

Sin and Salvation: An Inter-cultural Re-reading

by

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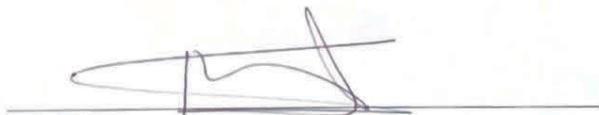
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Introduction

Is it possible to have only one conception of sin? Of salvation? Derek Nelson in *Sin: A Guide for the Perplexed* observes that with a variety of approaches, we are able to “see, in relief and detail, features of sin that might be otherwise obscured.”¹ One might say the same of salvation. We can thus gain a richer view of sin and salvation when we put old and new, traditional and post-colonial theologians in conversation. Looking through the lenses of an early church father, St. Augustine, born and bred in Northern Africa, but a citizen of the Roman Empire, Wonhee Anne Joh, a feminist theologian born in Korea but largely raised in the United States, and Randy Woodley, a Native American theologian also born and raised in the United States but with deep Cherokee roots, we see commonalities and differences. A common sense of something inherent about being human that often leads us to hurt ourselves, others, and creation. The salvation of Christ’s life, death and resurrection is the window into God’s love that desired to heal us so much that God joined humanity in the world and ultimately suffered for us. Yet it also shows us the power of the life lived in love (Augustine)/*jeong* (Joh) /shalom (Woodley) that God calls us to which is able to heal that buried wound.² Through this window, Christ’s life, death and resurrection, then, provides us with the power, grace and freedom to also pursue that life. There are differences in the theologies of these three, of course, coming from different contexts. When we open our ears to the Spirit, however, and the possibilities that cultures beyond our own have something to teach us, we may actually be reminded of what we already knew. Even as we gain greater understanding.

¹ Derek Nelson, *Sin: A Guide for the Perplexed*, (London: T&T Clark, 2011), 77.

² See *infra* p. 16 (Augustine), 20 (Joh), 32 (Woodley).

Chapter 1: A Story of a “Spiritual But Not Religious”: Confusion about Sin and Salvation

1.1 Being a Sinner = Being Bad

What is “sin”? And What does it mean as a Christian to say that I am saved? The idea of sin and salvation is deeply embedded in the Christian tradition and yet, for many of us, the answer to what they mean is murky. In that murkiness, many of us have come to understand sin as a “bad” act and being a “sinner” as “being unworthy” (or worse). In theory, we are to be comforted in knowing of our sinfulness by God’s grace of forgiveness and the idea of salvation. But here again, our murkiness in understanding just what salvation is, means that many of us have come to understand it simply as “believe in Jesus” and you will go to heaven. A highly unsatisfactory solution for those of us who experience doubt in our faith or worry about the legions of people who do not “believe in Jesus.”

In my own story, I start from the place in which I learned that we are all sinners. That because Adam ate the fruit despite God’s warning that it would result in death, that all of humanity was infected with sin. Memorizing Luther’s catechism as a child in the 80s, I learned that as a “sinner,” I deserved God’s wrath, displeasure, temporal death and eternal damnation. In the liturgy I said that I was not worthy. It is not surprising that I developed a deep sense of shame and constant fear of hell. I heard about the gift of grace and Christ’s love for me and in certain ways that was meaningful. Far more forceful, however, was the sense that I should be perfect. If I was not worthy of God’s love, and worse, deserving of God’s wrath, then I subconsciously concluded that there must be some standard I could achieve by which I would be worthy. No one told me I was rehashing an old argument made by Pelagius for moral perfectionism or that Augustine had effectively shut it down. But just what sin was, was always hazy to me. So I spent

a lot of time worrying I might have it wrong and end up in hell because how could I repent if I did not even know I was doing something wrong.

The problem with tying sin to God's wrath and eternal damnation is that many of us came to equate being sinners, as being "bad." This creates a sense of shame from which we cannot extricate ourselves from because no matter how hard we try to be "good," we will always be deficient in some way, whether or not we can identify it. In Linda Mercandante's study of people who identify as spiritual but not religious, *Belief Without Borders*, this sentiment is heard from some of her interviewees:

- "There were three words . . . I just hated . . . the word 'wrong,' the word 'sin,' and the word 'Christ.' . . . They 'smack of negativity, control, hypocrisy and outright lies, the opposite of spirituality.'"³
- "One thing I let go of is identifying myself as a sinner . . . this means that I am this person that is never going to make it. As if God's always there as a judgmental God. I'm always incomplete in some way."⁴

1.2 Ambiguous Sources of Sin

In my formation I came to understand that there were five sources for what constitutes a sin: 1) the Ten Commandments, 2) Deuteronomic law of Deuteronomy and the Holiness Code of Leviticus, 3) Jesus's command to love our neighbor as ourselves, 4) the Catholic seven deadly sins, and 5) other people telling me that I have done something wrong. More recently, I would

³ Linda A. Mercandante, *Belief Without Borders: Inside the Minds of the Spiritual But Not Religious* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 78, accessed March 23, 2023, <https://academic.oup.com/book/8734/chapter/154780127>.

⁴ Mercandante, *Belief Without Borders*, 133.

add a 6th source: 6) the idea of structural or systemic sin, which is societal, and yet, there is a sense in which as a participant in it, I should also be able to correct it through my actions. One might think that with all these sources, it would be easy to figure out when one is sinning and when one is not.

With some exceptions, however, most of these sources for identifying sin are ambiguous, all the more so in that the context in which they were written is so different than our own today. As a result, in today's world, the loudest Christian voices seem to pick and choose from the biblical sources what they still want to consider a sin. The same people who eat pork and get divorced will cast aspersions on people who are homosexual, ignoring and resorting to biblical instruction seemingly where it suits them.

Jesus's command to love our neighbors as ourselves is, of course, the most important instruction, but it is often also the most ambiguous. Jesus turning over tables because he was angry (Mt. 21:12-13; Mk. 11:15-18) and calling a Samaritan woman a dog (Mt. 15:21-28; Mk. 7:24-30) would both seem like sins to me if I committed them. Yet I'm told Jesus was without sin. So what do I learn from that? That sometimes wrath in the name of justice, and learning from our mistakes (when the Samaritan woman made him realize that she deserved healing too) cancels out the sin?

The ambiguity thus, left me prey to category 5 – when other people tell me I've done something wrong. As a result, I was always feeling ashamed because I was too loud, too excited, overreacting, etc. I am not alone in feeling that "sin" and being a sinner became about my not being worthy based on the definitions of others, particularly as it related to being a woman. Feminist theologians are particularly alert to the gender dynamics at work in definitions of sin.

For Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, “andocentrism” defines such a dynamic and names the way in which male human experience has become normative and come to justify coercive power.⁵

Sin being defined as anything out of the norm for the dominant group impacts not only women, but other marginalized groups as well. Native American theologian Ray Aldred wrote in “An Indigenous Reinterpretation of Repentance” about how for Indigenous people in the United States, sin has historically been portrayed as anything outside the mold of white European “civilized” Christians.⁶ In that context, confession and repentance became a demand for self-hatred of indigenous persons’ God given identities because they were considered “wild” and, therefore, immoral.⁷ In that model, sin was defined not as how we turn away from God, but as any deviation from colonially imposed standards of behavior.⁸

Derek Nelson points out in *Sin: A Guide for the Perplexed* that the doctrine of sin has fallen into disrepute.⁹ Priests, Pastors, and Christian educators hesitate to speak about sin – they are often as uncomfortable and confused as the rest of us.¹⁰ Nonetheless, sin and salvation permeate and are foundational to Christian theology. For those of us who have found grace within Christianity, it is, therefore, important to find a way to think and talk about it that addresses the suffering and evil we experience and observe in the world without imposing undue shame.

⁵ Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins*, (New York: Crossroad, 1983), xix.

⁶ Ray Aldred, “An Indigenous Reinterpretation of Repentance: A Step on the Journey to Reconciliation,” in *Majority World Theology: Christian Doctrine in Global Context*, eds. Gene L. Green, Stephen T Pardue, and Khiok-Khng Yeo (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2020), 434.

⁷ Aldred, “Repentance,” 434.

⁸ Aldred, “Repentance,” 433.

⁹ Nelson, *Sin*, 4.

¹⁰ Nelson, *Sin*, 4-9.

1.3 Salvation? Fears of Hell

As for salvation, in my youth, I learned that my sins were forgiven and “washed away” by the gruesome murder/sacrifice of Jesus and the reward for believing this was heaven in the hereafter. If I did not believe, hell was the punishment. I wondered how a God that I understood to not only be loving, but to *be* love could send one of its creations to eternal damnation simply because they did not “believe” for any number of reasons. And, as problematic, would send to heaven those who claimed to believe but completely disregarded the teachings of Jesus as to how we were to live life. In the end, these problems led me to leave Christianity for many years.

Even after returning, however, while I knew my own experience that brought me back, when I would hear someone say that being a Christian meant I was “saved” by Christ, I had no idea what that meant beyond the heaven and hell I’d learned about in my youth. While heaven after I die might be nice, how does “salvation” manifest in my day-to-day life, particularly in relation to sin? Shockingly, three years of seminary education has not answered this question. We seem to assume that people will understand what these words mean without talking about it.

In my own experience of talking with non-Christian friends, what they understand about salvation is strikingly similar to what I learned in my youth. Mercadante’s research showed that many of the spiritually but not religious that she interviewed homogenized core themes in Christianity, such as exclusionary salvation and “a static and permanent afterlife of glorious heaven and torturous hell.”¹¹ That people don’t know much more about what salvation means for Christians beyond the conservative fundamentalist take on it doesn’t seem surprising given my

¹¹ Mercadante, *Beliefs Without Borders*, 230.

own confusion. Yet, here again, salvation is foundational to Christianity and we need to be able to explain just what this gift is of our faith.

