

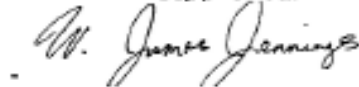
Salvation from Self-Improvement: A Feminist Theology

By

Julie Renée Morris

Date: 8/18/2020

Approved:



Willie James Jennings, Supervisor



J. Kameron Carter



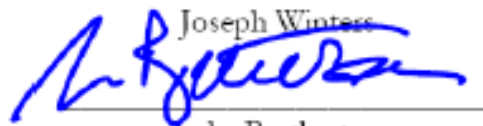
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Joseph Winters

Luke Bretherton

Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of
Theology in the Divinity School of Duke University 2020

ABSTRACT

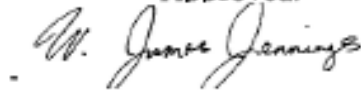
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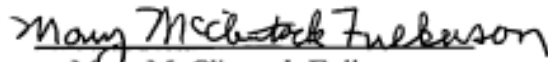
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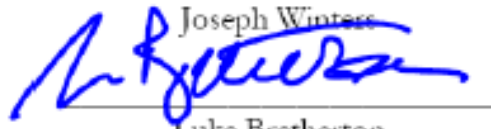


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Luke Bretherton

An abstract of a dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
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Abstract

Statement of the Problem

One of the most significant problems facing the doctrine of salvation is that it's been tied to a word foreign to its very nature: self-improvement. The dissertation articulates an idea of change that is inherent to the idea of salvation that resists and that fortifies us against the idea of improvement rooted in patriarchal commitments. It is an attempt to critically analyze the doctrine of salvation by asking the most pressing question facing it at this moment: is salvation good for women? It's a constructive re-thinking of what the doctrine means in light of women's bodies and the fundamental problem of improvement and self-improvement. Within 20th century protestant American contexts, the doctrine of salvation has often been structured in ways that equate self-improvement with salvation. Furthermore, the expectation for this salvific "work" plays out differently across different kinds of bodies, aligning itself with oppressive hierarchies. This kind of improvement is different from both the change initially experienced in salvation and improvements made as the believer enters into the communal reality of being a Christian. The idea of self-improvement as a salvific act presupposes an isolated self that will be cleaned up. This self becomes the white masculine. I argue in this project that the performance of redeemed masculinity (a saved man) is articulated by means of ideas of self-improvement and in turn ideas of self-improvement articulate a redeemed femininity (a saved woman) calibrated to masculinist longings for control and power. Evangelical theology articulates ideas of masculinity within a doctrine of salvation as the outworking of the effects of salvation, or being saved. That is, Christians demonstrate faithfulness by approximating, perpetuating and defending a particular vision of masculinity that depends upon self-improvement. This conflation of self-improvement with

the work of salvation depends on the existing (and continuing) inadequacy of the believer. This refracts through existing hierarchies of oppression such that those who are oppressed require more improvement. Thus, the doctrine of salvation has become unrecognizably entangled with social mechanisms that validate and perpetuate cultural hierarchies of oppression.

As a theological quandary, the questions theologians have struggled over are threefold: 1. Who enacts self-improvement, God or the human, or some combination of both? 2. What does an improved Christian look like and who must see the performative embodiment of this improvement? 3. What defines the content that people should approximate in their improvement? The problem emerges at the place of the surface for women, in terms of the formation of a loss of optic control whereby men are positioned as the fundamental observer/approver of the faithful self. If regimes of improvement constitute agency (Foucault), and if such regimes have been seized by women, especially women of color for emancipatory possibilities, then what are we to make of the idea of improvement for doing political, social, economic, and theological work? My project explores the problems and possibilities of salvation and improvement in their theological and related registers. The dissertation ultimately pivots on the question: can the doctrine of salvation itself be saved from its entanglement with self-improvement or its patriarchal commitments?

Loss of Optic Control – Looking like a Man: The practical outworking of a doctrine of salvation enmeshed with self-improvement affects people differently. The way women are taught to imagine faithfulness forms them in obedience to a masculine gaze and masculinist forms of self-evaluation. That is, Christian obedience has been articulated from the site of men who determine the content of women's obedience and position themselves as the

evaluators of it. In this instantiation of masculine-determined obedience, women's faithfulness is understood in reference to male desires. The dissertation suspects that not only do these practices of improvement get translated as the work of salvation (i.e., faithfulness), but that they are internalized into the subject's own identity. Thus, women's obedience is equated with a certain kind of gender performativity that is coded theologically. Further, because this obedience-as-improvement registers as a salvific operation, women not only willingly participate within it on occasion, but often perpetuate it amongst themselves (e.g., mothers teaching daughters). The entanglement of this kind of improvement with Christianity's notions of salvation and the biblical exhortation to "work out of your salvation" (Phil. 2:12) severely complicates notions of agency for those participating within it. This proves especially problematic for feminist, queer and black thought.

When biology becomes theology in this way (faithfulness is determined by gender performance), it over-determines all humans into racially gendered categories that define faithfulness according to these categories. That is, faithfulness takes on the tone of improving oneself into one particular kind of man or woman, an ideal. Theologically, the question of the ideal human is often answered Christologically, interpreting Jesus Christ as Savior *and* ideal man. Rosemary Radford Ruether has analyzed the way sexism infiltrated Christology and Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza extended this analysis to include how Christology used and legitimized other forms of oppression. How has this entanglement with an oppressive ideal affected women's bodies, how they understand their faith and how they practice faithfulness? Further, how do Schüssler Fiorenza and Radford Ruether's analyses of Christology and oppression play across other registers of subject identity (e.g., race, sex, orientation, etc.)?

Salvation from Self-Improvement: A Feminist Theology enters this conversation by giving unprecedented attention to the role of self-improvement within the doctrine of salvation. These representations also reveal the content of who should improve and how and establish who will be evaluating this improvement. It connects this alignment to women's experience of their body. Ultimately, the dissertation contributes to the budding field of theology of bodies, utilizing feminist and womanist scholarship to develop ideas of faithfulness and identity not rooted in self-improvement.

The purpose of this dissertation is to expose how self-improvement became entangled with Christian notions of salvation, such that faithfulness looks like self-improvement calibrated to masculine visions of the human. The dissertation looks toward the constructive turn for conceiving of a doctrine of salvation not entrenched in self-improvement, but it is also conscientious of "saving" the doctrine via the same problematic technology of improvement.

Description of Methodology and Materials

The dissertation is primarily a textual analysis with some elements of historical archival research. Largely following the methodology of systematic theology, this dissertation engages a variety of texts analyzing their theory, historical location, the author's biography, and how the text engages or reflects its cultural setting. The dissertation pays special attention to the subject location of the theologians it engages as a performance of its methodological argument that patriarchy attempts to present certain texts as objective or universal truths. By situating theological texts within the author's broader socio-political existence, the dissertation attempts to undermine this patriarchal tendency. Beyond this, the dissertation largely functions as a theory driven analysis of the cultural manifestation of patriarchy and offers explorations of its practical manifestations.

