**Doehring Sample Assignment**

**Part 1: Self-care through spiritual practices**

My primary spiritual practice is listening to sacred choral music, especially related to death, from a collection of choral works on my computer and from the webcasts of services/music from Trinity College Choir, Cambridge, England and St. Thomas Episcopal Church, NYC, NY. Choral music helps me become emotionally attuned to my grief and more aware of where I am holding stress in my body. Music helps me experience self-transcendence and goodness in my body and also helps me search for meanings that bring poetry/sacred texts together with classical music. My religious and spiritual practices bring moments of beauty and goodness that give me hope for the future and a sense of being at home in my body, relationships and creation. “Beauty can draw us home” ([J. B. Nelson, 2004, p. 168](#_ENREF_12)).

I also participate in worship at St. Andrew’s Episcopal Church, Denver, with my husband, where the progressive theology, choral music, and liturgy fits my love of classical choral music and my postmodern faith. The music and liturgy of the Anglican/Episcopal tradition offer me ways to re-experience my childhood wonder for the beauty of Christian symbols, while retaining a critical interpretation of their historical context. I feel known and respected by the rector, choir director, organist and congregants, and have received ongoing pastoral care, especially in moments of crisis.

**Part 2: A life-changing experience**

The younger of my two sons, Alex (27 years old) ended his life on June 13, 2018. Many aspects of Alex’s life and death remain an ineffable mystery. What I know, as a mother, is that Alex faced extraordinary limits when depression took over his life, on and off, over the past ten years. The past six months were his worst experience of being sucked down into the pit of depression that constricted his life and made him feel so different from other people. Depression was a disability that limited his life in dramatic ways, especially in being able to take steps toward leaving home and living on his own.

Alex carried many wounds from struggles with depression. As his family, we carried invisible wounds, from harrowing times of keeping him alive.[[1]](#endnote-1) Whenever his disability was in the foreground, as it had been in the past six months, our experience of Alex narrowed to focusing on his wounds and diagnosis.[[2]](#endnote-2) It was hard to step back and see Alex in all of his complex beauty and mystery, especially in grieving his death and understanding his decision to end his life.

**Part 3: The automatic stress/emotion-based theology/spiritual orienting system of initial values, beliefs, and coping from childhood that had the potential to be life-limiting or life-giving (2250 words)**

**Initial Emotions:** Shock, anguished grief, anxiety, guilt, urgency to do immediate tasks in response to his death

**Initial Values:**

*Sole responsibility for Alex’s struggles as his mother:* My stress responses often make me anxious, especially when I re-experience childhood values of feeling solely responsible for others; in this case, for Alex’s well-being—a role I had learned as child in looking after younger brothers and a younger sister. For Alex’s last six months I had been trying to help him hold onto life until his depression eased. He had episodes of being close to choosing death which we had weathered. The call from the police was a shock but not a surprise, since we had nearly lost him to suicide a number of times in the past.

*Truth-telling:* I was raised in a family that kept emotional and psychological struggles private—even unnamed. I was able to set aside this embedded value in favor of my intentional value of truth-telling, which made me immediately decide to say in public announcements that Alex chose to end his life, had long struggles with depression, and received good mental health care. I wanted to make public these three most salient features of his death, knowing that this would help people know what to say to us, and would create solidarity with those who had experienced similar struggles and losses.

*Duty*: In beginning to plan Alex’s memorial service, I struggled with beliefs in resurrection that came out of a premodern worldview of heaven above/earth below, and which, it seemed to me, prematurely removed the sting of death through visions of heaven and afterlife.[[3]](#endnote-3) I immediately rejected such beliefs as not meaningful for me or Alex. Childhood values about complying with religious authority made me question whether I could make public my search for meanings if I rejected traditional Christian beliefs about resurrection and life after death, which are woven throughout funeral liturgies.

*Concern for others:* I acted on my concern for others by being the one to break the news of Alex’s death to each family member, to prepare the house for visiting family members, and to prepare the memorial service. This intensified my moments of grief but ultimately made me feel less alone in my grief.