1.4 An Inter-cultural Re-reading of Sin and Salvation

Given my own experience and context, this study will be an exercise in re-reading received notions of sin and salvation. Already, I have named ways in which marginalized voices have helped me read and re-read my own formation and experience. In a bid to deepen that reading I will first turn to the foundational influence of St. Augustine (chapter two) before turning to marginalized voices in the field of post-colonial theology. I've chosen these post-colonial theologians not out of an attempt to conduct a specifically "post-colonial" reading of sin and salvation. Rather, as post-colonial theologians they are historically marginalized voices providing new reads on old ideas out of their hybridized context of being Christians with feet both in non-"western" cultural traditions while also firmly being a part of the United States.¹² I believe they can, then, help us to see sin and salvation, concepts that have been problematic for many of us in fresh, life-giving ways. Wonhee Anne Joh, a feminist, Korean-American, post-colonial theologian, deliberately re-reads the meaning of sin and the cross through a Korean theological lens (chapter three). Randy Woodley, a Keetoowah Cherokee theologian, provides a means to re-read sin and salvation through a Native American theological lens. I will conclude this study by putting these three authors in conversation with one another. In doing so, I will seek to draw out some common threads that may provide a re-reading of sin and salvation that is more life-giving than the shame my early Christian formation taught me.

¹² See e.g., Robert S. Heaney, *Post-Colonial Theology: Finding God and Each Other Amidst the Hate* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2019), 12-13.

Chapter 2: St. Augustine on Sin and Salvation

I begin with Augustine, that foundational theologian for the western church, to bring some clarity and contextualization on what he really said about sin and salvation. Notably, Augustine was not from Europe. He was born and spent most of his life in North Africa, descended from Berbers in what is now Algeria.¹³ He was also, however, a Roman citizen and his theology was heavily influenced by Greek neo-Platonic philosophy. In that combined sense then, he fits with the other theologians studied in this paper, who are citizens of the United States, which some would call an Empire,¹⁴ even as they are formed by non-European contexts.

2.1 St. Augustine on Sin

St. Augustine of Hippo's (354-430) doctrine of sin has been deeply influential in Western theological discourse. He was, of course, building upon previous Christian thinkers, but what is perhaps most important to keep in mind is that his writings on sin and salvation were responses to Donatists and Pelagians, both of whom were focused to some degree on moral perfectionism.¹⁵ Augustine, as a devotee of God's grace, adamantly and pastorally disagreed. Donatists argued that Priests who had succumbed to the fear garnered by prosecutions of Christians and engaged in the burning of the Bible and sacrifices could no longer be a part of the church, even after these Priests expressed remorse. Pelagius, to the best we can surmise from Augustine's writings, argued that humans were capable of moral perfection and that is what God

¹³ Nelson, *Sin*, 39.

¹⁴ See, e.g., Victor Bulmer-Thomas, *Empire in Retreat: The Past, Present, and Future of the United States* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018), 1-12. Bulmer-Thomas explains the debate around whether the United States is rightly called an Empire, although Bulmer-Thomas's conclusion is that it is.

¹⁵ Nelson, *Sin*, 41-42.

expected of us. Augustine, in contrast, emphasized the need for God's grace to overcome their sin and thus compassion when we fall short.¹⁶

As outlined by Jesse Couenhoven, Augustine articulates three referents of sin in his *Unfinished Work in Answer to Julian* that together encompass what we have come to call the doctrine of original sin: first, the primal sin is Adam's when he ate the fruit in the second Genesis creation story (Gen. 2:4-3:24). Second, what we would now call "original sin," which is the penalty of that first sin that is passed on to all of humanity, and which is the cause, third, of the sins we commit, which is also a punishment that none of us can avoid as a result of original sin.¹⁷

Most of us would likely agree that there is something about humans that leads us to harm ourselves, others, and creation, that seems to be out of our control. What has been problematic about Augustine's outline is his calling it a punishment. That he might see it as a punishment is not surprising, however, given the misery of the plagues and death, heavy taxation, and the disintegration of the Roman Empire that was all around him at that time.¹⁸ How many of us, when we see ourselves repeat the same mistake over and over even when we should know better, or when the world seems to be serving up pain, start to wonder if we have been cursed?

Augustine elaborated on the Genesis story of Adam and Eve by speculating that they possessed "original righteousness," a "volitional structure in which love for God and love for

¹⁶ Saint Augustine, "On Nature and Grace," 10.(11) in *Four Anti-Pelagian Writings*, trans. William J. Collinge and John A. Mourant, 22-90 (Washington, DC: Catholic University Press, 2010).

¹⁷ Jesse Couenhoven, "Augustine," in *T&T Clark Companion to the Doctrine of Sin*, edited by Keith L. Johnson and David Lauber, 181-198. (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2016), 181. Citing to Saint Augustine, "Unfinished Work in Answer to Julian," in *The Works of Saint Augustine: Answer to the Pelagians, Vol III*, ed. John E. Rotelle, OSA, tr. Roland J. Teske, SJ. (Hyde Park: New City Press, 1999), 73-74.

¹⁸ Nelson, *Sin*, 45.

themselves and others were properly ordered.”¹⁹ They were thus able to act justly in every way, and to not to sin, even though they had the choice.²⁰ Augustine simply could not understand why they would then choose to eat the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in spite of God’s warning of death, when they had all of paradise to choose from. To explain their inconceivable choice, Augustine concluded that they were acting out of their temporal creatureliness by choosing a momentary pleasure over eternal goods.²¹ Such a choice was a product of the immaturity of their righteousness, which left them subject to pride, putting themselves at the center of their world rather than God.²² The punishment was banishment from the Garden and, according to Augustine, the enslavement to sin and physical death that would infect all of humanity thereafter.²³

The way this “original sin” was transmitted to subsequent generations, according to Augustine’s elaboration, was via procreation. In short, he concluded that one of the consequences of eating the fruit, demonstrated by Adam and Eve covering their genitals, was that humans began to experience lustful sexual desire.²⁴ The connection of sex with disordered desire corrupted the sex act and became the means of transmission.²⁵ This connection exacerbated a problematic understanding of sex and desire that continues to this day.²⁶

According to Couenhoven, Augustine’s views about original sin were motivated less by a commitment to sin as punishment or thoughts about human nature, but by his theology of

¹⁹ Couenhoven, “Augustine,” 188 citing St. Augustine, “Unfinished Work in Answer to Julian,” 73.

²⁰ St. Augustine, “Unfinished Work in Answer to Julian,” 73.

²¹ Nelson, *Sin*, 43; St. Augustine, *The City of God Against the Pagans*, ed. and tr. R.W. Dyson (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1998), XIV.13.

²² Couenhoven, “Augustine,” 189. Augustine, *City of God*, XIV.13.

²³ Augustine, *City of God*, 14.14; Augustine, *On Nature and Grace*, 43.

²⁴ Nelson, *Sin*, 44; Augustine, *City of God*, XIII.13, XIV.21, XIV.17.

²⁵ Nelson, *Sin*, 44; Augustine, *City of God*, XIII.13, XIV.21, XIV.17.

²⁶ Margaret Farley, *Just Love: A Framework for Christian Sexual Ethics* (New York: Continuum International Publishing, 2006), 12.

baptism and doctrine of Christ.²⁷ The Creed proclaims that baptism is given for the forgiveness of sin.²⁸ Because infants were baptized even though they do not sin in the intentional ways that older humans do, Augustine reasoned that they must have some special sort of sin needing forgiveness, which, he surmised was an involuntary share in Adam's sin.²⁹ This solidarity between Adam's sin and humanity's sin, fit with Augustine's soteriology which followed Paul's parallel between the solidarity of humanity with Adam and Christians in Christ.³⁰ Baptism was the gift "to bring a fallen humanity into relation with Christ, who not only forgives the guilt all share in common but heals the flawed second nature with which all are born."³¹

Augustine's reasoning, calling it punishment, and wrapping infants as sinners into his thought process can make us uncomfortable today, causing us to miss how grace filled and thoughtful he otherwise can be about sin and evil. Augustine did not believe that sin and evil changed the essential nature of human beings, which remained good.³² People had not become "bad," rather, they had a sickness in need of healing.³³ This "original sin" disorders our powers of belief, desire and love, and thus, even if we are essentially God's good creation, how we act out of these powers is often at odds with the divine design, which in turn, harms oneself and the world.³⁴ We thus, end up doing "evil with a desire for some good, but evil by its very nature cannot deliver what it promises. That is why evil, and evildoing, is a kind of weakness, even when it takes the form of arrogance and power."³⁵

²⁷ Couenhoven, "Augustine," 192.

²⁸ Couenhoven, "Augustine," 192.

²⁹ Couenhoven, "Augustine," 192.

³⁰ Couenhoven, "Augustine," 193.

³¹ Couenhoven, "Augustine," 193.

³² Nelson, *Sin*, 44.

³³ Couenhoven, "Augustine," 194, 198.

³⁴ Couenhoven, "Augustine," 187.

³⁵ Couenhoven, "Augustine," 184-185.

For Augustine, sin most often appears in the form of pride, “the hubris that led the Romans to accomplish great feats in the name of honor, but which inevitably led to the fall of empire as well, since it sought to be more than it could.”³⁶ Thus, pride is when we as humans inevitably forget that we are not God - a point that Woodley resonates with.³⁷ But sin is also caused by suffering and oppression, by ignorance and weakness – something that Joh will especially resonate with.³⁸ Augustine realized that sins were often not intended, but only seen in retrospect, and frequently were small and miserable.³⁹ He thought that this understanding should lead us to have compassion for one another.⁴⁰

Modern readers often take issue with Augustine’s dependence on grace for “right living.” The seat of sin is in the human capacity for choice.⁴¹ In contrast, an animal cannot sin, according to Augustine, because it does not have the same volitional capacity.⁴² Yet Augustine also taught that human beings could only live the life Christ called us to when God gives us the grace to do so. His intent was to equalize humanity by showing that we all need God’s grace for healing through Christ.⁴³ None of us are exempt. Some perceive this as an unacceptable diminishment of human agency.⁴⁴ According to Couenhoven, however, Augustine was not articulating “a doctrine of psychological determinism, in which a person’s story is set by the cards dealt him or her at birth.”⁴⁵ Rather, it is God’s grace that disrupts such determinism.⁴⁶ Nor was Augustine

³⁶ Couenhoven, “Augustine,” 193; Augustine, *The City of God*, XIV.13.