The materials used are all texts and include feminist, queer, theological, womanist, philosophical, and exegetical. Non-theological philosophy informs much of the theoretical analysis of patriarchy and how it functions culturally. These texts are incorporated into the standing theological framework and then analyzed for how these systems became incorporated within theology and theological doctrine.

Conclusions Drawn

The dissertation finds that patriarchy has infiltrated the Christian doctrine of salvation such that it requires self-improvement calibrated to patriarchal interests. It terms the product of this infiltration patriarchal soteriology. Patriarchy has accomplished this by conflating two things: conversion with approximation and Christ with the masculine ideal.

When Christians confuse conversion with approximation, then both their freedom and theological orientation shift away from Christian values. While conversion signals the possibility of transformation and change, approximation (as described in this dissertation) indicates work toward change as a requirement. Approximation indicates lack that must be corrected and functions as a mechanism that communicates the work must always continue. This continuous work simultaneously reinforces the subject's continued inadequacy. Approximation also indicates a goal to which Christians attempt to move toward. While this sounds reminiscent of the Christian value to be like Christ, approximation is predicated on inadequacy that must be corrected rather than the relational freedom proclaimed in Christianity. In this sense, approximation establishes a hierarchical system where Christians can be evaluated on the extent of their lack. Within the patriarchal system, this lack gets read through many registers including race, gender, ableism, intellectualism, etc. The dissertation narrows this analysis of patriarchy's ordering of bodies to consider how this emerges in race

and gender. The second conflation describes the content of what Christians are approximating under patriarchal soteriology.

By conflating Christ with the masculine ideal, patriarchy establishes a theological foundation for its arrangement of bodies and teaches Christians that confirmation to this system is an act of faithfulness. Christ as a masculine idea equates Christ's masculine qualities with holiness. Thus, patriarchy depicts Christ as a young, white, strong, male. This is the shift of biology becoming theology and it informs how certain bodies should improve in order to become more holy. When the masculine ideal is actually what Christians are approximating, however, what is actually happening is the patriarchal ordering of bodies (e.g., women submit to men, men lead, whiteness rules, etc.). Both of these conflations provide a theological justification for patriarchy's existence and perpetuation.

Against patriarchy's infiltration into the Christian imagination, the dissertation conceives of three strategies theology can use: anti-patriarchal christology, fugitive theology, and interrelationality. Anti-patriarchal christology uses a lens informed by patriarchy as a system to analyze biblical texts. It operates on the assumption that God is invested in deconstructing systems of oppression (like patriarchy) and as such Christ demonstrates clear actions to this end. Fugitive theology invites reinterpretation, expansion, imagination into the work of theology in order to resist patriarchy's ever-expanding colonial grasp. Lastly, interrelationality emphasizes the commonality between all creatures, thereby challenging the legitimacy of an ideal figure or the sovereign self.

To this end, *Salvation from Self-Improvement: A Feminist Theology* contributes to the emerging fields of theology of bodies, theology of entanglement and critical whiteness studies. It deconstructs Christianity's entanglement with patriarchy and offers a constructive

turn for how Christians can imagine a doctrine of salvation that does not reproduce patriarchal oppression.

*To my parents, Jean and Jonathan Morris
who have always modeled to me the joy of learning and growth*

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A Note about Terminology

Patriarchy: The current iteration of Wynter’s notion of Man organizes humans into social hierarchies based on their subject position. This term usually refers only to the sex/gender system by which women (broadly construed to include cisgender, femme, female-presenting, and female identifying) are subjugated under men. This dissertation acknowledges this reference, but by placing it in the context of Wynter’s framework the dissertation expands the term to include how this system moves through ever-expanding [registers (e.g., race, sex, gender, ableism, class, etc.).

Sex/Gender: The dissertation operates from the belief that gender is a social construct, and sex is a biological reality that under Western patriarchal colonialism has been forced into a binary (male/female) that does not reflect the vast array of biological sexual diversity. At points, this dissertation will use man/male and woman/female as the language used within the patriarchal system in order to describe the “logic” of that system and how it operates. This should not be mistaken for the author’s own perspective. As patriarchy only recognized these two categories, this also means that its violence toward “women” also extended to women-presenting people. The author chose to use the term “woman” at these moments to highlight the violence of reducing humans to a presumed category and *not* to give credence to this reduction. This distinction should be clear in the writing, but the significance of this distinction deserves explicit mention.

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The acknowledgements may be the most accurate representation of the methodology behind this work. No text emerges on its own and no text births itself out of the sheer willpower of its writer. I wrote this text amidst many significant relationships, conversations, in different countries, listening to different languages and communing with different environmental terroirs. I wrote it alongside much personal discovery and reorientation. The end of this dissertation was written amidst a global pandemic, and my notion of interrelationality had to expand to account for things like social distance and newly limited communities. What follows is an expression of my thanks to the people who have supported me through writing this dissertation.

Salvation from Self-Improvement: A Feminist Theology simply would not have happened were it not for the efforts of my dissertation committee and for that I am grateful to each member. Thank you, Mary McClintock-Fulkerson, for shaping me as an academic, exploring historical concepts of womanhood in our directed study together, and for sharing bits of your personal experiences as an academic along the way. Luke Bretherton, thank you for investing in me as a scholar long before you were on my committee and doing extra work of teaching me how to teach. I deeply enjoy our debates and found you to be a sharp and compassionate thinker. Thank you, Joseph Winters, for your insightful questions that have shaped my articulation of self-improvement and for your generosity to step in and serve on short notice. J. Kameron Carter, your classes and our conversations significantly shaped the kinds of questions I ask and how I imagine the answers to those questions. You've invested countless hours in conversation with me, offering advice and working through dense texts; thank you for your labor on my behalf. Finally, to my advisor and mentor Willie James

Jennings, I aspire to be a teacher, academic and human like you. Thank you for how deeply you have invested in me and my work, how you have challenged me, abetted my anxieties, encouraged and fostered my ideas, and genuinely cared for me as a person. Thank you for staying on as my advisor when you moved to Yale; it was yet another example of how committed you are to your students. I have enjoyed our laughs, your wisdom, your consistent pressure for me to practice self-care, and how fiercely you fight for what and who you love.

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My family has also been a magnificent support to me these last years. My parents, Jean and Jonathan, have cheered me on at every step, joining me in Dr. Jennings' class during my coursework, coming to watch me give a paper at AAR, and flying across the country to watch me teach my first course. There have been so many cups of coffee where we shared our theological dreams and questions, many long hugs telling me I could do it, projects like splitting wood and painting the house to give me a break from writing. Thank you for your love; I have felt it at every step.

Thank you to my siblings, Jennifer, Joel and Candace and their children, Olive, Cal, Drake and Bowie for keeping me close while I have been physically distant and much preoccupied with writing. Jennifer, thank you for your consistency, prayers and so many texts that encouraged me and made me feel seen and remembered. Thank you, Joel, for a thousand fantastic dinners, heated (but friendly) debates over finely crafted cocktails and exploring incredible botanical gardens together (the moss!). Candace you were one of the first and strongest enthusiasts of self-care and boundary work in my life. Your influence on my life continues expanding into my professional and personal life. Yours is one of the voices I keep close. Also, your editing skills helped me make it through my master's program and significantly shaped my writing voice. Thank you, Olive, Cal, Drake and Bowie, for always making me feel welcome and special. I love each of you and have learned from you about compassion, leadership, perseverance and superb fort-making. Thank you!

