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Dissertation information

Title of dissertation: Breaking Evangelical: An Attachment-Focused Framework for Healing Spiritual Trauma

Advisor: Colleen Butcher

Graduate program:

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Copy and paste your 300-word Dissertation Abstract below:

About 25 percent of the US population is religiously unaffiliated, and about 70 percent of these individuals are former Christians (Pew Research, PRRI, Gallup, Barna). Included in this phenomenon is the spiritual traumatization of women within evangelical churches, which has been revealed partially through the #MeToo and #ChurchToo movements on social media.

At the core of spiritual abuse is the issue of broken attachments (human bonding and communion with God). God created people for community, and abuse is direct injury to this vital aspect of our humanity.

This work explores theories and concepts of perichoresis, God attachment, and interpersonal attachment through a trinitarian lens, with the aim of offering a holistic healing framework for spiritually traumatized women who want to pursue a fruitful spiritual life inside or outside institutional church. Many spiritually traumatized women choose to stay in their churches. This still exposes an underlying attachment failure within churches, as well as a potential type of Stockholm syndrome within evangelical circles.

Women frequently leave churches with spiritual trauma that has injured their God attachment. They need holistic healing toward secure God attachment, which can take place outside traditional church contexts. God attachment can be more secure by healing one's God images, internalized metaphors from which all relationship attachment originates. Both implicit images and explicit concepts of God play important roles in God attachment.

Fully acknowledging and addressing spiritual trauma is of utmost importance to move toward any kind of healing and reconciliation. I propose an attachment-focused healing framework, which is trauma-informed and healing-centered, partially drawing from Esther Lightcap Meek's covenant epistemology (inspired by Michael Polanyi's subsidiary-focal integration) and James Fowler's stages of faith development.

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trauma, healing, spiritual abuse, God attachment, religious unaffiliation

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