³⁷ Couenhoven, “Augustine,” 193; Augustine, *The City of God*, XIV.13. For discussion of humans forgetting we are not God in Woodley, *see infra*. p. 36.

³⁸ Couenhoven, “Augustine,” 194. For discussion of suffering causing sin in Joh, *see infra*. p. 19, 24.

³⁹ Couenhoven, “Augustine,” 194.

⁴⁰ Couenhoven, “Augustine,” 194.

⁴¹ Couenhoven, “Augustine,” 187.

⁴² Couenhoven, “Augustine,” 187.

⁴³ Couenhoven, “Augustine,” 194-195.

⁴⁴ Couenhoven, “Augustine,” 194-195.

⁴⁵ Couenhoven, “Augustine,” 195.

⁴⁶ Couenhoven, “Augustine,” 195.

suggesting that people had no volitional capacity to shape oneself or others apart from God, only that, inevitably, without God, such efforts would fall short.⁴⁷

Couenhoven points out the irony of the negative view many have of Augustine today.⁴⁸ In contrast with his opponents who thought that only the select few could achieve purification, Augustine believed the salvation of grace was open to all who clothed themselves in Christ.⁴⁹ Like many of us, he was trying to make sense of the suffering and tragedy in the world.⁵⁰ His theology was intended to be hopeful by pointing out that often this idea that “individuals can and should renew their own hearts, minds and communities is actually a false hope, one that asks what the fallen cannot give, thereby adding to the burdens of the already afflicted.”⁵¹ For Augustine then, “our true freedom lies in the gift of new life already offered to us by the one who made us.”⁵² The deepest sin, then, is when we “refuse to rest in this hope.”⁵³ Which highlights that the intent was not to suggest such a sin made a person “bad,” but that losing hope may be the worst suffering of all.

2.2 St. Augustine on Salvation

In Romans 5:8-9, Paul says, “God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us. Much more surely then, now that we have been justified by his blood, will we be saved through him from the wrath of God.” Augustine was appalled at the idea that this verse could be understood as God’s anger being such that the only solution to appease it

⁴⁷ Couenhoven, “Augustine,” 195.

⁴⁸ Couenhoven, “Augustine,” 198.

⁴⁹ Couenhoven, “Augustine,” 198.

⁵⁰ Couenhoven, “Augustine,” 198.

⁵¹ Couenhoven, “Augustine,” 198.

⁵² Couenhoven, “Augustine,” 198.

⁵³ Couenhoven, “Augustine,” 198.

would be the torture and death of Jesus.⁵⁴ For Augustine, such an understanding was not the Christian God, and was no different than how pagans understood the need to appease their wrathful deities common at that time in ancient religions.⁵⁵ Instead, Augustine emphasized God's eternal love for us, "the Father loved us not merely before the Son died for us, but before he founded the world."⁵⁶ Jesus' death was "an extension into our fallen world of God's eternal love for humanity and desire for human flourishing."⁵⁷ It feels contradictory that on one hand Augustine sees human proclivity to sin as a punishment when he has such a strong negative reaction to wrath being understood as God's anger. But this is the complexity of being human.

Augustine argued that understanding Paul's statement in light of this love requires us to re-interpret what he meant by "wrath."⁵⁸ It should be read, not as the pagans would, but bearing that eternal love in mind. "Wrath," then, is not to be confused with human anger, an emotional disturbance. Rather, as "the tranquil unfolding of God's own plan for the universe, which we call justice."⁵⁹ It is not God's anger that separates humanity from God, but humanity's desire for power and domination.⁶⁰ In this world when we see someone with more than we have, it tells us that we have less. It becomes a competition for what we perceive as scarce resources. In that competition, humility and generosity are perceived as contrary to one's self-interest.⁶¹ When we're trapped in that way of thinking we can only see God as any other god: jealous, seeing

⁵⁴ Mark A. McIntosh, *Divine Teaching: An Introduction to Christian Theology* (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2008), 87.

⁵⁵ McIntosh, *Divine Teaching*, 87-88.

⁵⁶ McIntosh, *Divine Teaching*, 87.

⁵⁷ McIntosh, *Divine Teaching*, 88.

⁵⁸ McIntosh, *Divine Teaching*, 88.

⁵⁹ St. Augustine, *The Trinity*, trans. Edmund Hill (Brooklyn, NY: New City Press, 1991), XIII. 5. 21.

⁶⁰ McIntosh, *Divine Teaching*, 88.

⁶¹ McIntosh, *Divine Teaching*, 89.

human advancement as a threat, and needing appeasement.⁶² To reconcile us to God, then, God must heal our trapped consciousness.⁶³

Humanity's entrapment in its desire, kept it subjected to injustice, which Augustine says is the devil's provenance.⁶⁴ Although God could have simply used "omnipotent divine fiat" to take away our sins and free us, Augustine argues that this would have been stooping to the devil's level by suggesting God had no room for opposition.⁶⁵ Instead, Augustine concludes, God "flipped the script." In a world in which humanity was striving to be God, God would choose humility and join humanity.⁶⁶ "Once we had been brought in this way to believe how much God loved us and to hope at last for what we had despair of," God was able freely to "confer his gifts on us with a quite uncalled-for generosity, without any good deserts of ours, indeed with our will our only preparation."⁶⁷

The incarnation alone, however, was not enough.⁶⁸ Augustine believed that even with Christ's loving example we would continue to return to the cycle of power, violence and revenge all the way to hell.⁶⁹ Something more was needed to dismantle the structures of power that dominate the human situation. The cross made visible "the malignant envy that has perverted justice in the name of power" by condemning one who was not only completely innocent, but also over whom Satan had no rightful power or authority."⁷⁰ With the resurrection, God

⁶² McIntosh, *Divine Teaching*, 89.

⁶³ McIntosh, *Divine Teaching*, 89.

⁶⁴ McIntosh, *Divine Teaching*, 89.

⁶⁵ McIntosh, *Divine Teaching*, 89.

⁶⁶ St. Augustine, *The Trinity*, XIII. 5. 23.

⁶⁷ St. Augustine, *The Trinity*, XIII. 4. 13.

⁶⁸ McIntosh, *Divine Teaching*, 90.

⁶⁹ McIntosh, *Divine Teaching*, 90.

⁷⁰ McIntosh, *Divine Teaching*, 90.

demonstrated that the powers that had killed Christ, even with a momentary death he did not owe, no longer had the right to hold anyone who had put on Christ.⁷¹

Salvation through Christ's life, death and resurrection, then, for Augustine, is the prying loose the grip of domination, envy, violence and revenge that then allows us to act differently in the world and follow in the path of Christ.⁷² In other words, it is the freedom and grace to follow God's vision for the world, not the devil's.

2.3 Re-reading Sin and Salvation Through Augustine

Taking a fresh look at Augustine enables me to clear away some of the misunderstandings of my inherited theological understandings of sin and salvation. While Augustine's doctrine of original sin has often been blamed for a theological anthropology in which we as sinners are "bad" (or worse), returning to his work shows that, in fact, he was trying to come to terms with how we could both be God's good creation and yet make such harmful choices, some tragically so. Rather than a message of shaming us, his message seems to be an attempt to free us from that shame that comes from thinking that we can be or should be "perfect," which is solely the provenance of God. It is also equalizing in that these "disordered" choices are something that we are all infected with. Yet his message is one of hope, because the salvation of Christ's life, crucifixion, and resurrection is that God has already entered in and destroyed the grip of "the devil" through the systems of domination that we find ourselves trapped in. It sets us free, with God's grace, to be who God called us to be, not at the whim of an arbitrary standard set by a dominant norm, and to live in the love of Christ.

⁷¹ St. Augustine, *The Trinity*, XIII. 5. 21.

⁷² McIntosh, *Divine Teaching*, 91.

This is not to ignore his portrayal of original sin as “punishment,”⁷³ which is undoubtedly at least part of the source of some of the confusion in what I learned about sin and salvation. Perhaps though, his use of “punishment” must also be understood in the same way he redefines God’s “wrath” as it is used by Paul, not as appeasement of an angry God in the way we understand human anger, but through the light of God’s eternal love for humanity and desire for human flourishing.”⁷⁴ Perhaps a better understanding might be that original sin is the natural consequence of the decision to center ourselves over God when we are trapped in systems of power and domination.

In the next chapter, Wonhee Anne Joh explores further ways of understanding how we might re-think “original sin” as instead, “original *han*,” a Korean concept which very loosely translated could be understood as suffering. She explains how this original *han*/suffering comes about in a way that connects to Augustine’s understanding of it being connected to our birth. Yet her theology adds a more compassionate component by acknowledging how much of our “disordered” choices that Augustine speaks of come out of subconscious trauma and pain. She thus provides a helpful corrective to Augustine’s theology that can move us past thinking that as sinners we are all “bad.” At the same time, she has a similar reading of the liberating power of the cross as Augustine. She too rejects atonement theories of a wrathful God needing appeasement and re-connects the cross to its power as a force of liberation from oppressive systems to live in, what she calls *jeong*, a Korean concept very loosely explained as a love in

⁷³ Nor to ignore any number of other problems not discussed here, including his disparagement of Eve that has contributed to the marginalization of women, his own sense of shame around sex that became inextricably tied up with sin, or problematic conclusions about unbaptized babies facing eternal damnation.

⁷⁴ McIntosh, *Divine Teaching*, 88.

which we see ourselves in the other, and the other in ourselves. *Jeong* is the path of Christ that has the power to transform both our individual and collective *han* (suffering).

Chapter 3 **Wonhee Anne Joh's *Heart of the Cross***

Wonhee Anne Joh in *Heart of the Cross* articulates a Christological reflection on how to understand Christ's death on the cross based on the Korean concepts of *han* and *jeong*. Joh's theology is infused with her own experience as a person who has feet in multiple worlds. She grew up in the United States and it is the home with which she most identifies even as, having been born in Korea and raised by Korean parents, she does not feel completely at ease in it. She is the daughter of parents who have been intimately involved in resisting colonization and oppression in Korea and working for the unification of North and South Korea. Lives she would identify as having experienced much *han* while living lives of *jeong*. At the same time, as a citizen of the United States, she is conscious of its, and by extension her, implicit participation in the continuing conflict between North and South Korea. This experience that she calls hybridity, with a foot in multiple worlds, gives her a witness to the meaning of Jesus' life and death that can add great depth to how we think of sin and salvation.

