁶ Deeply changing a person’s worldview takes time, and it takes meaningful relationships. Reshaping a person’s imagination can never be a rush job. The combination of a protracted length of time and supportive, safe relationships is immensely powerful. When a person gains knowledge about Christianity that shifts their beliefs, their body should also gain a sense of the truth of those beliefs. For this to happen, they need good relationships sustained over time.

Henri Nouwen has made the argument that any work done for the Kingdom of God must at its core be work of compassion, stating that “preaching must be

⁴³ Ecclesiastes 4:9-12, Galatians 6:2 (English Standard Version).

⁴⁴ Lewis, Amini, and Lannon, *A General Theory of Love*, 86.

⁴⁵ Van Der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score*, 234.

⁴⁶ Lewis, Amini, and Lannon, *A General Theory of Love*, 144.

more than handing over a tradition.”⁴⁷ One of Nouwen’s central points in his book *The Wounded Healer* is that each person has a core need for healing, not just a need for more information or more understanding. Acting as detached dispensers of truth is not the work of the ministers of God. To be sure, truth can be passed along with a heart of compassion, but truth detached from evident love can seem empty. As Nouwen puts it, “no one can help anyone without becoming involved.”⁴⁸ This concept applied to apologetics means that if apologists are going to address individuals’ broken imaginations, they cannot only be teachers but must also be healers. Those who need apologetic ministry always are in need of healing, not only information. It is not *just* truth that someone needs for life change; they also need spiritual healing, something that occurs within a place of safety. For apologists to be healers, the core of their authority will shift; it will no longer be their knowledge. Nouwen writes that, for any person to do ministry for the Kingdom’s sake, “compassion must become the core and even the nature of authority.”⁴⁹ Apologists cannot speak only as experts and not as healers, for truth without love is but a clanging gong.

Apologists must be listeners, not just telling God’s story but also listening to others’ stories. In the process of telling our story, we change. Our minds and imaginations change, and so do our physiologies. Thompson affirms this, stating, “The process of

⁴⁷ Henri J.M. Nouwen, *The Wounded Healer*, (New York: Doubleday, 1972), 39.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 72.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 40.

reflecting on and telling your story, and the way you experience others hearing it, actually shapes the story *and the very neural correlates, or networks, it represents.*"⁵⁰ Connecting with another person through telling your story can start to change the neural connections in your brain, which is the beginning of a shift in the imagination.⁵¹ Sharing your story in such a way requires vulnerability, and vulnerability requires safety; safety is not optional for good apologetics. It is imperative that apologists are listeners because listening is an act of love that can prompt deep healing that knowledge alone cannot.

Not all of the questions raised by this topic can be easily answered. Imaginations can be so warped by trauma as to be averse to the services and liturgies of the church. Serene Jones relates how a survivor of violent trauma was triggered and became terrified by the liturgy surrounding the eucharist relating to the blood and death of Christ. She makes the heartbreaking observation that, for traumatized persons, "it's hard to let in things from outside that could potentially be salvific to you, because what is outside has tried to kill you."⁵² Those who have been severely traumatized cannot tell the surgeon's scalpel from the murderer's knife, nor the love of God from the antipathy of man. They will not want to open themselves to either. Jones relates that, in studying the intersection of trauma and faith, she "began to think about theologically engaging the traumatized mind as a

⁵⁰ Thompson, *Anatomy of the Soul*, 77.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Serene Jones, *Trauma + Grace: Theology in a Ruptured World*, Second Edition, (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2019), 20.

challenge of *healing imagination*.”⁵³ Can apologetics be a work of healing imagination? How can apologetics, and for that matter, the church, engage with the re-shaping of severely traumatized imaginations?

How important are feelings in the development of belief? Emotions are often dismissed as irrational and irrelevant to apologetics, but neuroscience suggests that we cannot really separate what we think and believe from what we feel. Doubt may often arise from the conflict between what we feel in our bodies and what we think in our heads. But it may be physiological feeling that really determines belief.⁵⁴ We may ask if it is possible that to cultivate unshakeable faith, it is more important to develop a *feel* for faith rather than just a *reason*. If people’s emotional and bodily states have significant governance over how they develop belief, it may be a crucial spiritual discipline to know how we train our bodies and emotions.

Finally, perhaps the most intimidating question: how important is it for an apologist to engage with his own story and trauma? Nouwen states that a Christian spiritual leader must be one who has “the courage to be an explorer of the new territory in himself and to articulate his discoveries.”⁵⁵ If an apologist has not explored his own story and cannot talk about his doubts and perception-distorting experiences and traumas, how effective will he be in helping others understand their stories and presenting a compelling case for faith? Nouwen believed that the way to minister to others is to

⁵³ Jones, *Trauma + Grace*, 20.

⁵⁴ Lewis, Amini, and Lannon, *A General Theory of Love*, 113-114.

⁵⁵ Nouwen, *The Wounded Healer*, 40.

“put your own faith and doubt, your own hope and desire, your own light and darkness at the disposal of others who want to find a way through their confusion.”⁵⁶ To be able to do this, an apologist would have to be in touch with her doubts, desires, and darkness and be going through the process of healing and growth entailed. Apologists have the same needs as those they minister to; they have the same need to be vulnerable, the same need for healing, the same need for sanctuary.

⁵⁶ Nouwen, *The Wounded Healer*, 39.

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