**Initial Beliefs:**

*Struggles with moral theologies of suffering; moving toward radical theologies of suffering:* Moral theologies about suffering—that Alex’s death was his and my fault—increased my moral stress of feeling responsible for Alex’s suffering and death, and fears of being judged by those in authority (God/psychiatric experts). Like feminist theologian Susan Nelson, I question a moral understanding of Alex’s suffering: “Would a good God let radical suffering so erode the human spirit that all hope is lost (and would that lost hope be justly charged to the sufferer as the sin of despair)?” ([S. L. Nelson, 2003, p. 402](#_ENREF_13)). Over the years I have developed a more complex moral understanding of his struggles. When used to think about collective rather than individual sin, the moral approach helps me understand how familial, social and cultural systems contribute to the suffering of those struggling with mental illness, and that we all, as a society, need to be held accountable. Spiritual care is not just about caring for persons; it’s about social justice that challenges life-limiting and destructive systems that exacerbate suffering. I found Debbie Creamer’s theology of limits meaningful for reflecting on Alex’s struggles with depression: “Human life is, in so many ways, an experience of limits….Instead of cementing disability as a distinct and separate category of otherness,…consider the ways in which limits are normal, unsurprising, fluid and even good” ([Creamer, 2012, p. 341](#_ENREF_5)). “When we dismiss disability as being an exceptional and othering experience, we deny the normality of limits in all of our lives, pretend that we do not experience increasing limits as we age, and even refuse to acknowledge the future limit of death” ([Creamer, 2009, p. 119](#_ENREF_4)).

Rejecting an individualistic moral paradigm of Alex’s suffering allowed me to lament using a radical[[4]](#endnote-4) paradigm: “The paradigm of radical suffering stands in this place of suffering and incoherence, recognizes everything such evil threatens, realizes that this evil cannot be justified but must be resisted, and asks in the face of such evil, ‘Where is God?’ or ‘What kind of God... ? or ‘Is there a God at all?’” (Nelson, 2003, p. 403). I understood his genetic predisposition and struggles with mental illness as a tragedy: “The essential tragic experience is irreparable human loss” ([Eagleton, 2003, p. 4](#_ENREF_7)) that often cannot be redeemed through heroic ways of coping with disability. “Tragedy stresses how we are acted upon rather than robustly enterprising, as well as what meager space for maneuver we often have available” (Eagleton, 2003, p. xvi).

*Struggles with exclusive childhood meanings*: My childhood experience of my father’s skepticism and my mother’s Catholicism as absolutely true makes me anxious about how to respect other’s beliefs and represent the multiplicity of my religious beliefs. My anxiety makes me view someone’s beliefs as all or nothing (e.g., exclusively skeptic, in my father’s case). For example, I initially worried that being ordained as a Presbyterian meant I had to keep secret my struggles with resurrection beliefs, or that I could not use any Christian symbols in a memorial service for Alex, who practiced meditation and was drawn to a Buddhist worldview. It helped to remember that Alex was not exclusivist in his search for meanings, which freed me to find meanings that could speak to the diversity of those who gathered to share grief. Reading about religious hybridity[[5]](#endnote-5) and spiritual fluidity ([Bidwell, 2018](#_ENREF_3)) helped me respect both my and Alex’s spiritual fluidity.

My religious struggles arise from being spiritually fluid, as Bidwell (2018, p. 2) notes: “Spiritually fluid people evoke prejudice and curiosity uncover assumptions, and disrupt our typical labels; they undermine religious authority, complicate religious communities, and blur social categories. Their lives question ordinary assumptions about pure, static, and singular religious identities.” The millennial generation does not experience the same struggles with religious conformity. Nor does this generation tend to hold exclusivist beliefs. Most of those gathering to support us were similar to us in this way and would likely find the service meaningful.