3.1 Defining Joh's Terms: *Han*, *Jeong*, and Abjection

Joh depends on a number of complex concepts from feminist theory and inter-cultural and inter-religious sources. Among such concepts are *han*, *jeong*, and *abjection*. In explaining *han*, Joh references the work of Andrew Sung Park and Jae Hoon Lee. At a superficial level, *han* could be understood as the internal source of suffering.⁷⁵ Park considers it as broken-

⁷⁵ Wonhee Anne Joh, *Heart of the Cross* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 20.

heartedness, “the critical wound of the heart generated by unjust psychosomatic repression, as well as by social, political, economic and cultural oppression.”⁷⁶ The response to this internal *han* may be expressed in diverse ways from sadness, helplessness, hopelessness, resentment, hatred, and the will to revenge. *Han* is not only a source of suffering, but also of creativity. Although *han* is a Korean concept used within Minjung theology that developed out of Korea’s specific experience of colonialism and repression, Park believes that *han* is universal in all oppressed people. Thus, *han* is experienced by those who survived the Holocaust, Palestinians in the occupied territories, and victims of racial discrimination, battered wives, victims of child-molestation, and exploited workers.⁷⁷

Lee explores diverse manifestations of *han* in folklore, shamanism, literature and psychology to conclude that there is, what he calls, “original *han*” and “secondary *han*.”⁷⁸ For Lee, “original *han*” forms during early childhood and is beyond the reach of conscious memory. Nonetheless, it may harbor tremendous pain and loss, an embodied “life energy,” that Lee explains exerts a significant influence on a person’s life as it seeks to be released.⁷⁹ The repression of original *han*, intended to protect the self, ends up hurting it by inhibiting the self from responding to an external present experience of *han* (secondary *han*) in a healthy manner. To overcome the secondary *han*, we must first “delve into the deepest layers of our unconscious where the original *han* lies dormant to heal it.”⁸⁰

⁷⁶ Andrew Sung Park, *The Wounded Heart of God: The Asian Concept of Han and the Christian Doctrine of Sin* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993), 10.

⁷⁷ Park, *The Wounded Heart of God*, 10.

⁷⁸ Jae Hoon Lee, *The Exploration of the Inner Wounds – Han* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1994), 26.

⁷⁹ Lee, *Inner Wounds*, 26.

⁸⁰ Joh, *Heart of the Cross*, 22, citing Lee, *Inner Wounds*, 26.

Similar to *han*, no single word in English conveys the depth and meaning of *jeong*.⁸¹ The Chinese characters used to represent *jeong* are those for heart, vulnerability, and something arising.⁸² Crucial to its understanding for Joh's theology is that it conveys our connectedness, in the sense of "when we perceive our very own self, conscious and unconscious, in the mirrored reflection of the other."⁸³ In seeing that self in the other, and, conversely, the other in oneself, *jeong* incorporates compassion, affection, solidarity, relationality, vulnerability, forgiveness, and love. It is accepting that our differences as humans are not only to be tolerated but are necessary. *Jeong* is the power that redeems relationships, moves us beyond binary oppositional perceptions such as oppressor and oppressed and moves us toward life.

Jeong can also combine with *han* to form *jeong-han*, a pre-mature form that combines love and aggression, and is depressive rather than liberative as when mature *jeong* is practiced in the face of *han*. Because of *jeong*'s relational nature in which we see our self in the other, when faced with external *han*, *jeong-han* can turn our aggression inward rather than outward in self-survival. This can lead to self-hate in the form of self-reproach, depression, and anxiety.

Joh elaborates on a sort of continuum of *han* laid out by Lee that involves *jeong-han*, *won-han*, and *hu-han*. For our purposes, it suffices to provide her example of the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Center. This event helps explain how the three forms of *han* manifest and can actually lead to more *han*, in contrast with how *jeong* can be transformational. She explains that those who hijacked the planes were experiencing *hu-han* in that they had given up on justice as a goal and so only sought retaliation and violent revenge for the oppression they experienced. On the other side, the individual *han* of many in the U.S. coalesced into collective *won-han* with a

⁸¹Joh, *Heart of the Cross*, xiv.

⁸² Joh, *Heart of the Cross*, xiii.

⁸³ Joh, *Heart of the Cross*, xxi.

deep reaction of outrage, anger, bitterness, dumbfoundedness and a desire for justice. The response of hunting down the perpetrators was a militarized sense of *dan*, which is the practice of severing or cutting off the forms of oppression imposing the *han*. While the motivations of each was a bit different, the actions on both sides were violent and ultimately increased *han* rather than healed it. Quite literally, unhealed *han* led to violent and oftentimes innocent death.

Joh noted, however, that for some, the struggle with *won-han* allowed for introspection and a recognition of our shared *han* with others, even with the plight of those in the world “who hate us so much.”⁸⁴ For Joh, this is the space where *han* matures and *jeong* can be the means toward transformation and healing. When *jeong*’s ability to empathize and see *han* in the other is harnessed, rather than evolving into destructively aggressive *hu-han* or immature, depressive *jeong-han*, *jeong* can lead *won-han* to becoming a creative and constructive resistance to the forces that created the structures that caused the *han* in the first place. Rather than simply cutting off those that caused the *han* through *dan*, *jeong*, then, is the means toward the healing and transformation of the wounds of individuals and communities.⁸⁵

Part of Joh’s Christology involves a very sophisticated understanding of Julia Kristeva’s work on “abjection,”⁸⁶ which Joh relates to the human connectivity of *jeong*. To understand what she means by abjection, one must first understand the semiotic and symbolic worlds. The semiotic is most objectively understood as the time when mother and child are united as one when the child is in the womb.⁸⁷ More amorphously, it can be seen as the pre-consciousness that

⁸⁴ Joh, *Heart of the Cross*, 25.

⁸⁵ Joh, *Heart of the Cross*, 26.

⁸⁶ Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982).

⁸⁷ Joh, *Heart of the Cross*, 92.

exists prior to one's formation of subjectivity and identity.⁸⁸ Because of this unity of being that requires the one (the mother) to sacrifice for the other (the child), it is a space that literally embodies the radical love of, 'love your neighbor as yourself.'⁸⁹

The symbolic, in contrast, is most objectively understood as the time when the child emerges from the womb into the world and develops a separate "I" from its mother.⁹⁰ In the move from the semiotic to the symbolic worlds, the subject self must shed the "abject" in the process of identification in the symbolic world.⁹¹ The semiotic and symbolic worlds are not so clearly divided, however, but far more intertwined than we realize.⁹² This abject, the repressed or repelled semiotic self that connects us to the "other," never fully goes away, but remains around the edges or in the depths of the self.⁹³ Thus, the semiotic self that is fully connected with the "other" is always present and intertwined with the self.⁹⁴ At the same time, one might understand the semiotic rupture of birth as creating the "original *han*" through the force of expulsion.

Abjection, then, is both that which is repulsed, the semiotic connection, and the process of expelling what it believes threatens its identity.⁹⁵ This concept applies not only to the development of the individual's identity in moving from the semiotic to the symbolic worlds, but also to the forming of group identity, which similarly tends to repress or repel that which threatens its identity as a group. As with the move from the semiotic to the symbolic, however, the abject is that which, while repressed, is never completely obliterated. Rather, it tends to mark

⁸⁸ Joh, *Heart of the Cross*, 92.

⁸⁹ Joh, *Heart of the Cross*, 113; Julia Kristeva, "Stabat Mater," in *The Kristeva Reader*, ed. Toril Moi (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 160-86.

⁹⁰ Joh, *Heart of the Cross*, 92.

⁹¹ Joh, *Heart of the Cross*, xxiii.

⁹² Joh, *Heart of the Cross*, 92.

⁹³ Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 9.

⁹⁴ Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 9.

⁹⁵ Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 9.

the borders of identity while at the same time transgressing those very borders.⁹⁶ Perhaps the most tangible way to think about the abject in terms of group identity is the scapegoating of individuals and groups in much of U.S. society, for example, people of color, women, homosexual or transexuals, the poor, as a way to solidify the dominant group's identity.⁹⁷ But no matter how much those groups are pushed to the margins or oppressed, they do not go away and they will continue to confront the identity of those in the dominant group.

3.2 Engaging Sin in Joh's Christology of the Cross: the Suffering of *Han*

In Joh's discussion of sin, she engages with Park who explains that sin produces *han*, which produces more sin, and more *han* in a vicious cycle.⁹⁸ Referencing the ideas of Augustine, Park agrees with the idea of "the solidarity of the human family in the interwoven strands of human misery" and even that *han* may pass through the channels of human existence and social tradition.⁹⁹ He disavows, however, the biological transmission of guilt. Where Park and Augustine further diverge is that Park sees sin as being on the part of the oppressor and *han* on the part of the oppressed.¹⁰⁰ Park takes issue with what he believes to be western theology's over-focus on the state of individual sinners while disregarding "the plight of those 'who have been sinned against,' the victims of the sinners."¹⁰¹

Joh, however, following Lee, disagrees. Lee, insists that such binary thinking of oppressed/oppressor only aggravates the problem of unresolved *han*.¹⁰² Lee points out how,

⁹⁶ Joh, *Heart of the Cross*, xiv.

⁹⁷ Delores S. Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk* (New York: Orbis Books, 1993), 143-170.

⁹⁸ Joh, *Heart of the Cross*, 102.

⁹⁹ Andrew Sung Park, *The Wounded Heart of God: The Asian Concept of Han and the Christian Doctrine of Sin* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993), 80.

¹⁰⁰ Park, *Wounded Heart of God*, 69.

¹⁰¹ Park, *Wounded Heart of God*, 74-77.

