**IST 3034 Post-traumatic stress disorder: Pastoral, psychological, and theological responses**

**Journal Assignment: Reflecting on our own experiences of trauma/moral stress**

**Preface**

When we provide intercultural spiritual care to someone who has experienced traumatic stress, our experiences of trauma and their embedded theologies may be evoked. If we are not taking care of ourselves and staying centered in the process of caring for others, our stories may become a liability. The purpose of this assignment is to go through a process of reflecting on a formative event that overwhelmed us, in order to

* **Enhance life-giving coping** by exploring and intentionally using religious and spiritual practices so that we can stay relationally engaged with goodness: our own goodness and the goodness of others and life in general.
* **Identify and evaluate our embedded theology that formed in the aftermath of the overwhelming event, and construct a more life-giving intentional theology grounded in compassion:** In this assignment wewill have the opportunity to assess whether the values, beliefs and ways coping that emerged after the trauma (our embedded theologies) are congruent with our intentional theology (what we say we believe in). We will claim the values and beliefs that anchor us now, and make sure that we are integrating them by using spiritual practices.

In deciding which experience to write about, review the Life Stressor Check List to help you recall the kinds of stressful experiences that have been part of your life and think about how they affected you.

**Assignment Outline**

**Part 1: Describe a traumatic experience**

Describe an experience of suffering that was experienced as threatening in some way, which you feel comfortable sharing with the class. You could also write about the experience of a close friend or family member whose suffering was experienced as life threatening in some way. Describe whether you experienced traumatic symptoms or how this experience impacted your life in the weeks, months, and perhaps years that followed. (less than 350 words)[[1]](#footnote-1). *Note: if you are not sure what experience to write about, use your spiritual practices as you try drafting a description of an overwhelming experience. If you get stuck trying to write about this experience, then move on to writing about another experience. Also pay attention whether you are able to edit your description once you have written a draft. Your ability to edit indicates you are able to process the experience. If you cannot edit your description, it may be too fixed or frozen to co-create meanings right now, which means you are better off writing about a different experience.*

**Part 2: How did you experience God or a sense of transcendence?**

Put into words whether/how you experienced God/a sense of the transcendent/the sacred/ goodness (or a word that describes this dimension for you) in coping with this experience. Describe whether/how you experience religious, spiritual or moral struggles. Religious and spiritual struggles refer to experiences of tension, strain, and conflict about sacred matters with the supernatural, within oneself, and with others. Ken Pargament describes three types of spiritual struggle:

* Supernatural: Struggles with God or transcendent dimension
* Intrapsychic: Struggles within with values (moral stress)
* Interpersonal: Struggles between us and our significant others (parents, partners, family, work relationships), communities of faith, political differences that have profound significance

You can provide some background details about how/whether religion/spirituality was part of your life before this event and tell us whether/how this aspect of your life changed. (less than 300 words)

**Part 3: Describe the dangers of theological naïveté inherent in your experience.**

“If survivors, their families, or communities do not draw upon second order reflections on violence, suffering, and evil available to them in their religious traditions, their theological naïveté may result in theologies that are part of a web of violence, rather than a web of life.”

Describe the dangers of theological naïveté inherent in your experience. For example, were the ways in which people coped with and/or made sense of this traumatic event harmful? (less than 300 words)

**Part 4: Did anyone function as a pastoral or caregiver to you as you struggled to experience God’s presence and make sense of this traumatic event?** If so, describe what this was like; if not, describe how such a person could have helped. (325 words or less)

**Part 5: Elaborate the embedded theology of values, beliefs, and coping that was energized by trauma/stress-related feelings.** Use Chapter 5 to think about different theologies of suffering and Chapter 6 for examples of these kinds of theologies of trauma. Use my assignment as a model for how to do this part. For those of you from nontheistic traditions, see the file on Buddhist orienting systems.

EMBEDDED THEOLOGY

***Emotions***

***Coping***

***Values***

***Beliefs***

Moral theologies

Redemptive theologies

Eschatologies of hope

Theologies of lament and protest

Theologies of ambiguous suffering

**Part 6: How is the embedded theology you experienced in your stress reactions/ emotions shaped by intersecting social systems, like religious sexism, heterosexism, racism, classis, ableism….?** Use Doehring (2015) The Practice of Pastoral Care, Chapter 7 (see charts on pp. 35 & 162 for examples). Rather than using a chart, use subheadings for each social system that gave you advantages of or disadvantages in ways that shaped your embedded theologies in this experience. Be specific about how this social system shaped the embedded theology of your children/was internalized by you and then shaped your stress and emotional reactions in this experience or trauma/moral stress you are describing.

**Part 7. Elaborate the intentional theology** that is energized by positive moral feelings like compassion, joy, gratitude you experience in spiritual practices, which hold together values and beliefs that make up an intentional theology. This intentional theology may be what you want to experience, and/or may have evolved for you over a long term process of making meaning and integrating this experience into your life.

INTENTIONAL THEOLOGY

***Emotions*** *(emotions that arise from life-giving coping and spiritual practices identified below):*

***Coping/Spiritual practices:***

***Values:***

***Beliefs***

Moral theologies

Redemptive theologies

Eschatologies of hope

Theologies of lament and protest

Theologies of ambiguous suffering

1. The purpose of the word count is to help you pare down the story to its barest or most salient details. This helps you practice telling the narrative in a simple way, and helps readers not feel overwhelmed by the details. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)