*Struggles with inclusivism*: In my search for meanings, I did not want to imply that my search for meanings was either exclusively true for all of those who mourn a death like Alex’s, or inclusively true, as though my meanings would apply to all those who mourn tragic deaths like Alex’s. As Hedges notes, “The most telling critique against an inclusivist approach is that it forms the other religion into the pattern of one’s own, thereby denying its inherent integrity” ([Hedges, 2010, p. 159](#_ENREF_10)). I echo Bidwell’s rejection of inclusivism: “I do not believe that God is one or that all paths reach the same mountain. Religions are not different descriptions of a single reality; they describe different (and sometimes related) realities” (Bidwell, 2018, p. 7). I wanted to represent my search for meanings as particular to me; in this way, using a particularist approach to religions in the world that respects differences without making exclusivist claims, which I hear Bidwell affirming when he asks and answers the question,

How can there be more than one ultimate reality? I’m not sure; it’s a paradox. I’ve decided to live with that unknowing. For me, it’s more important to preserve the possibility of multiplicity than to reconcile it all with a logical solution. To insist on a singular ultimate reality beyond or behind all religious expressions becomes, for me, a type of violence; it risks the erasure of real differences. (2018, p. 7)

I also support a pluralist approach to the ways many religious traditions search for meanings amidst tragedy, appreciating that my particular meanings would speak to common aspects of tragic deaths through suicide, especially those explored through theologians writing about moral injury, as well as limits and disabilities. As someone presenting a public contextual theology of a death like Alex’s in an interfaith context like his memorial service, I wanted to model a hospitable approach to religious difference by combining a particularist approach with a pluralist approach that promotes a radical openness to the ways in which all religions may be true.[[6]](#endnote-6)

The problem with only implementing a particularist approach (popular in the academic study of religion) is that it rejects the functional definitions of psychological aspects of religion and spirituality that have helped me understand my religious struggles through research on when religious struggles help or harm people ([Abu-Raiya, Pargament, & Exline, 2015](#_ENREF_1)). Hedges critiques particularism for its premise—that religions are ‘monolithic cultural islands’—a premise not meaningful for younger generations who are more spiritually fluid. “Religious identities always have fluid edges marked by hybridity and multiplicity” (Hedges, 2010, p. 229). Some argue that particularists are “simply exclusivists or inclusivists in post-modern guise” (Alan Race, cited by Hedges, 2010, p. 161). In sharing my search for meanings in a public context, I wanted to function as both a mother and a pastoral theologian who combines a particularist and pluralistic approach that respects religious differences, religious multiplicity, and spiritual fluidity. As someone familiar with research on religious and spiritual struggles, I wanted to use life-giving religious practices and meanings that would

* connect with beauty/goodness/love through ritual and music,
* search for complex contextual meanings that can bear the weight of suffering
* foster flexible ways of sharing anguish, meanings, and sources of hope
* facilitate spiritual wholeness an integration as persons, families and communities.[[7]](#endnote-7)

*Struggles with traditional references to the resurrection in funeral services*: Resurrection beliefs in the immediate aftermath of a tragic death strike me as offering premature reassurances in ways that foreclose sharing lament and anguish. In my search for meanings on what I wanted to say at Alex's memorial service, I worked with my Episcopal rector, Elizabeth Randall, on using the New Zealand *Book of Prayer* funeral service as the basis for our memorial service. I found its contemporary language fit my religious world better than the *Book of Common Prayer*. I set aside most of the references to resurrection/heaven and chose the prayers and texts that spoke about God’s love and the love of community as what sustains us and helps us find hope in the face of death.

**Initial Coping:**

*Work harder:* a default way of coping from the past was to work harder at tasks in which I felt competent. This way of coping came from my father’s work ethic and his financial responsibility for the family. While coping through hard work could make me self-reliant and stubborn, and increase my values of being morally responsible for my survival and others, I used this work ethic adaptively to tackle tough tasks listed below.