¹⁰² Lee, *Inner Wounds*, 151.

although innocent suffering may be one cause of *han*, “it loses its innocence by becoming the source of evil forces that seek revenge on other innocent victims.”¹⁰³ Thus, we not only experience *han*, but we also cause *han*. In the violent cycle of sin and *han* that Park articulated, Joh believes that without *jeong*, *han* simply leads to more sin. Her intent is not to exonerate oppressors or blame victims, but, calling on Lee’s idea of “original *han*,” she recognizes the deeply rooted and subconscious form of *han* experienced in the abjection of the maternal semiotic that has been suppressed in the move to the symbolic world.¹⁰⁴ Moreover, the damage from the cycle of *han* and sin becomes apparent in both the individual and collective unconscious.¹⁰⁵

An example called to mind is the cycle of *han* and sin that led to the current tragic conflict between the State of Israel and the Occupied Territories of Palestine. In a grossly oversimplified analysis, the burden placed on the German people by the allies after World War II created *han* in the Germans that led to their scapegoating and persecuting Jews in Europe prior to and during World War II thus creating *han* in the Jewish people, which became the basis for their ever expanding-settlement in what would become Israel. The Jews’ reaction of *dan*, an attempt to cut off their exposure to the violent repression of the Nazis and prevent any future persecution in turn led to its own imposing of *han* on Palestinians as they violently took and continue to take Palestinian land and oppress them.

On a more personal level, Brazilian philosophical theologian Ivone Gebara speaks of the way women in Latin America are rarely allowed into positions of power that could contribute to

¹⁰³ Lee, *Inner Wounds*, 151.

¹⁰⁴ Joh, *Heart of the Cross*, 102, 110.

¹⁰⁵ Joh, *Heart of the Cross*, 110.

systems of domination, yet in their own way “acquiesce to them and further their sinful ends.”¹⁰⁶ In some Mexican families, for example, the youngest daughter is not allowed to marry so that she is available to care for her parents in their old age. In enforcing this “structure of evil” that harms her daughter, the mothers may be viciously cruel by telling their daughters not to be like the prostitutes, single mothers, black and indigenous women, and lesbians.¹⁰⁷ Sin begets *han* which begets sin which begets *han* which begets sin in a vicious cycle.

3.3 Engaging Salvation in Joh’s Christology of the Cross: the Power of *Jeong*

Joh’s emphasis on the liberative and healing impact of Christ’s crucifixion center on her argument that the cross embodies both the horror of *han* and the power of *jeong*.¹⁰⁸ She contrasts her theology with that of atonement theories of salvation, such as that of Anselm in which Jesus’ death on the cross is a form of payment willed and demanded by God for humanity, which she views as a form of depressive *jeong-han*.¹⁰⁹ Atonement theories for Joh are not liberative but, rather, fatalistic, passive and glorify victimization. Moreover, by focusing on Jesus’ death as a sacrifice, the focus shifts away from and disregards his life of *jeong* in which he stood up for the marginalized against oppression.

Joh draws on the theology of Mark Lewis Taylor who argues that “Jesus death on the cross is best viewed as . . . an imperial execution.”¹¹⁰ Recalling the event as an execution is important to claiming the subversive power of the cross in the struggle for freedom highlighted

¹⁰⁶ Ivone Gebara, *Out of the Depths: Women’s Experience of Evil and Salvation*, trans. Ann Patrick Ware (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2002), 96.

¹⁰⁷ Gebara, *Out of the Depths*, 96.

¹⁰⁸ Joh, *Heart of the Cross*, xiv.

¹⁰⁹ Joh, *Heart of the Cross*, 73.

¹¹⁰ Joh, *Heart of the Cross*, 72 quoting Mark Lewis Taylor, *The Executed God: The Way of the Cross in Lockdown America* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), xiii.

by Jesus' life and ministry.¹¹¹ It shows the power of Jesus' life as a threat to Imperial identity through the fear the Roman Empire expressed in trying to extinguish him. Jesus' death on the cross was not, then, "the passive sacrifice of a victim, but a revolutionary and resistant act against the power of the empire."¹¹² Although Joh does not reference Augustine, one can hear echoes of his view of the power of the cross also in opposition to those of his time who wished to view it as merely a sacrifice to appease an angry God.

Joh uses the concept of mimicry to demonstrate how the cross as a symbol works to menace the patriarchal notions of power and obedience by reflecting back both the injustice being perpetuated by an innocent victim and reminding the world of the power of *jeong* lived in Jesus' life. The rulers of the Roman Empire used the cross to terrorize people who might challenge their authority. Yet, early Christianity used this same symbol to mock the empire. Through this lens, the cross "steals the show from imperial power."¹¹³

Joh not only took issue with atonement theories, but those such as Jürgen Moltmann, Park, and other theologians that glorified Christ's suffering for humanity as representative of the Trinitarian God's participation in human suffering, drawing the implication that the suffering is where salvation occurred.¹¹⁴ She agrees with Dorothee Soelle: "The cross is neither a symbol expressing the relationship between God the Father and his Son or a symbol of masochism that needs suffering in order to convince itself of love. It is above all a symbol of reality."¹¹⁵ For Joh, the cross as a symbol of reality becomes more than just a symbol of suffering, but of love, and,

¹¹¹ Joh, *Heart of the Cross*, 73.

¹¹² Robert. S. Heaney, *Post-Colonial Theology: Finding God and Each Other Amidst the Hate*, (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2019), 63.

¹¹³ Taylor, *Executed God*, 99.

¹¹⁴ Joh, *Heart of the Cross*, 105.

¹¹⁵ Soelle, Dorothee. *Suffering*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), 164.

perhaps more powerfully, a symbol of the risk inherent in a lifetime lived on the edge and for those who live in the fullness of *jeong*.¹¹⁶

Seeing Christ's death on the cross as an execution, rather than an obedient sacrifice, and as salvific beyond simply God's solidarity with our suffering, forces us to return to looking at Jesus' life. For Joh, it was Jesus' practice of *jeong* that the Empire feared so much that they wanted not only his death, but to send a message to others who might be inspired to continue following him.¹¹⁷ His practice of *jeong* led to his *han* and death on the cross. His *jeong* extended not only to the *han*-ridden marginalized and other victims of oppression, but even to the perpetrators of oppression who were causing *han*.¹¹⁸ Whether in his encounter with the woman caught in adultery, his associations with outcasts, sinners, and those complicit in oppression, and finally in his cry, 'forgive them for they do not know what they do' while on the cross, all demonstrate Jesus' embodiment of *jeong* and its power to transform and bring wholeness.¹¹⁹

Christ, having lived this powerful life of *jeong*, in which he was able to fuse love of self with love of the other, becomes on the cross, the visual abjection of the maternal semiotic that the dominating power tried to destroy to preserve their power and identity.¹²⁰ Rather than destroy it, however, Christ is the eruption of this maternal semiotic love into the world. Christ, as the abject on the cross, stands in solidarity with and signifies a return of all the abject that society has tried to repress, expel, persecute, execute, and oppress, in other words, all those who have been *han*-ridden.¹²¹ Christ's combined *han* and *jeong* on the cross thus functions to relieve the

¹¹⁶ Joh, *Heart of the Cross*, 106.

¹¹⁷ Joh, *Heart of the Cross*, 119.

¹¹⁸ Joh, *Heart of the Cross*, 118, 125.

¹¹⁹ Joh, *Heart of the Cross*, 106, 126.

¹²⁰ Joh, *Heart of the Cross*, 110.

¹²¹ Joh, *Heart of the Cross*, 112.

psychic wounds of “original *han*,” and the overcoming of the separation between God and humanity. When one perceives the depths of both *han* and *jeong* on the cross, abjection is understood not as “something to be overcome, but that which must be acknowledged and embodied as the stranger/other that is irreparably part of our very selves.”¹²²

Salvation through Christ on the cross, then, awakens the divine presence within us to not only perceive, but “also to accept the often negativized and shadowed parts of ourselves and, thus, ultimately, to awaken to and practice the way of living in the fullness of *jeong*.”¹²³ In *jeong*, we look inside ourselves and identify with those we perceive as the other, which, in turn, reveals us to ourselves. Joh refers to this recognition of the self in the other to be a form of “collaborative compassion.”¹²⁴ The collaboration to which it refers is not one that maintains the status quo, but is brought about through a connectedness that “seeks to work towards emancipatory praxis for all.”¹²⁵ Just as Christ as the abject signifies solidarity with the other, *jeong* signifies solidarity through relationality, “You die – I die; you live – I live.”¹²⁶ When one does not live in *jeong*, one does not live in relationship; and when one does not live in relationship, one is not only indifferent to the other, but to oneself.

Thus, a praxis of *jeong* that salvation through Christ draws us to is “a form of relational living that daily encounters the otherness of the self in relationships.”¹²⁷ This includes not only resisting the unequal distribution of power based on group identification, but also celebrating

¹²² Joh, *Heart of the Cross*, 109.

¹²³ Joh, *Heart of the Cross*, 122.

¹²⁴ Joh, *Heart of the Cross*, 122.

¹²⁵ Joh, *Heart of the Cross*, 122.

¹²⁶ Joh, *Heart of the Cross*, 123.

¹²⁷ Joh, *Heart of the Cross*, xxvi

difference which can be a source of creativity. In so doing, interdependence, rather than a group identification that feels it is necessary to repress the other, will become unthreatening.¹²⁸

3.4 Re-reading Sin and Salvation Through Joh

Joh's theology gives words to the experience I felt but couldn't explain that brought me back to Christianity. The knowledge, as an introspective person who has lost two brothers to suicide, that there are subconscious wounds that often drive my behavior and ultimately separate me from God and those around me. Yet, also a sense that the immensity of Christ's life and love for me and humanity that led to the cross was doing something important. Something more than simply meaning heaven or hell in the after-life and something more than simply a sacrifice to pay for my sins. But something that changes how we live and relate to God and those around us in the here and now.