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Much of my processing for *Salvation from Self-Improvement* happened organically in conversations with trusted friends. Oluwatomisin Oredein consistently engaged with me

about strategies for writing, teaching, and getting jobs as well as providing the invaluable gift of her company while I was writing. I am infinitely grateful for the way she challenges me, listens and asks exactly the right question. I spent many evenings with Naaman Wood processing both academic content and the system of the academy itself. Naaman has been an invaluable conversation partner and helped me significantly with the conclusion of this work. Ashleigh Elser engaged with me about feminism and the dynamics of gender in academia in ways that have deeply informed how I think and write about it. Matt Elia was one of the first to really talk me through a potential dissertation and has been continuously open and generous with doing mental work with me. Michelle Wolff brainstormed the title of the dissertation with me and is someone I admire for their ability to share work and connect people with one another. Conversations with Seamus Robertson have challenged and inspired me; they have reintroduced me to authors that figure into my work and have expanded how I think about relationality, religion, and our connection to the earth. Chase Gregory was one of the first friends I made in the Gender Studies program and has a gift for making people feel at ease and like their work is valuable. This friendship bolstered my courage and helped me create bridges between gender studies and Christianity in ways that have fundamentally shaped my work.

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All of you are in my work.

Introduction

One is not born but becomes a woman--Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*¹

Simone de Beauvoir's now famous quote began an exploration in feminist studies around the socialization of gender. De Beauvoir describes how this process depends on a system that declares women inherently lacking and referential to the neutral and adequate subject position: men.² The correction to this is itself the process of becoming a woman, improving oneself according to men's desires and beliefs about what a woman should be. Thus, being socialized as a woman means belief in an inherent problem that requires the mitigation of self-improvement. Oddly, the notion of inherent lack and to need to correct this had strong parallels with Christianity. These parallels begin emerging if we replace "woman" with "Christian" in the above quote.

One is not born but becomes a Christian.

When this phrase is read with de Beauvoir's work in mind, two interpretations emerge. On the one hand, this signals the conversion process central within Protestant Christianity. On the other hand, it signals how this conversion process has become entangled with de Beauvoir's notion of a patriarchal system of improvement. That is, the conversion process within Christianity began to take on the characteristics of the latter. Unfortunately, Christianity's soteriological framework had enough similarities to patriarchy's

¹ Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevallier (New York: Vintage Books, 2011), 283.

² As noted in the Note on Terminology, the reference to "women" and "men" here refers to patriarchy's division of humans into just these two categories.

system of improvement that its translation into patriarchy was not easily tracked. The doctrine of original sin translated easily into patriarchy's concept of inherent lack, the belief in a sinless Savior translated into the ideal humans should emulate, and living out one's salvation became working to improve one's self toward this ideal. To be clear, it's not that these elements of Christianity are inherently patriarchal, but that the similarities to patriarchal frameworks became sites for patriarchal infiltration. This entanglement came with an overall shift in twentieth century evangelical christianity toward the inward and subjective experience of spirituality, meaning people were paying more attention to their individual growth and spirituality.³

Consequently, self-improvement came with associations of overarching health, well-being, and instructions on how to live a healthier more abundant life. This meant that soteriological practices became confused with cultural imaginations of what a healthy, abundant life (and person) looked like. The idea of what a good Christian *looked like* began merging with patriarchy's presentation of what a good (read successful, acceptable, desirable) person looked like. It was only a short step then, to mistake patriarchy's instructions for self-improvement with Christianity's description of holy living. The 1970s saw a rise in Christian self-help books for women explicitly connecting holiness with cultural ideas of beauty in books like *God's Answer to Fat--Lose it, Pray Your Weight Away* and *Help Lord--The Devil Wants Me Fat!* Thus, patriarchy infused possibility and hope with notions of inherent lack that could only be corrected through the work of self-improvement. It then routed this through its own rosters of power such that the means and need for improvement correlated directly

³ Theologian Richard Kyle tracks this shift in his book *Popular Evangelicalism in American Culture* (London: Routledge Taylor and Francis Group, 2018).

to bodily particularities. Thus, the saved body took on the particularities affiliated with power (currently, white, cis, hetero, and male).

The confusion between patriarchy and Christian soteriology (what I term patriarchal soteriology) led to the baptism of the patriarchal arrangement (a social hierarchical order that privileges heterosexual, male-dominated, white, cisgendered, wealthy, etc.). The expectation to approximate to the patriarch (either by emulation or submission) became an issue of salvific import. For women, patriarchal soteriology communicated that they were inherently further from salvation and that the solution lay in approximating themselves to masculine desires. For women outside power structures in other ways (e.g., non-white, non-western, non-binary, etc.) this was compounded with the conflation of systemic power with salvation. Thus, the performance of redeemed femininity (a saved woman) was articulated by means of ideas of self-improvement calibrated to masculinist longings for control and power.

As a theological quandary, the questions theologians have struggled over are threefold: 1. Who enacts self-improvement, God or the human, or some combination of both? 2. What does an improved Christian look like and who must see the performative embodiment of this improvement? 3. Who defines the content of what people should approximate in their improvement? The problem emerges at the place of the surface for women, in terms of the formation of a loss of optic control whereby men are positioned as the fundamental observer/approver of the faithful self. When biology becomes theology in this way (i.e., anatomy determines the content of faithfulness), it over-determines all humans into racially gendered categories that define faithfulness according to these categories. That is, faithfulness takes on the tone of improving oneself into one particular kind of man or woman (and only these two options), one supportive of the power structure within patriarchy.

The practical outworking of a doctrine of salvation enmeshed with self-improvement affects people differently. The way women are taught to imagine faithfulness forms them in obedience to a masculine gaze and masculinist forms of self-evaluation. That is, Christian obedience has been articulated from the site of men who determine the content of women's obedience and position themselves as the evaluators of it. In this instantiation of masculine-determined obedience, women's faithfulness is understood in reference to male desires. The dissertation suspects that not only do these practices of improvement get translated as the work of salvation (i.e., faithfulness), but that they are internalized into the subject's own identity. Thus, women's obedience is equated with a certain kind of gender performativity that is coded theologically. Further, because this obedience-as-improvement registers as a salvific operation, women not only willingly participate within it, but often perpetuate it amongst themselves (e.g., mothers teaching daughters). Powerful examples of this complicated relationship between patriarchy and soteriology emerge in Christian self-help books around heterosexual romantic relationships. A brief consideration of some of these exhortations elucidate this point.