*Caring for Alex’s body* as a mother helped us find ways (described below) of sharing anguish. S*orting through Alex’s things and space* immediately after his death helped me find and read his journals and return to these over and over again in sharing anguish and searching for meanings; also for reclaiming the goodness of his life. I also began immediately to clean out his living space as a way of letting go of his physical presence with us and blessing the new sense of a home without Alex.

*Searching for meanings* in speaking with family members and writing emails helped me and others begin to try and understand Alex’s life and death.

**Part 4:** **How was your embedded theology shaped by intersecting social systems?**

*Religious sexism:*My values of feeling solely responsible for other’s well-being along with my duty to conform to absolute religious beliefs come from trying to be a good girl raised in Catholic churches and schools; also from my birth order as the one in charge of my brothers and sisters when my parents were away.

*Classism:* My father’s education provided social status and financial security and reinforced a work ethic that possibly over-valued these aspects of social identity as the key to survival and independence.

*Racism:* Being identified as white was an advantage within mental health systems, especially when my son needed emergency care.

*Citizenship:* Being a US citizen gave my son access to Medicaid, which covered costs of hospitalizations and mental health care.

*Note: While I experienced spiritual practices as a central resource, I know that many other aspects of my life have sustained me: first and foremost, meaningful work, as well as good habits, like healthy eating and exercise: I also am very fortunate to be in a stable marriage and family, and have access to extensive social support. Without all of these life-giving routines and resources, spiritual practices may have not been as effective.*

**Part 5. Describe your intentional theology (2100 words)**

**Spiritual practices and ways of coping:** As I noted above,music helped me experience goodness and grieve Alex. I chose a choral work for the choir to sing after my words of remembrance: Good Night, Dear Heart by Dan Forrest (b.1978), who set this poem by Robert Richardson, chosen by Mark Twain for the tombstone on the grave of his daughter, Sarah who died at age 20:

Warm summer sun shine kindly here,

Warm summer wind blow softly here,

Green sod above lie light, lie light;

Good night, dear heart, good night, good night.

The choir also sang a setting of a favorite hymn, “There’s a wideness in God’s mercy” that described my theology of God’s love.

My search for meanings was also a spiritual practice that helped me grieve Alex’s death and share anguish with others whose adult children had died tragically, some by suicide. It was especially helpful to hear how much mental health struggles had shaped their children’s lives, which helped remind me over and over again that we had tried our best to help Alex with his struggles.I was fortunate to have conversation partners with which to voice my struggles as I searched for meanings. Sheila Davaney, Larry Graham's wife, herself a feminist theologian, helped me decide on the parable of the good Samaritan as the gospel reading for the memorial service, after I had spent hours going through the gospels and rejecting the usual funeral gospel readings and parables about sinners and the righteous.

Spiritual care conversations with my rector, Elizabeth Randall, were an invaluable part of my spiritual practices. She was respectful of my spiritually fluid religious identity. Her homily offered a public theology of God’s love that included my worldview and spoke to common values and beliefs among a religiously diverse gathering of family and friends.

**Values:**

*Caring for Alex’s body and ashes:*

I chose to attend the cremation of Alex’s body as a time of caring for and releasing his body. My husband and I, my older son and his wife, and my brother and sister laid hands on the covering over Alex’s body. We read some of his poetry, offered prayers and commended his body to be cremated. Then we bore witness to his body entering into the fire that would reduce his body to ashes.

During the first hymn of the memorial service, Alex’s brother Jordan and I carried his ashes up to the front of the church. We placed them on a table in front of the altar. At the end of the service, Jordan and I went up together and I carried the ashes up to the altar where the Elizabeth blessed them and then I placed them in a drawer under the altar (the columbarium) where they will remain. I'd like to have my ashes mixed with Alex's when the time comes.

We interred some of Alex's ashes under a fig tree beside a family home on Vashon Island off of West Seattle, where Alex spent many summer days with cousins from the age of five onwards. I decided to use two slabs of granite they had there, and on one my sister Nancy and I wrote one of Alex's poems:

You call that art?