Thus, the implications of Joh's theology extend out from it simply being a contextualization for a Korean audience. It both compliments, builds upon, and in some respects acts as a corrective to what Augustine has taught us. Similar to Augustine, Joh understands us all to suffer from an original wound that has trapped us into "sin," what Augustine calls "disordered" choices that separate us from God and each other. Unlike Augustine, however, for Joh, this wound he calls "original sin" is not a punishment, but, rather, what she refers to as "original *han*," which is a painful consequence of being finite human beings that are expelled from the loving unity with the "other" we experience in our mother's wombs (the maternal semiotic). This original *han*, caused by the abjection of that connection with the other, causes us

¹²⁸ Joh, *Heart of the Cross*, 16

to inflict *han* on others. Thus, sin in that context is that which separates us from God and each other and thus causes *han*.

This happens not only at the individual level, but at the societal level, which is all the more powerful and painful as it becomes part of the systems of domination and oppression that seek to repress or even exterminate the other in an attempt to establish identity. Such a reading of “original sin” as “original *han*” moves us away from perceiving this wound as punishment, which has been confused with meaning we as humans are “bad.” Instead, it leads us toward a recognition of suffering that we all as humans experience in our separation from God and the other that so often dominates the choices we make in the world.

Similar to Augustine, Joh sees salvation through the cross, not merely as a means to a heavenly afterlife, but as freeing us from the grip of the systems of domination in the here and now so that we are free to live in the *jeong* of Christ. For Joh, the cross signifies both the suffering of *han* and the power of *jeong* that the dominating powers tried to destroy, but could not. Christ on the cross, through his life of *jeong*, is the eruption of the abjected maternal semiotic, that repressed but connected part of our individual and communal selves that is able to see ourselves in the other and the other in ourselves, into the world. This eruption relieves the “original *han*” and our separation from God and from each other. We are thus freed to live, with God’s grace, the powerful life of *jeong* in which we see ourselves and the other as God’s good and beautiful creation even as we confront the shadow of sin in ourselves and the other that seeks to oppress us.

Joh’s perspective on salvation through the cross calls to mind what Ray Aldred said about hope for indigenous people found in the cross,

I am struck by the hope the wounded Christ brings to aboriginal people, the hope that we will not die, that somehow, even in the midst of great pain and the intensity of rage, there is one who understands. This is . . . the abused Christ who identifies with our own abuse. It is from this place that one can then turn to this Christ and embrace life [that ceases] to hate one's own earthly identity and [instead to] embrace our broken identity, . . . to live, . . . and [turn] to heal the relationships that have been damaged.¹²⁹

Joh's theology of salvation through *jeong* alerts us to the imperativeness of living with this understanding of our deep connectedness to heal the *han* that is often a source of sin: we can only live when the other lives, we die when the other dies. Woodley's theology of shalom fleshes out this understanding of what a liberated life of salvation through Christ looks like through a comparison with the Native American Harmony Way.

Chapter 4: Randy Woodley's *Shalom and the Community of Creation*

Woodley proposes an understanding of Christianity as a practice of shalom through the lens of a Native American Harmony Way. He is a Keetoowah Cherokee whose life in his youth was often spent on the land: fishing, hunting, backpacking and hiking, drawing up the sweet drinking water from a well, and catching lightening bugs, frogs and snakes.¹³⁰ He learned that the land, the ancestors, and the stories they told were all intertwined. At rest in creation, Woodley received signs from the Creator, of Creator's presence and concern for his wellbeing. By this Woodley came to understand God as present and at harmony in creation. In this connection to creation, he discovered a sense of shalom and through his theology seeks to help "all peoples to find or recover a sense of connectedness to creation" via a Way of Shalom.

¹²⁹ Aldred, "Indigenous Reinterpretation of Repentance," 436.

¹³⁰ Woodley, Randy. *Shalom and the Community of Creation: An Indigenous View*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2012), xvii.

4.1 Living in Shalom

Shalom (and its Greek corollary *eirene*) is integral to an understanding of Scripture, appearing over 500 times. While generally translated as peace, Woodley notes that “calling shalom just peace is like calling the Grand Canyon a large crack in the ground.”¹³¹ Shalom incorporates aspects of “completeness, wholeness, health, peace, welfare, safety, soundness, tranquility, prosperity, perfectness, fullness, rest, harmony, and the absence of agitation or discord.”¹³² As Woodley notes, this “rich list of descriptors leans heavily into concepts of love, justice, and God’s created intention.”¹³³ It is the life we are called into by God.

Woodley references Paul in Colossians speaking about how we are to treat each other in a shalom based world.

Since God chose you to be the holy people he loves, you must clothe yourselves with tenderhearted mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. Make allowance for each other’s faults and forgive anyone who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds us all together in perfect harmony. And let the [shalom] that comes from Christ rule in your hearts. For as members of one body you are called to live in [shalom]. And always be thankful.¹³⁴

In Luke 4:16-27 Jesus reads from Isaiah 61, declaring the intent of God to restore shalom in the world through him. His reference is to the jubilee, “‘the acceptable year of the Lord’ when those who have been marginalized will be restored to their rightful place of dignity.”¹³⁵ The “jubilee was the culmination of the law of sevens.”¹³⁶ On every seventh day, every person and

¹³¹ Woodley, *Shalom*, 10.

¹³² Woodley, *Shalom*, 10.

¹³³ Woodley, *Shalom*, 11.

¹³⁴ Col. 3:12-15.

¹³⁵ Woodley, *Shalom*, 28.

¹³⁶ Woodley, *Shalom*, 28.

creature were to cease from their labor, rest in imitation of God after creating the world, and recognize the holiness of God and the sacredness of all creation. Every seventh year was to be a sabbath for the land to give it a chance to rejuvenate.¹³⁷ Following the seventh set of seven years, on the fiftieth year, would be a jubilee year when all debts were to be cancelled, all prisoners set free, and land returned to those who originally possessed it; a social safety net to ensure injustice and oppression never lasted too long.¹³⁸

For Woodley, how we treat those at the margins of our society, our poor, oppressed and disempowered reveals just how well we are living in shalom and the measure of our hearts and relationship with God.¹³⁹ As spoken of by the prophet Jeremiah, “[King Josiah] gave justice and help to the poor and needy, and everything went well for him. Is not that what it means to know me? Says the Lord.”¹⁴⁰ Woodley notes (similarly to Joh) that injustice is committed not only by the wealthy. As Ezekiel says, “Even common people oppress the poor, rob the needy, and deprive foreigners of justice.”¹⁴¹ Shalom thus has the broader implication of acting rightly toward one’s community; when righteousness is combined with justice it creates systems of shalom rather than corruption.¹⁴²

4.2 The Native American Harmony Way

To understand shalom better, Woodley references Native American understanding of balance and harmony, which he refers to as the Harmony Way. Woodley does not profess to speak for all Native Americans and is careful to point out that they are separate nations with

¹³⁷ Lev 25:1-7.

¹³⁸ Lev 25:1-7.

¹³⁹ Woodley, *Shalom*, 14.

¹⁴⁰ Woodley, *Shalom*, 14; Jeremiah 22:16.

¹⁴¹ Woodley, *Shalom*, 15; Ezekiel 11:29.

¹⁴² Woodley, *Shalom*, 79.

different practices and beliefs. In his research he has found some commonalities, but he often draws from his Cherokee background for examples.

An elder explained the Cherokee concept of *duyukta*, which is often translated as the Harmony Way, as “a moral code that might be roughly translated as . . . ‘the right path,’ or ‘the path of being in balance . . . placing importance on the good of the whole more than the individual; having freedom but taking responsibility for yourself; staying close to the earth and all our relations.”¹⁴³ Staying in balance includes, “stories, . . . ceremonies, arts and crafts, . . . taking time to dream; understanding our nature and our needs and taking care of them; listening and praying; recognizing our dark and light sides; having the support of the family, . . . clan, and tribe, [and] . . . understanding ourselves and our place in the world around us.”¹⁴⁴

The Harmony Way is not a philosophy, but a holistic way of being and doing life. Like shalom, “living out the harmony way requires not only belief, but also action, which aligns itself in participation with the whole of the universe.”¹⁴⁵ Belief is thus not a separate category from how one lives one’s life, rather, “one comes to believe something because one does it.”¹⁴⁶ Here again, this is consistent with the biblical life in shalom as found in James 1:22, “But do not just listen to God’s word. You must do what it says. Otherwise you are only fooling yourselves.”

The Harmony Way is not an expectation that one is expected to strive for personal purity or moral perfection as argued by Pelagius.¹⁴⁷ Within the Harmony Way mistakes are to be expected and they are to be learned from not used to shame.¹⁴⁸ In a certain sense, one can see

¹⁴³ Woodley, *Shalom*, 72.

¹⁴⁴ Woodley, *Shalom*, 72.

¹⁴⁵ Woodley, *Shalom*, 88.

¹⁴⁶ Woodley, *Shalom*, 96.

¹⁴⁷ Woodley, *Shalom*, 79.

¹⁴⁸ Woodley, *Shalom*, 69.

them as a good thing because they remind us that we are human and not God.¹⁴⁹ It is when we forget that and try to take Creator's place that our actions become shameful and dangerous.¹⁵⁰ We can see this in Jesus' interactions with the Pharisees where he is repeatedly trying to show them that a narrow interpretation of the Priestly codes could become dangerous and inconsistent with God's original intentions. In Luke 11:52, he exclaims, "What sorrow awaits you experts in religious law! For you remove the key to knowledge from the people. You do not enter the Kingdom yourselves, and you prevent others from entering."

This idea of human imperfection is made manifest in traditional art forms in which a "mistake" is often intentionally left in a rug, basket or pottery to remind us that only the Creator's work is perfect.¹⁵¹ In the traditional Native American view, when one makes a mistake, we ask help from Creator and those around us.¹⁵² Such ideas call to mind Augustine's centering of the sin of pride and our need for God's grace to help us heal and overcome it. What matters in the Harmony Way is not personal perfection, but our role or place in the universe.¹⁵³

An important characteristic of the Harmony Way is an understanding of the connectedness of all things. The Sioux bands express this through a prayer, "*mitakuye oyasin*," which means, "For all the above me and below me and around me things."¹⁵⁴ Here again, we see the parallel in the Way of Shalom, "For in [God] we live and move and exist,"¹⁵⁵ and "He is the God who made the world and everything in it."¹⁵⁶ Moving more specifically to the connection of all humans, the creation story in Genesis speaks to how we are all related to one another, "From

¹⁴⁹ Woodley, *Shalom*, 69.