Salvation through Gender Roles

In 2001, John Eldredge published a book on recovering true masculinity that quickly became a bestseller in evangelical circles.⁴ A few years later he co-wrote a book with his wife Stasi Eldredge, *Captivating: Discovering the Secret of a Woman's Soul*, which was also widely circulated. Together the two books outlined the essence of masculinity and femininity as God intended in order to suggest how men and women might recover their intended gender

⁴ *Wild at Heart: Discovering the Secret of a Man's Soul* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2001). Four million copies sold [rt\(https://religionnews.com/2016/04/22/the-book-that-revolutionized-christian-manhood-15-years-after-wild-at-heart/\)](https://religionnews.com/2016/04/22/the-book-that-revolutionized-christian-manhood-15-years-after-wild-at-heart/).

roles and feel more fulfilled. Both authors found their interpretation of these gender roles in a reading of the creation story that essentializes male and female and contends that the creation story teaches gender roles.

Building upon her interpretation that God's creation of Eve indicates women's inherent relationality, Stasi Eldredge describes the inherent qualities of a woman, "She is inviting. She is vulnerable. She is tender. She embodies mercy."⁵ Following this line of thought, Eldredge interprets the Fall as the loss of these divinely-intended feminine qualities. Thus, embodying and pursuing these characteristics demonstrates women's attempts to be holy and faithful, as God intended them to be. In so doing, Eldredge makes biology theology, giving a very particular gender performance salvific import. Indeed, the proper performance of one's prescribed gender role elicits this performance in the opposite sex. She argues, "True femininity arouses true masculinity. Think about it--all those heroes in all those tales play the hero *because* there is a woman in his life, a true Beauty who is his inspiration. It's that simple and profound. True femininity calls forth true masculinity."⁶ Thus, the solution to sin (i.e., the working out of salvation) necessitates a reclamation of these roles.

While the interpretation of sin and the doctrine of creation is certainly at play in this theological formulation, the understanding of salvation underwrites this entire process. That is, a saved body has particular traits, behaviors and even appearance that correlate directly to their assigned sex. Put differently, demonstrating one's salvation and faithfulness means behaving and looking like a particular kind of woman or man. Salvation becomes a process

⁵ *Captivating: Discovering the Secret of a Woman's Soul* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2010), 31.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 151.

necessitating continuous performativity and because of the nature of patriarchy a performativity that requires constant self-improvement for women. The theological error that allows this slippage into patriarchal soteriology is the equating of biology and theology such that biology becomes the determinant for theology (i.e., if you have a male body, you must *x*).

Another theological error often leading to patriarchal soteriology happens when people map the God-human relationship onto human-human relationships. When interpreters use the difference between God and humans as analogous to how humans are different, they create a hierarchical ordering between humans (associating some with the God-position and some with the human). Furthermore, hierarchical human relationships are often assumed to be indicative of the kind of difference between God and humans, such that God's otherness (e.g., divinity, lordship, etc.) is programmatic for good hierarchy. Emerson Eggerichs provides a classic example of this error and its theological conclusions in his book on Christian relationships, *Love and Respect: The Love She Most Desires; The Respect He Desperately Needs*.

Drawing on an interpretation of Ephesians 5:23, Eggerichs argues that God created men to lead, provide, and protect and women who yearn to be "honored, valued and prized" (interesting that only males are doing the actions in this formulation).⁷ Practically, this means that men and women have different divinely intended roles that are biologically determined. Proceeding from this principle, Eggerichs asserts that men are inherently more sexually driven and visual than women while women naturally desire emotional intimacy and care. This leads him to advise the following for a healthy (hetero) relationship, "Sex for him and

⁷ Emerson Eggerichs, *Love and Respect* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2004), 53.

affection for you is a two-way street. Just as he should minister to your spirit to have access to your body, so, too, you should minister to his body if you want access to his spirit.”⁸ As an example of this faithfulness, Eggerichs details one wife’s “ministry” to her husband, “She decided to minister to her husband sexually, not because she particularly wanted to, but because she wanted to do it as unto Jesus Christ. She didn’t have that need for sex. It wasn’t within her, but she realized that this was about her husband’s need, and the Lord had spoken to her about meeting his need first.”⁹ Thus, the husband figures as Christ in the husband-wife relationship, and this relationship is transactional: she gets intimacy in exchange for sex.

Eggerichs finds this in an interpretation of Christ’s headship of the Church, “The husband has a need to be respected as the head, the one called upon to die. ‘Christ...is the head...[and] loved the church and gave himself up for her.’”¹⁰ Not only does this assume that Christ’s headship resembles (and thus justifies) masculinist notions of rulership, but it also positions men alongside divinity. While Eggerichs works hard to argue that this does not mean inequality, it is notable that this gender division has one side aligned with leadership and salvific action and the other with respectful reception. Furthermore, this demonstrates the infiltration of patriarchal soteriology both in the association of the masculine with Christianity’s salvific figure and in its interpretation of the crucifixion as a kind of heroic self-sacrifice.

Cultural interventions like the ones of Eggerichs and Eldredge responded to evangelical anxieties that had arisen around changing notions on gender and sex in the twentieth century on two fronts: 1) they resolved recent challenges to the internal logic of its

⁸ Ibid., 250.

⁹ Ibid., 249.

¹⁰ Ibid., 53.

theology and 2) they reaffirmed its perceived position as the organizing principle in society. Internally, the reinforcement of the gender binary and gender roles firmly affirmed evangelical Christianity's understanding of the created order (i.e., God created two sexes and gave them corresponding roles). Alternatives to this arrangement revealed a fracture that went to the core of this theology. If these alternatives were licit, why hadn't Christianity known about them before (since they claimed knowledge of creation and divine order)? Furthermore, if biology didn't determine innate capacity, then on what grounds did it base things like male leadership? For this reason, Christian theologies that had adopted a patriarchal framework perceived challenges to the patriarchal arrangement as an attack on Christian values and its ability to claim (and proclaim) divine knowledge.¹¹ Gender and sexual ethics thus became one of the most central concerns within evangelical Christianity. Defending and adhering to the patriarchal arrangement became a matter of defending Christianity and its claim to truth. In this way, gender performance and sexuality became matters of salvific import. How one aligned with the patriarchal framework declared one's adherence to the divinely intended created order. Additionally, this logic explained away the challenges to patriarchy that did emerge (e.g., feminists, the LGBTQIA movement, etc.) as sin and claimed adherence to its prescribed gender system as the solution. The defense of the patriarchy became caught up in evangelical concerns for self-protection against sin's ever-present threat of infiltration as well as evangelical impulses toward converting those outside Christianity. Thus, conversion to Christianity necessarily meant conversion to its beliefs on gender, sexuality and respective roles.

¹¹ This is akin to the theological crisis Sylvia Wynter tracks with the "discovery" of the New World.