  This is art

Going for a walk.

We propped the slab with the poem against the base of the tree and then put another slab flat, over the ashes. Earlier in the day we visited the family beach where Alex spent lots of wonderful times and we collected flat sea stones on the beach. After the interment we had these stones on hand if people wanted to write words on them and build cairns, which Alex liked to do.

*Seeking physical and psychological health:* I found solace in the ways I supported Alex in finding good mental health care and in working with his team. This helped me understand better the extent of Alex’s struggles, and to be the best mother I could through reaching out to his mental health team, especially during and after crises. I have made use of my employee benefits to find a good psychologist with whom I meet.

I was grateful that Alex made a significant life change in making a commitment to sobriety three months before his death.This life change helped him cope better with despair and anger, especially when he felt alone at night. Sobriety helped him meditate, concentrate on his writing and read poetry—most recently, Jack Kerouac’s *Haikus*. He wrote poems in a journal which I did not read until after his death. There are not many entries until after he chose sobriety, when he began writing haiku poems, often about something that caught his attention, like the sight of a tree or cloud when we were driving somewhere, or the sounds on an airplane trip we took. These poems were wonderfully focused, often with an image or sound paired with words that make us wonder, like these three poems, which he wrote on a flight to Chicago at the end of May:

Angels in the clouds

above Kansas

Slowly dancing away

Waaaa cries the baby

at take off

Mystery until landing

Something holy about the metal

slicing open soda

50,000 feet

It seems to me, in retrospect, that his sobriety helped him read more, concentrate better, and to use words to pay attention, wonder, and search for meanings by juxtaposing a sight or sound with words like “mystery” and “holy.”

**Beliefs:**

*Affirming beliefs in God’s love that seeks justice and embraces outcasts:* In her homily, Elizabeth Randall used the texts I had chosen from the Hebrew Bible (Isaiah 49:8b-15*)* and the gospel (the parable of the Good Samaritan found in Luke 10:25-37*)* to affirm God love. Here are excerpts from her homily that I found deeply comforting and meaningful:

From the words of the prophet Isaiah,

Who comforted the comfortless

In a time of terrible loss and sorrow,

We hear of a God

Whose will is always for renewal of life,

Renewal of life in concrete, real terms:

Food for the hungry,

Freedom for prisoners,

Healing for the sick,

A clear path for the lost.

And most of all,

The prophet speaks of a God who remembers.

Always and forever.

As a mother would not forget her child,

So, even more so, would God never forget

Anything in all creation.

It is the essence of God to be

The one who remembers.

And from the parable of the Good Samaritan,

What can we hear and hold today?

There are many ways to open and enjoy a parable;

One of them is to set ourselves inside it,

And to invite it to come live within us.

So I wonder,

What happens for you,

When you enter this story today?

One thing I would share with you

From my own reflections

Is the image of Alex,

Wounded and in pain.

But what I see is this.

Many people stopped to help him.

Many people crossed the road to come alongside him.

But only one could lift him,

Hold and carry him,

And bring him to a place of rest.

There is, beyond our knowing

But intimately near,

Palpable, elusive,

Mysterious and vibrant,

A more, a vastness,

An infinite power and goodness

That flows through all things,

Bringing life and health,

Making love and healing harms,

Regathering all things at their end.

Whether you know this more,

This beyond

As a personal God,

Whether you understand yourself

As interwoven in the web of all that is,

Whether you wonder

What or who or why is there,

At a time like this,

Faced with a loss that is at the edge of what we can bear,

I invite you to reach for,

To consider,

Perhaps to embrace these images and promises of scripture:

There is one who will never forget.

That one will remember Alex

Beyond time and forever.

There is one who mends, heals,

Restores, and makes new.

That one has gathered up the brokenness of Alex

And made him whole.