¹⁵⁰ Woodley, *Shalom*, 69.

¹⁵¹ Woodley, *Shalom*, 70.

¹⁵² Woodley, *Shalom*, 69.

¹⁵³ Woodley, *Shalom*, 70.

¹⁵⁴ Woodley, *Shalom*, 81.

¹⁵⁵ Acts 17:24-29.

¹⁵⁶ Acts 17:24.

one man, he created all the nations throughout the whole earth.”¹⁵⁷ Within that connectedness, the Harmony Way recognizes individuals for their uniqueness and special gifts, just as in 1 Corinthians 12:12ff in which Paul states that each part of Christ’s body is as important as the other. Uniting in connection and community does not mean uniformity. As spoken in Colossians, “[Christ] holds all creation together.”¹⁵⁸ Increasingly, science is supporting this idea of our deep connection to each other and the earth.¹⁵⁹ This knowledge should give us pause before waging war on our brothers and sisters and extracting resources with abandon.¹⁶⁰

Woodley suggests that Euro-western theology may have a better understanding of this connection if we reinvigorated our memory of Jesus as Creator as found in the gospel of John. Thus, “the Creator of all things is also the redeemer or reconciler of all things, and all things (read all creation) are being created for Christ.”¹⁶¹ In the Cherokee language, a phrase points to this idea of Jesus as Creator-Son. Missionaries have told indigenous people that they worshiped another god, but Woodley argues that the missionaries’ emphasis on Jesus as savior, rather than on as Creator, prevented them from having a broader view of salvation that would understand all of Creation under Christ’s universal restoration.¹⁶²

4.3 Sin in Shalom/the Harmony Way

Woodley points out that Native Americans recognize the concept of sin, even if they do not have an identical word.¹⁶³ The Harmony Way is often visualized as a circle or hoop.¹⁶⁴ God

¹⁵⁷ Woodley, *Shalom*, 84.

¹⁵⁸ Woodley, *Shalom*, 87; Colossians 1:17b.

¹⁵⁹ Woodley, *Shalom*, 85.

¹⁶⁰ Woodley, *Shalom*, 86.

¹⁶¹ Woodley, *Shalom*, 59.

¹⁶² Woodley, *Shalom*, 60.

¹⁶³ Woodley, *Shalom*, 69.

¹⁶⁴ Woodley, *Shalom*, 88, 89.

is in the center as the provider who provides in abundance and meets our needs.¹⁶⁵ The circle of shalom/harmony is broken and sin results when we stop trusting Creator to provide for what we need and act out of fear (which sounds a lot like Augustine). People hoard the earth's resources, which creates systems of selfishness, mistrust, and pollution as people set about protecting their seemingly scarce resources, which leads to more oppression and war. Thus, sin can be thought of as a "brokenness and an alienating force that works against God's vision."¹⁶⁶ Sin is also about being out of balance. Although it can take the form of personal acts, sin and restoration is less about the guilt of the individual and obtaining human forgiveness and "more oriented toward restoring harmonious relationships in all of creation."¹⁶⁷

4.3 Salvation in Shalom/the Harmony Way

When viewed through shalom, the salvation we receive in Christ is "a restoration of our whole selves to God and the whole creation, including our social and physical selves," and less about the hereafter.¹⁶⁸ Woodley notes that in Scripture, evangelism is not about getting souls to heaven, but, rather, when it speaks of Jesus saving, the Greek word used, *sōzō*, means to heal or make whole.¹⁶⁹ Our salvation in Christ is, therefore, about healing our whole person, and even the whole community of creation, not just our souls.¹⁷⁰

In traditional Native American spirituality, heaven and earth, and for that matter hell, were all to be experienced both now and later, but later was not to be worried about because life

¹⁶⁵ Woodley, *Shalom*, 78.

¹⁶⁶ Woodley, *Shalom*, 23.

¹⁶⁷ Woodley, *Shalom*, 23, 69.

¹⁶⁸ Woodley, 102.

¹⁶⁹ Woodley, *Shalom*, 102.

¹⁷⁰ Woodley, *Shalom*, 102.

now is already so abundantly full of life.¹⁷¹ This concept is reflected in Jesus pointing out, in Matthew 6:34, how God takes care of the birds and the flowers in the field. Jesus says, “So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring its own worries. Today’s trouble is enough for today” and John 10:10b, “I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.” This is not to say there is no concept of an afterlife. As an Ojibwa elder told Woodley, “We make mistakes and we learn from them and we all go to the heaven place, the Happy Hunting ground. When a person does not learn from their mistakes in this lifetime, sometimes it takes a little longer for them to get there. They have to wander for a while.”¹⁷² Jesus’ message similarly is that all are eligible for entrance, not only those with the means and education to perfectly keep every letter of the law. We see this in his parable of the workers who received the same wage at the end of the day, regardless of when they started working. “I choose to give to this last the same as I give to you. Can I not choose what I do with what belongs to me? Or are you envious because I’m generous? So the last will be first and the first will be last.”¹⁷³

Not only are all invited into the Kingdom of God, but all of creation is to be included. In Genesis, God’s injunction to all of creation, not just humans, is to be fruitful and multiply. God’s covenant with Noah is for “all living creatures.”¹⁷⁴ And the prophet Hosea tells us, “I will make for you a covenant on that day with the wild animals, the birds of the air and the creeping things of the ground; and I will abolish the bow, the sword, and war from the land; and I will make you lie down in safety.”¹⁷⁵ Thus, we see that “[c]reation (what God did and does on a daily basis) and

¹⁷¹ Woodley, *Shalom*, 77.

¹⁷² Woodley, *Shalom*, 69.

¹⁷³ Matt 13-16, 21:33-43, 22:1-4.

¹⁷⁴ Gen 9:10.

¹⁷⁵ Hosea 2:18.

the carrying out of shalom (what we do) are inextricably woven. We have the opportunity each day to participate in God’s shalom activities” and experience salvation.¹⁷⁶

4.5 Repairing Broken Shalom

Woodley warns that even good systems can be corrupted over time.¹⁷⁷ To restore balance traditional native American practice embedded renewal and cleansing ceremonies into the systems. Today, he says, modern people neglect these rituals. One example of such a ritual that Woodley provides from his Cherokee background is the Cherokee Ceremonial festival of the Green Corn Moon. In preparation, houses are cleaned, extra and excess is given away, if a person has more than one of anything, they are to give it away before the festival starts, preferably to someone who does not already have the item, extra food is shared with those who need it, debts are paid and grudges put to rest before the festival begins.¹⁷⁸ Woodley notes how much like shalom living and the jubilee this festival sounds such that he surmises the ancient instructions came from the same source.¹⁷⁹ Following the principles reflected in the preparation for this ceremony allows us to restore and maintain harmony and freedom from worry.¹⁸⁰

Another ceremony to repair broken shalom among the Cherokee is an ancient “cementation ceremony” each fall in which anyone who has a grievance with a fellow Cherokee can participate.¹⁸¹ The ceremony includes fire and prayers spoken by the holy person. Family and friends on each side of the dispute line up facing each other with the particular persons in the dispute at the head of the lines. Each tells their story of the dispute. They then go to the fire and

¹⁷⁶ Woodley, *Shalom*, 43.

¹⁷⁷ Woodley, *Shalom*, 79.

¹⁷⁸ Woodley, *Shalom*, 153.

¹⁷⁹ Woodley, *Shalom*, 153.

¹⁸⁰ Woodley, *Shalom*, 155.

¹⁸¹ Woodley, *Shalom*, 23.

pray for the strength to forgive the other. After prayers, the two persons in the dispute strip naked and exchange clothes. Once they do this, they express forgiveness and vow never to bring up the issue again. The pipe is passed down the two lines for everyone present to smoke. Finally, gifts would be exchanged and a feast prepared by the parties for the whole community. I note that this idea of exchanging clothes seems like a symbolic way to represent what Joh speaks about in recognizing the self in the other as a part of living in *jeong*.

Native American understandings of the Harmony Way can help us to understand better the Way of Shalom and, in particular, how to restore broken shalom in practical ways.¹⁸² Indigenous ceremony for restoring balance involves not only ritual and symbolic acts, but practical restitution and restoration.¹⁸³ A foundation of ceremony is gratitude for all the relationships that exist between humans and each other, Creator, and the rest of creation.¹⁸⁴

We all need God's vision, and anything less than that is broken shalom.¹⁸⁵ One area of broken shalom in need of restoration is the past and ongoing oppression of Native American peoples in the United States.¹⁸⁶ This includes listening to their pain, but also restitution to make whole, just as some form of compensatory act was often required by the ancient Semitic tribes to make up for property loss, murder, or death in battle.¹⁸⁷ Although Jesus was born in an occupied place, part of the power of Jesus came from his neither seeing himself as powerless victim or as an oppressor. Rather, he sought to free oppressor and oppressed alike from the chains of colonial

¹⁸² Woodley, *Shalom*, 23.

¹⁸³ Woodley, *Shalom*, 23.

¹⁸⁴ Woodley, *Shalom*, 66.

¹⁸⁵ Woodley, *Shalom*, 21.

¹⁸⁶ Woodley, *Shalom*, 93.

¹⁸⁷ Woodley, *Shalom*, 24.

structures and thinking.¹⁸⁸ Jesus then joins us in this work of repairing the broken shalom so we can all reach the “peaceable kingdom.”¹⁸⁹

4.6 Re-reading Sin and Salvation Through Woodley

Woodley, like Augustine and Joh, acknowledges something internal to us that leads us to Augustine’s disordered choices, but does not give it a name. Rather, this tendency to “make mistakes” is what distinguishes us from God. Here too is a constructive opportunity to move away from Augustine’s contention that “original sin” is a punishment. Even more than Joh, Woodley’s presentation of the Native American belief that this is simply how we distinguish ourselves from God pulls us away from thinking of ourselves as “bad.” Instead, constructively, we simply think of ourselves as being human and we can have more compassion for each other because we are all human and we all sin.