Challenges to the patriarchal arrangement also threatened the Church's previously unchallenged position of power over social relationships (e.g., who was allowed to marry, divorce, have kids, have sex, etc.). The twentieth century witnessed a strong break with the Church in this regard (e.g., divorce, same-sex relationships, etc.), which heightened evangelical worry over how to understand and interpret these alternative "threats." Threats to patriarchy also meant a loss of influence and control for Christians and challenged the notion that they were the gatekeepers for truth. Put differently, it challenged the ideological grounds for how they understood themselves. The theological affirmation of patriarchy relieved these evangelical anxieties around the deterioration of the nuclear family, denounced the legitimacy of non-heterosexual (LGBTQIA) communities and relationships, and reinforced their sense of control by confirming their beliefs about the gender binary. In other words, this recovery of masculinity was not just a reaffirmation of a particular set of beliefs, but was an attempt to re-energize and reconfirm the patriarchal system and identity structures they were bound to. Because evangelical Christianity had married patriarchal beliefs to its ethics and soteriology, it worked hard to protect the patriarchal order it perceived to be salvific.

This produces a theological politic that reinforces the gender binary and positions women in reference to men and perpetuates the optic of women who need saving by men (while in practice women are held responsible for much of men's morality). This means that a saved man looks like the emulation of Christ-as-leader-and-true-man while a saved woman looks like the emulation of previously-fallen-and-now-redeemed-by-Christ humanity. Within this framework, Christian men are strong, spiritual leaders, authoritative and wise, while Christian women are beautiful, obedient and grateful for guidance from men. For women

(and people assigned this gender), this means that salvation is always already in reference to their biology and to men.

We must then ask: is salvation good for women?

Untangling Soteriology from Patriarchy

This dissertation aims to answer this question by analyzing the interactions and intermingling of patriarchy with Christian soteriology. Specifically, it studies one of patriarchy's most effective mechanisms of control and reproduction: self-improvement.

This project begins with an exploration of two pioneers who studied sexism within soteriology and Christology: Rosemary Radford Ruether and Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza. Radford Ruether has analyzed the way sexism infiltrated Christology and Schüssler Fiorenza extended this analysis to include how certain Christologies have been used to legitimize other forms of oppression. A close reading of Radford Ruether's seminal article, "Can a Male Savior Save Women?" will provide the broad theoretical framework for understanding how the doctrine of salvation is historically/culturally/socially situated. From this point, the chapter will turn to Schüssler Fiorenza's consideration of intersecting forms of oppression and how the answer cannot remain only within the sex/gender system.

This chapter will draw these two authors together in order to investigate how subject positions interact with the doctrine of salvation. Further than asking if a male savior can save women, this chapter will interrogate the underlying assumptions of a doctrine that privileges and normalizes some subjects more than others. Finally, it will lay out how the doctrine of salvation interacts with different subject positions and how salvation functions differently depending on the subject. This will establish the framework for how soteriology has functioned as a socio-theological reality, some of the problems that have manifested within this doctrine, and will begin to explore how this affects women differently (though this will

be explored more fully in chapter three). After establishing some of the problems within soteriology and its theological framework, the project turns to a consideration of how patriarchal soteriology is situated within a larger sociological context.

The second chapter uses the work of Sylvia Wynter and Denise Ferreira da Silva to outline the larger socio-political context for current constructions of soteriology. Wynter's notion of "Man" provides a starting point for understanding the confusion between patriarchy and soteriology in how they each function. Wynter's "Man" is reinforced and expanded by da Silva's concept of the "Patriarch Form," which makes explicit the racialized and gendered work within this system. The exploration of these terms reveals the parallels between patriarchy and Christian soteriology. These parallels demonstrate how patriarchy resourced Christianity's notions of conversion and a Savior to incorporate soteriological performances into its own agenda. Wynter and da Silva also explain how the patriarchy reproduces itself by claiming that the goal (e.g., wealth, liberation, happiness, salvation, etc.) can be achieved only by the hard work of approximation to the Man/Patriarch form (shortened to "Man" moving forward). The merit of this claim depends on Man also claiming universality, that there is no other framework or way of being outside this system. Both da Silva and Wynter demonstrate the fallacy of this claim by analyzing Man's hatred of and dependency on the other (herein lies an analysis of how race functions within this system). Da Silva's incorporation of a theoretical-mathematical formula of "hacking" foreshadows possible ways forward for undermining Man as a systemic reality. Understanding patriarchy's broader framework, its parallels to soteriological structures and how its mechanisms manifest help in the separation of soteriology from its patriarchal context. While da Silva and Wynter provide careful theoretical analysis of how these

sociological systems operate, they do not explore how this operates practically for different people.

The next chapter will look at how the work of salvation manifests within patriarchal soteriology as self-improvement, specifically for women. Following the work of Barbara Ehrenreich, Deidre English, Naomi Wolf and Kathy Peiss, this chapter will study the connection between praxis of salvation and women's participation in regimes of self-improvement. Specifically, it will study how self-improvement manifests within beauty culture as a mechanism of control and a tool weaponized against women that is compounded through race. Yet beauty culture also carries with it the possibility for subversion and liberation in its affirmation of women's own subjectivity and the designation of a cultural space specifically for women. Women's negotiation of this space demonstrates how patriarchal soteriology works itself out on the terrain of women's bodies, where the idea of what it looks like to be a saved woman mingles with masculine desires for power and control. Beauty culture demonstrates patriarchy's ability to transfer meaning between the subject and their physical appearance while dismissing it as purely superficial (and therefore irrelevant). Thus, beauty becomes one of patriarchy's most pernicious weapons. Drawing out the practical realities of how patriarchal soteriology affects women not only illuminates the stakes of soteriology's conflation with patriarchy, but it also proves its far-reaching effects.

From this point, the dissertation returns to theology proper asking: what kinds of soteriological formulations reveal an underlying vulnerability or commitment to patriarchy? The fourth chapter analyzes the doctrine of salvation in two prominent theologians: Catholic theologian Hans Urs Von Balthasar and Protestant ethicist Dietrich Bonhoeffer. The goal here is not to demonize either theologian, but rather to show the pervasiveness and ease

with which patriarchal soteriology has captured Christians' imagination of what it means to be saved.

Finally, the dissertation concludes with a constructive turn toward imagining a doctrine of salvation free from self-improvement. Using Alexander Weheliye's notion of *habeas viscus* as a lens and tool for breaking through patriarchal structures, the chapter explores the contributions of Delores Williams and her emphasis on Jesus' life and ministry as salvific. It then concludes with an exegesis of Jesus' trial and crucifixion, offering new insights for constructing a soteriology that does not repeat patriarchy's commitments. What emerges is the possibility of imagining salvation as something that has already been completed and thus opens up ongoing improvisations for how Christians may enact and manifest this reality.

Christians are caught within a vision of salvation that is wrapped up within patriarchal expectations to ceaselessly work toward their own self-improvement. Without understanding patriarchy's mechanisms and tools, it cannot be adequately dismantled. Without a careful analysis of patriarchy's infiltration into Christian soteriology, Christians risk perpetuating oppression, communicating that one's anatomy dictates the content of faithfulness. When Christianity and patriarchy's messages get confused, patriarchy transforms Christianity's notion of acceptance into an expectation for growth and the communication of an existing deficit. That is, Christian acceptance as a stasis ("you exist as enough already") transforms into "you will be enough *if*." While the content of the expected transformation continually changes, it often looks like becoming thin enough, hetero enough, able enough, white enough, beautiful enough, educated enough. If patriarchal soteriology remains intact, Christ becomes the powerful, divine, male, white engine that justifies this patriarchal regime. The stakes of this separation extend to Christian practice

itself; if patriarchal soteriology remains intact, Christian habitus and theology will continue teaching women that they are inherently inadequate, that faithfulness means they need to look a certain way. Taken to its conclusion, this would shift Christianity's invitation to growth and exploration into patriarchy's demand for everlasting self-improvement. Thus, Christianity itself transforms into yet another system of oppression, binding people within it even as it promises freedom.