*Affirming a God of love who suffers with us:*I am drawn to process theology’s way of describing God’s power as a relational process of becoming. “God’s power is persuasive and relational rather than unilateral; ordered by love and compassionate judgment” ([Graham, 2006, pp. 11-12](#_ENREF_8)). “The alternative to omnipotence lies in the risky interactivity of relationship. In the language of process theology [God’s power] ‘lures’ them collectively and individually toward self-actualization” ([Keller, 2008, p. 89](#_ENREF_11)).

*Acknowledging and lamenting the limits of our love:* Tragically, moments of hope and goodness weren’t enough to help Alex climb out of the pit of depression, and take the first steps toward the kind of life he longed for: finding meaningful work and love relationships that would help him leave home. I relied on religious traditions of lament in naming the limits Alex experienced

* through genetics that predisposed him to depression.
* through a society that so often measures worth in terms of accomplishments
* through lack of affordable housing, which made it so hard for Alex to leave home, or for those with mental illness to find shelter.

In the end, I lamented the limits of family love, which could not safeguard Alex once he had made his decision to end his life.

Given all of these limits, I had to acknowledge that we did our best, as parents, as family, as his mental health team. In our moments of grief, I sometimes had to become reconciled, over and over again, with the limits of our love for Alex. We are learning to forgive ourselves, especially when a memory brings sorrow, and an anguished longing beginning with the words, “If only Alex had been able to….” or “I wish we had …” I know these longings aren’t realistic and that we did the best we could.

*Sharing anguish helps us bear it:* Sharing anguish helps us bear it, as my dear friend Larry Graham ([Graham, 2017, p. xiii](#_ENREF_9)) wrote. Confessing our limits helps us knit together those webs that hold us in love. Larry Graham’s words offer encouragement. He gently asks, “Where is your web still torn, even after your efforts to repair and heal? What are the strands in the web that remain that give *you* life and keep you going?” ([Graham, 2017, p. 128](#_ENREF_9)).

What gives us life and keeps us going? What helps us take up the strands of life and once again knit webs of love connecting us to each other? What can we carry forward from Alex’s life and death? I believe that we need to continue to do our best in supporting each other, especially when we come up against our limits. We need to work together to protest moral attitudes toward disabilities that make us feel like failures if we don’t heroically overcome our limits or disabilities. We need to protest the marginalization of people who are stigmatized because of their limits and disabilities. We need to do our best to protect and hold onto each other, when death seems the only way to end pain. And when our loved ones end their lives, we need to hold each other: sharing anguish, searching for meanings, and reclaiming goodness.[[8]](#endnote-8)

*Honoring the complexity and mystery of Alex and respecting his decision to end his life:* I affirm the words spoken by Elizabeth Randall in her homily:

Alex’s experience is uniquely his own.

Some of it we know,

About some of it we can wonder,

And some of it will remain hidden.

His life, his struggles,

His ultimate choice, Are his.

Alex’s story belongs to him.

But he was generous in sharing much of it,

And, having chosen to end his life,

Gracious in the way he left this world.

Let him remain as a precious, unique,

Irreplaceable individual.

And set him as one star in the vast, uncountable

Constellations of the human family,

Whose story is gathered and shared

Through the generations.

On the last night before Alex took his life, I watched him, as he sat for a long time looking out at the sun setting on the mountains. His face was calm. He was not angry. He seemed at peace. He seemed open to the beauty of the world. He told me not to worry. I hear his words now as a blessing—his way of saying good bye. I find solace in this haiku poem he wrotein April.

I went into the dark

Boldly, sweetly, crazy

It held me.