Woodley conveys “sin” as that which pulls us and the community out of balance, breaking the circle of shalom. Similar to Augustine, Woodley talks about how sin happens when we stop trusting Creator to provide for our needs and we act out of fear. Also similar to Augustine, the means to recovering that balance is to call on God’s grace and our community to help us.

Salvation, similar to Augustine and Joh, is the restoration of our whole selves to God. Woodley takes salvation further, however, and includes the restoration of ourselves to all of creation. Salvation then is not about some future heaven and hell, but about the here and now. This restoration frees us to live a shalom life. Restoration through salvation thus involves not

¹⁸⁸ Randy Woodley, “Mission and the Cultural Other: In Search of the Pre-Colonial Jesus.” *Missiology: An International Review* 43, no. 4 (2015), 457.

¹⁸⁹ Woodley, *Shalom*, 23 (Isa 9:7; Rom 14:17).

only the gift of Christ's life, crucifixion, and resurrection, but involves our contribution. Given Joh's emphasis on living in *jeong* as the means for transformation and healing, I would imagine that she would agree. Practice forms belief, not the other way around. We practice shalom because we believe God cares for us, not because of a fear of hell and our practice reflects that belief. Woodley is not advocating for moral perfection because only God is perfect.

The explanation of what it means to live life in shalom in response to God's salvation and the generosity of God's grace is where Woodley most significantly builds on the theology of Augustine and Joh. Like the life lived in *jeong* put forward by Joh, living in shalom involves our deep connection, not only to each other, but to all of creation. This means living a balanced life that includes justice, mercy, kindness, and gratitude. It means listening and praying, meeting our needs while honoring the community, taking responsibility for our actions, honoring our connections to creation, taking the time to be creative and dream, and offering hospitality to the stranger. Perhaps above all is the importance of love and justice that must pervade a life of shalom.

Chapter 5: Conclusion: Re-reading Sin and Salvation in Inter-cultural Conversation

Drawing back to where we began, we can see a number of connections across the three theologians that help us to remember the earlier sources of our theology of sin and salvation, but also to make constructive turns so that their meaning speaks to us today.

5.1 We Are God's Good Creation. And We Sin. It is Part of Our Human-ness

One of the most notable connections is the sense that being human means we carry something deep inside us that leads us to "sin" and act in ways that are contrary to God's plan.

Sin manifests in relationship with ourself, with others, in community as systems of domination, and, for Woodley, with creation.

Augustine called it “original sin,” the punishment for Adam’s immature and prideful choice to eat the forbidden fruit to try to be like God. While Augustine was on to something true about being human, both Joh and Woodley provide means by which we can turn from his thinking of “original sin” as a punishment, which has led to, I believe, an unintended perception that as “sinners” we are “bad.” Instead, it becomes a wound in need of healing or simply that which identifies us as humans and not as gods.

Using Joh to make a constructive turn from punishment, re-reads “original sin” as “original *han*,” which, drastically oversimplified, is the deep, subconscious suffering that is created by the abjection of the maternal semiotic when we’re born into the symbolic world. It is a wound that is a consequence of becoming human and, like original sin, disorders our choices. Science seems to support Joh’s idea. Trauma has been shown to alter our genetic material and can be passed on to our children.¹⁹⁰ It also impacts us physically and psychologically in any number of ways that cause us to act in ways that damage our relationships.¹⁹¹

Woodley’s constructive turn from Augustine re-reads “original sin” not as a punishment or even a wound with a name, but, rather as a humanizing process that avoids the idolatrous notion that we are gods. Notably he and Augustine both highlight the importance of recognizing that we are not God and that it is when we begin to think we are, or at least to think that we do not need God, that we make the choices that separate us from God, each other, and creation.

¹⁹⁰ Bessel A. van der Kolk, M.D., *The Body Keeps the Score* (New York: Penguin Books, 2015) 174.

¹⁹¹ Van der Kolk, *Body*, 17.

Augustine calls this pride, which, for him, is not only a sin itself, but the driver of all sorts of other sinful acts.

5.2 Sin is that which Separates Us from God, Manifested in Our Relationships

In the discussion of the manifestation of sin, all three view it as a deviation from God's vision for humanity (and for Woodley, for all of creation). Sin is a wound for or an act of separation from God. It is made visible in the world in our relationships – with ourselves, with others, and with creation. For Augustine original sin disorders our powers of love such that we act out of pride by centering ourselves rather than God, as well as out of ignorance, weakness and suffering in ways that diminish rather than lead to flourishing. It is only with God's grace that we can overcome these disordered decisions. Joh's explanation of how the suffering of *han* leads to hurtful choices has resonance with Augustine. For Woodley, sin is that which takes us and the community out of balance. Similar to Augustine, the means of recovering that balance is calling on God and those around us to help us.

For both Joh and Woodley sin is not only personal and relational, but it is also manifested in sinful societal structures that oppress. Augustine also speaks to this reality, but not as sinful human creations, rather, as systems of domination created by the devil that enslave us. While referring to the devil makes many of us moderns uncomfortable, and runs a danger of obscuring the human role in perpetuating systems of oppression, it also highlights just how entrenched these systems are in our lives and how difficult it can be to extract ourselves from them, making all the more clear our need for God to help us find our way free of them.

5.3 Salvation = Liberation In the Here and Now To Live In Love/*Jeong*/Shalom

All three in different ways speak of salvation as liberation in the here and now rather than as simply a promise of a heavenly afterlife. This liberation is about Christ's life, crucifixion, and resurrection loosening the bonds of the powers of domination over our lives to free us to pursue the powerful vision of Christ's life. Augustine refers to this as the way of love in Christ, Joh calls it living in *jeong*, and for Woodley it is the way of shalom or harmony.

Augustine and Joh had similar explanations of the role of the crucifixion in salvation. Both refuted it being a sacrifice or atonement for a debt. Rather, in Augustine's words, in contrast to how Satan works, God chose to come humbly to join humanity. Jesus's crucifixion on the cross demonstrated the perversion of justice found in the powers of domination by condemning one who was innocent and over whom it had no authority. The resurrection, however, demonstrated that these powers no longer had the right to hold anyone. Thus, those who put on Christ's life are free from the grip of domination, envy, violence and revenge which allows them to live differently in the world, in the way of love of Christ.

In Joh's language, the cross embodies both the horror of *han* and the power of *jeong*. It reflects back both the injustice being perpetuated on an innocent victim and reminds the world of the power of *jeong* lived in Jesus' life that the dominating powers wanted to repress. The cross overcomes the separation between God and humanity through the maternal semiotic being made visible in the symbolic world. The crucifixion thus awakens the divine presence in us to perceive the shadow parts of ourselves and to awaken to and practice living in *jeong*, in relation and solidarity with the other in whom we see ourselves. The salvation of the cross thus incorporates not just Christ's crucifixion, but our subsequent freedom to live in *jeong*, which is the means to transforming and healing the pain of *han*.

Woodley viewed salvation as the restoration of our whole selves and the whole of creation to God, which frees us to live a life of shalom. Like Joh's living in *jeong*, a life of shalom involves a recognition of the connection between all persons, and, for Woodley, with all of creation. Thus, the freedom of salvation has a component of human participation. Augustine might agree with their inclusion of practice in salvation since the freedom salvation grants is the ability to live differently in the world, but he emphasizes practice less, which makes sense since he was arguing against the moral perfectionism of the Pelagians. Nonetheless, Joh and Woodley's emphasis on practice as a response to and a part of our salvation are useful corrections to developments in theology that have evolved from Augustine in which "right belief" is understood as the sole means to accessing Christ's salvation regardless of practice. This is not the moral perfectionism of Pelagius, we all sin, but an acknowledgment that the transformation and healing of salvation is manifested when we practice *jeong*/shalom with God's help.

Finally, Both Augustine and Woodley in different ways emphasized ceremony as part of healing sin or bringing us back into balance. For Augustine this was baptism. For Woodley this was ceremony and making amends or restitution. Joh, conversely did not mention ritual practices as a part of healing. All of which raises a point that this paper does not have room to address any number of related questions about the role of baptism and eucharist, repentance and forgiveness. These will all have to be set aside for the future.

5.4 Conclusion: Healing Through a Re-reading of Sin and Salvation

In setting Augustine, Joh, and Woodley in conversation together on the meaning of sin and salvation I've come away with an understanding of sin and salvation that is not neat and tidy as much as I might like it to be and yet it provided clarity and comfort in response to my

struggles I outlined at the beginning of this study. In the end, they have helped me find words to describe my experience in coming back to Christianity. Perhaps most healing is the understanding that being a sinner does not make us “bad.” It is simply an acknowledgement that we all have some kind of inner experience by which we make “disordered” choices that separate us from God, each other, and creation. Recognizing that we all carry this “wound,” whatever we call it, in need of healing can help us to have compassion for ourselves and others and to recognize that we truly are all equal even when we might be inclined to point fingers and say that certain others sin more or less than us.

While none of these theologies provide a detailed set of rules to identify when we sin, Joh and Woodley both emphasize the importance of recognizing our connection with each other and creation. Woodley expands on what a life of shalom looks like that we can lean into. Not with the goal of perfection. Any idea that we might be is the very sin of pride that Augustine and Woodley emphasize and is often where we go wrong or fall out of balance, to use Woodley’s terminology. Rather, all three emphasize that none of us can do it alone. We all need God, we all need community.

We turn toward salvation in Christ, not out of fear of hell, but because in the end, we all need God to transform and heal the wound and to help us more fully live the life of Christ/*jeong*/shalom. Because that is the life in which we will find connection with God, others, creation, and even ourselves. It is where we will find the power to transform systems of domination and we will heal. The gift of salvation is that when we trust in the power demonstrated by Christ’s life, on the cross, and in the resurrection, we find healing and the freedom to live life in Christ/*jeong*/shalom and from there we can share our burden with God and trust that God is at work through us, others, and creation.

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