Chapter 1

Subjectivity with Rosemary Radford Ruether and Elisabeth Schüssler

Fiorenza

At a basic level, the doctrine of salvation (soteriology) articulates how God solves the problem of sin and restores people into relationship with Godself. Often this doctrine also describes how God restores people into relationship with other people and with creation. In this sense, soteriology is about liberation. By defining how salvation is brought about, soteriology also provides instructions for people to understand their own salvation and how it is brought about. As such, soteriology shapes people's understanding of what actions are required (if any) of them to be saved. Thus, how Christians understand soteriology influences their understanding of God, themselves and what constitutes ethical behavior.

Theologians developed different soteriologies about exactly how God saved, what aspects of God's Incarnation were salvific, what was required from people in order to receive God's salvation, and what exactly humans were being saved from (i.e., definition of sin). Because soteriology gets at the core of Christianity and interacts with so many other pivotal doctrines, it deeply shapes Christian culture and behavior. Thus, soteriological beliefs influence interpretations of self, society, behavior, etc. Yet the reverse is also true and has been analyzed much less frequently. What happens when various cultural beliefs or practices become the starting point for developing a doctrine of salvation? Or more worrying, what happens when these influences come from oppressive systems of power? One of the most pervasive examples of this has been soteriology's coupling with patriarchy and its subsequent utilization of self-improvement.

The doctrine of salvation has become entangled with self-improvement such that it has begun functioning more as a tool for policing subjects rather than a liberative doctrine/belief system. That is, it has begun functioning as the antithesis of itself. This is demonstrated most clearly in the way the current iteration of the doctrine of salvation affects different subject positions (i.e., different bodies) differently. Rosemary Radford Ruether and Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza draw this out in each of their work. Radford Ruether identifies the way masculinity has influenced christology and traces the implications of this for women. Extrapolating from this, we can see the connection between Christianity's salvific figure and how the doctrine of salvation functions. Schüssler Fiorenza deepens the connection between doctrine and sociopolitical location with her work on *kyriarchy*.

This chapter will proceed with a biographical account of Rosemary Radford Ruether who was one of the first theologians to critically analyze sexism within theology. She was also one of the first women to actively address this in her work, and as a practicing Catholic draws this criticism to the center of Christian tradition. By analyzing her own sociopolitical location as something that deeply informs and motivates her work, this section provides a deeper understanding of the stakes within her theology. It will then perform a close reading of her work on masculinity within christology, drawing connections to a similar operation happening within soteriology.

The second half of the chapter will continue similarly with Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, whose contributions to feminist theology in the twentieth century exposed the continued collaboration between patriarchy and Christianity. Schüssler Fiorenza also expanded this critique to Christianity's complicity within other systems of oppression. As a Protestant, Schüssler Fiorenza also demonstrates that patriarchal soteriology pervades Christian theology without reference to these distinctions. This analysis situates her

theological work within the context of her life (i.e., her geographical, social, political, religious, and historical location). This connection between her life and theology (similar to the section on Radford Ruether) emphasizes the stakes for understanding how doctrine can be influenced by ideologies external to Christianity, most insidiously when it is influenced by systems of oppression. Furthermore, the methodological approach of attending to these author's subject positions also challenges the idea the patriarchal assumption that theology can emerge out of a vacuum as pure objective truth (an idea that will be analyzed fully in chapter two). From this point, the chapter will analyze Schüssler Fiorenza's treatment of the kyriarchy and how theology began differentiating its message according to the body receiving it.

Matricentric Enclaves: Rosemary Radford Ruether's Biography

Rosemary Radford Ruether was born in 1936 in St. Paul Minnesota and describes her upbringing as being raised in a "series of matricentric enclaves."

¹ Raised in a dedicated Roman Catholic family, Radford Ruether gained an early appreciation for religion that was later strengthened by her experience of Catholic school. After Radford Ruether's father passed away leaving a wife and three daughters behind, Radford Ruether's mother went to work as an accountant at a nearby real estate agency and Radford Ruether's Aunt Mary who worked as a social worker moved in. According to Radford Ruether, her oldest sister, Bequita, became the "boy" of the family, hanging storm windows and doing chores the other women could not manage. The powerful female influence on Radford Ruether's life extended beyond the five women at home to her schooling at Catholic grade school Dunblane Hall.

¹ Radford Ruether, *My Quests for Hope and Meaning*, (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2013), 1.

Though male priests were in exclusive control of church at the school, nuns handled all things related to the school. Radford Ruether describes how the nuns participated “as principals, as teachers, and sometimes playmates who took their turns at bat in baseball and joined us on sleds during snowy days.”² Significantly, the nuns equipped Radford Ruether not only with writing skills and academic prowess, but also with a sense of self-sufficiency as a female. She notes, “Our sister (the nuns) were affirming of females. They even hinted that girls were better than boys; perhaps smarter students.”³ This affirmation by women and role models of strong women grew exponentially when the Radford Ruether family moved to La Jolla, California in 1952.

In La Jolla, Radford Ruether was yet again surrounded by independent, politically minded women who were active in cultural and social concerns. Amongst these women was Helen Marston Beardsley who was a close friend of her mother’s. Helen was a political and social activist who founded the San Diego chapters for the American Civil Liberties Union and the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom. She fought for farmworkers’ rights to assemble, protested wars, and was a proud member of the Socialist party. Describing Beardsley’s influence on her, Radford Ruether notes “On several occasions, Helen invited me to come with her to these anti-war and pro-farmworkers demonstrations, thus beginning my political education.”⁴ This participation within social and political activism would continue throughout Ruther’s entire life. Her commitment to activism that fought for equality and social justice intensified after her experience at Scripps College and Claremont Graduate School.

² Ibid., 4.

³ Ibid., 4.

⁴ Ibid., 6-7.

Though Radford Ruether attended an all-female college and surrounded herself with a “female-centered core community,” she also experienced significant sexism at college. According to Radford Ruether, Scripps’s college was not at this time a feminist school, and the hierarchy of the school (professors, principals, etc.) was very male-dominated.⁵ The message communicated therein was that women were inferior teachers and ill-suited for leadership. Though Radford Ruether gained much of the academic foundation for her career from Scripps’ and Claremont, it was not without experiences that bolstered her passion for equality. One such experience was with Robert Palmer, a professor who advised her undergraduate work and encouraged her to pursue graduate work (which she did). Radford Ruether describes her experience with Palmer when she tried to turn in her dissertation,

I was happy at my survival, with a completed dissertation, so imagine my surprise when, with a third baby on my hip, I turned in my painfully typed doctoral manuscript (no computers in those days) to Robert Palmer, who had mentored me from being a freshman undergraduate through a completed PhD. Instead of congratulating me, he grumbled that I was letting him down by going off to teach, somewhere else, rather than remain as his permanent teaching assistant. I was stunned! Did this man really think I had done a PhD to continue for the rest of my life as his teaching assistant in Humanities! Did he perhaps, despite his pressing me to do doctoral work, never really imagine that I could grow up to be his peer! This incident was my final confrontation with the deep patriarchalism of Scripps’ male faculty of the 1950s and ‘60s.⁶

Thus, Radford Ruether began encountering firsthand how systemic oppression and religion were not mutually exclusive and indeed seemed oddly compatible. Sexism was not the only issue of inequality to come onto Radford Ruether’s radar around this time.