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1. Theologian Shelly Rambo describes the hidden wounds of trauma in terms of gospel narratives about the wounds of Jesus who appears after his death to his followers:

   “To probe the afterlife via the trajectory of trauma provides a different entrance into the classic questions of Christian faith….There is no clear cut line separating the two; life is not a departure from death but, instead, a different relationship to death and life. In a posttraumatic age, they exist simultaneously rather than sequentially. The return of Jesus reveals something about *life in the midst of death.* If we take the line between life and death to be more porous, as the context of trauma suggests, then resurrection is not so much about life overcoming death as it is about *life resurrecting amid the ongoingness of death*. The return of Jesus marks a distinct territory for thinking about life as marked by wounds and yet recreated through them” ([Rambo, 2017, p. 7](#_ENREF_16)). Rambo’s (2017) exploration in *Resurrecting Wounds: Living the Afterlife of Trauma* has particular narrative meanings for me in terms of my own trauma history and scholarly focus on trauma. When I was 27, having just experienced the goodness of my body in the birth of my first son, Jordan, I went on a two day silent retreat at a Jesuit center in Guelph, Ontario. Memories of a childhood trauma emerged. Under the direction of a wise Jesuit, I faced fears that I could not protect my child from danger and I experienced for the first time a profound sense of Jesus with me in my childhood suffering. I reclaimed wounds from this trauma, and wrote a prayer that concluded with these words:

   “You were not ashamed of your wounds.

   You showed them to Thomas

   As marks of your ordeal and death

   I will no longer hide these wounds of mine.

   I will bear them gracefully.

   They tell a resurrection story.” ([Doehring, 1995](#_ENREF_6))

   I chose an opening hymn that spoke to these images of the wounded Jesus appearing after his death: “"We walk by faith" set to the tune St. Botolph. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. “Caregivers may think chronic illness is only of concern during the acute crisis stage surrounding diagnosis, but people continue to incur losses over the ensuing years. The experience of chronic illness has been described as one of "shifting perspectives": at times the illness requires primary attention, at other times the illness shifts to the background of the person's consciousness” ([Arora, 2009, p. 22](#_ENREF_2)).

   “As the focus on chronic illness shifts from background to foreground and new losses or crises occur, care seekers may need new ways of making sense of their illnesses, including new theological understandings of their experiences”([Arora, 2009, p. 34](#_ENREF_2)) [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. It could be that a redemptive understanding of Alex’s death will become relevant in the long term retrospective process of meaning-making. At some future time I may look back on his suffering, and hold onto the horror of suffering even as I reclaim the goodness of life. The redemptive perspective on suffering could, at some future time, help me retrospectively look back and see how new life was eventually experienced through the long-term process of coming to terms with a death that could have been wholly destructive. I can also see the wisdom of Shelly Rambo’s descriptions of the ways that trauma continues to co-exist with glimpses of new life. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. “The term "radical suffering" is borrowed from Wendy Farley, *Tragic Vision and Divine Compassion* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1990). Farley defines radical suffering as suffering that destroys the human spirit and cannot be justified. Radical suffering cries out not for theodicy but for vindication” (Nelson, 2003, p. 399). [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. “Religious multiplicity—the experience of being shaped by, or maintaining bonds to, more than one spiritual or religious community at the same time—is occurring more frequently in the United States and Europe. In other parts of the world, religious multiplicity has long been a norm. As more and more people transgress religious boundaries, this multiplicity becomes more visible. We increasingly encounter spiritually fluid people in public life, at school, at work, at backyard cookouts, and at the health club” (Bidwell, 2018, pp. 1-2). [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. A three-fold typology of comparative approaches to religion as exclusivist, inclusivist, and pluralist was first proposed by Race ([1983](#_ENREF_15)), as cited by Hedges (2010). The category of particularism was added by Hedges ([Hedges, 2010](#_ENREF_10)). Here are simple descriptions of these terms:

   Exclusivism: radical discontinuity among religions (e.g., Christianity is the only truth)

   Inclusivism: radical fulfillment (Possibilities for many paths to same end)

   Pluralism: radical openness (All religions may be true)

   Particularism: radical differences need to be respected (Each religion is an integral whole) [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. Research demonstrates that these are four markers of spiritual wholeness and integration ([Pargament, Desai, & McConnell, 2006](#_ENREF_14)). [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. Graham (2017) describes three interacting poles of lamentation—sharing anguish, interrogating suffering, and reinvesting hope, especially in the goodness of life (p. 139). [↑](#endnote-ref-8)