During her final years at Claremont College, Radford Ruether became involved in ecumenical chaplaincy. The central issue for their activism was Civil Rights for African

⁵ Ibid., 8.

⁶ Ibid., 10.

Americans, and Radford Ruether became involved in this work. In the spring of 1965, she joined a delegation of students traveling to Mississippi to fight for civil rights there. Radford Ruether describes this experience as a significant one that was a “turning point in [her] own self-awareness.”⁷ The previous year had been a violent one in Mississippi; three civil rights workers had been murdered by Mississippi Klansmen. This would be Radford Ruether’s first experience knowingly risking her wellbeing in order to do what she believed was right.

Radford Ruether describes one experience during her stay at the college dorms in Mississippi that made her acutely aware of this risk.

A few weeks before we arrived, a group of Ku Klux Klansmen had driven through the campus one night shooting at the windows of the buildings. No one had been hurt but Buelah organizers had set up a night vigil, served by a rotating committee, to guard against such an incident in the future. If such night riders appeared again, the watch group were to ring a bell, and everyone was to dive under the beds to protect themselves from bullets coming through the windows. This seemed pathetically inadequate protection but I dutifully took my place in the night vigils, acutely aware of our vulnerability in a world of open war between civil rights workers and White racists.⁸

The significance here is not to adulate Radford Ruether’s willingness to risk bodily harm, but to note the connection between her faith, work and experiences with people whose reality was starkly different from her own. That is, in this experience Radford Ruether seems to be gaining a growing understanding of her own subjectivity (e.g., race, class, geography, etc.).⁹

⁷ Ibid., 11.

⁸ Ibid., 12.

⁹ Michel Foucault develops the idea of subjectivity in his book *History of Sexuality Vol. 1*. For Foucault, subjectivity is not just who one is, but the concrete activity that constitutes the relationship of the self to itself. For example, how a white person understands, relates to and acts as it relates to their whiteness is one aspect of their subjectivity. In this example, “white” is the person’s subject position and their relationship to whiteness is their subjectivity. This term proves helpful for our argument as it explains the relationship between subject position and subjectivity. This is a helpful way for understanding the christological dilemma Radford Ruether is attempting to analyze and her own relationship to it.

Indicative of this is how she began wondering how racism was happening in her own hometown of Los Angeles in ways of which she was previously unaware. Detailing her experiences resisting the Ku Klux Klan, Radford Ruether notes, “My summer in Mississippi was a decisive turning point for me. For the first time I got a glimpse of what White America looked and felt like from the side of Black people. I realized that this was a very different world from that shaped by and for Whites like me...You only begin to glimpse the full reality of a society if you locate yourself in the disadvantaged sector and look at it from that context.”¹⁰ This demonstrates the way Radford Ruether began developing an awareness of how life experiences were deeply influenced by intersecting forms of privilege/oppression.

This growing awareness of the intersection of systems of oppression extended to Radford Ruether’s own religion. Radford Ruether recounts attempting to go with a few of her friends (both black and white) to a White Baptist Church while she was in Mississippi, “As we approached, we heard the windows banging shut. A delegation of church leaders met us at the door with a printed statement to the effect that God had decreed the separation of races, and humans were not to change these god-given patterns. We were not allowed to enter, and went back to our Black church, duly warned.”¹¹ In this incident, Radford Ruether acts against the privilege of her own subjectivity as a white person. This experience is also indicative of Radford Ruether’s budding realization that her own faith could be mobilized to perpetuate the very oppression she was trying to dismantle. It’s no coincidence that only two

Michel Foucault, *History of Sexuality: Volume 1 An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1990).

¹⁰ Ibid., 14.

¹¹ Ibid., 12-13.

years later, Radford Ruether published *The Church Against Itself*, which offered a searing critique of the institutionalized church as a site of oppression and anti-missional work.

After the summer Radford Ruether spent in Mississippi, she accepted a job teaching at Howard University. Initially Radford Ruether was offered to teach just one class at Howard (historical theology). She must have performed admirably in her role because the next year she was offered a full-time position and taught at Howard for ten years. Significantly, Radford Ruether taught there at the beginning of the Civil Rights movement and found herself in the interesting position of teaching the emerging field of black theology to her primarily black students. Her commitment to examining the way subjectivity interfaced with religion remained a primary focus at this time and was likely reinforced by her experiences there. Two years before she left Howard University, Radford Ruether published *Faith and Fratricide: the Theological Roots of Anti-Semitism*. This text argued that the roots of anti-Semitism were not modern deviations from Christianity but built into the earlier iterations of Christology. Though it may seem like an unusual time and place to reflect on ancient christology, this text reveals Radford Ruether's willingness to interrogate the foundations of her religion in order to root out the theological justification/foundations for oppressive structures. With WWII only thirty years earlier, Radford Ruether obviously understood the practical stakes for how these theologies could be mobilized on the ground. She also understood that a thorough analysis of the theological ideologies that made racism possible needed to be studied at their roots, not just their surface-level manifestations. Though the connection is not explicit, Radford Ruether's life experiences (e.g., sexism at Claremont, racism in Mississippi and teaching at Howard University during the Civil Rights Movement, etc.) deeply shaped the kind of theology she produced her entire life.

Radford Ruether's biography demonstrates that she accounted for the role of subjectivity in theology. That is, Radford Ruether seems to understand that who one is deeply informs the kinds of theological questions they will ask and how they will answer them. Radford Ruether's response to this was to pursue relationships with people whose experience of the world was different from her own, especially if her work engaged them. Explaining this orientation toward the world, Radford Ruether notes, "You only begin to glimpse the full reality of a society if you locate yourself in the disadvantaged sector and look at it from that context."¹² Part of Radford Ruether's theological methodology is itself a way of being in the world and cannot be separated from her life experiences. In this way, an understanding of her biography informs interpretations of her work and provides the foundation for the following analysis.

Radford Ruether's formation by strong, independent women (what she termed a "matricentric enclave") and her subsequent experiences shaped the possibilities of Radford Ruether's work and informed its content. The presence of strong women in Radford Ruether's childhood normalized women pursuing their desires and satisfying their own needs. It also provided the backdrop of stark contrast when she began experiencing sexism firsthand. Her developing interest in other forms of oppression sprang from her own

¹² Ibid., 14. Radford Ruether describes using this approach when she studied Israel-Palestine in the 1980s, Nicaragua in the 80s, and South Africa under apartheid in 1989.

While I want to heartily pause over Radford Ruether's instincts to move into relationship with those whose experience of the world was different from her own, I am wary of the colonistic impulse (I experience in my own life) to engage the world as a resource to be harvested. This impulse would come online even more poignantly as a white Westerner attempts to relate to non-white, non-Westerners. If this is the case, non-white people and their experiences provide the resource of this knowledge and perspective that white people otherwise have no access to. This should not diminish or deny the need for relationships between people from different subject positions but should absolutely nuance them (especially when there are distinctly different power positions between them).

experiences of discrimination and fostered an awareness of her own role within them. That is, Radford Ruether began to confront the complicated and conflicting reality within her own self of being both a victim of oppression and a perpetrator of it. This self-awareness combined with a commitment to justice led Radford Ruether to expand her writing to the environment, ecofeminism, and sexism within the Church. One of the ways this manifested was in Radford Ruether's interrogation of Catholicism's relationship with patriarchy. Specifically, she examined patriarchal commitments within christology and drew out the implications for women.

Masculinist Christology: A History and a Problem

As the saving figure within Christianity, Jesus Christ and theological interpretations of Christ are at the heart of soteriology. Interpretations of Christ inform how we understand Christ functioning as a Savior. Thus, questions on the relationship between Christ's body and *how* Christ saved have remained prescient for Christians for centuries. One of the perennial questions Christians have encountered has been how to navigate and interpret the particularities of Christ's human body. Was Christ male? If so, was it necessary for Christ to be male? Historically, answers to this question have not been favorable to women. For Radford Ruether, the christologies that drew theological implications from Jesus' masculine body not only justified her exclusion from the priesthood, but also gave men theological grounds for claiming leadership over her. As much of this behavior had strong parallels with patriarchy's justification of male superiority, this led Radford Ruether to begin questioning the possibility of sexism's infiltration into christology. Radford Ruether tackles this side of Christology in the penultimate chapter of her book, *To Change the World, Christology and Cultural Criticism*. Beginning with a brief historical overview, Radford Ruether then gestures at the theological stakes within Christology and finally offers three alternative models for

Christology. Throughout this chapter, Radford Ruether demonstrates an awareness that theological doctrines (that are theoretically supposed to affect everyone the same) do not affect all people the same way. Further, Radford Ruether observes that many of the theologians responsible for this narrowed theology seem adversely impacted by their own privilege (or interests). That is, men have produced theology that advantages men and reproduces (rather than undermining as it should) the standing systems of oppression. A close reading of her work here reveals both the connection between subjectivity and theology as well as soteriology's dependency upon maleness as the normative category.

Arguing that theologians most frequently use the doctrine of Christology against women, Radford Ruether cites Thomas Aquinas for providing the clearest formulation of this sexism. She notes, "Aquinas argued that the male is the normative or generic sex of the human species. Only the male represents the fullness of human potential, whereas woman by nature is defective physically, morally and mentally."¹³ Aquinas believed in a hierarchical ordering of the world where God stood at the top as sheer actuality and males emulated this actuality by being the principle (read form or template) for all of humanity. Females, on the other hand, functioned as matter and potential. This meant that women received or responded to action but were not active agents in the way men were. This formulation mapped directly onto Aquinas' theology in his interpretation of the *imago dei*, "But as regards a secondary point, God's image is found in man in a way in which it is not found in woman; for man is the beginning and the end of woman, just as God is the beginning and end of all

¹³ Radford Ruether, *To Change the World: Christology and Cultural Criticism* (Wipf and Stock: 1989), 45.

creation.”¹⁴ Significantly, woman’s inferior position is not a result of the Fall, but is inherent to her very nature (not that this would solve everything). Radford Ruether notes the significance of this theological stance for Christology,

Therefore it follows that the incarnation of the Logos of God into the male is not a historical accident, but an ontological necessity. The male represents wholeness of human nature, both in himself and as the head of the woman. He is the fullness of the image of God, whereas woman by herself does not represent the image of God and does not possess wholeness of humanity.¹⁵

This had repercussions for women’s relationship and status within the Church.

If woman could not represent the full image of God and had a “misbegotten” nature, then it followed for Aquinas that she could not represent headship in the Church.¹⁶ Radford Ruether crystalizes this connection between sex and theology, “Just as Christ had to be incarnated in the male, so only the male can represent Christ.”¹⁷ Thus women are not only inherently inferior, but also limited in their participation within the Church. Historically, women have been barred from priesthood and most other leadership positions within the Church (some Protestant churches have amended this in just the last several centuries). Men have justified this on a variety of theologically questionable grounds including bride-bridegroom symbolism and simple physical resemblance.¹⁸ Radford Ruether observes the

¹⁴ Sister Prudence Allen, *The Concept of Woman* (Grand Rapids, 1985), 389. From Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, op. cit., 1a, 93, 4.

¹⁵ Radford Ruether, *To Change the World*, 45.

¹⁶ Much of Aquinas’ theology about the relationship of males & females to God followed the philosophy of Aristotle. Aristotle argued that women had a “misbegotten” nature but did not make theological claims about this. By taking up Aristotle’s philosophy in a theological register, Aquinas makes biology theology. From this platform, he can argue for a natural order of the world. Physical markers now carry theological weight and can be theologically interpreted. This move is curious considering Jesus’ own denunciation that physical markers indicated theological truths (John 9).

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 45.

¹⁸ E.g., the Vatican Declaration against the Ordination of Women, 1976.

absurdity of males accepting sexual fluidity within the symbolism while applying it rigidly to females, “Obviously only males can be bridegrooms, although, oddly enough, these writers find no difficulty in the idea that males, in the laity, are ‘brides’.”¹⁹ These double standards reveal the intrusion of an external bias into theological interpretation. Summarizing this, Radford Ruether notes, “It is taken for granted that this symbol system of bridegroom over bride, as head over body, male over female, is revealed truth, rather than itself being simply a projection of a certain male-dominated social order.”²⁰ The infiltration of presiding hierarchies of power into theology troubles the certainty of theological accuracy when the people creating it are also those in places of power.

Within this vein, the Vatican released the Declaration against the Ordination of Women in 1976 that stated that there must be a physical resemblance between the priest and Christ. According to the declaration, this did not limit people of different races or economic classes from representing Christ, but really only applied to sex. Within this formulation, biology now carries theological weight. Put differently, biology now determines proximity to God and the divine. Radford Ruether notes about this, “we must assume this imitation of Christ has now been reduced to one essential element, namely, male sex.”²¹ Radford Ruether names the problematic connection between theology and biology, “It reveals the extent of the contradiction between the message of Jesus as redeemer of all humanity ‘in which there

¹⁹ Ibid., 46.

²⁰ Ibid., 46.

²¹ Ibid., 47.

It’s also significant that the Vatican here seems to be conflating physical appearance with biological sex (and reducing sex into only two categories: male or female). This demonstrates a colonistic assumption that what can be observed/seen about a body is what is true about that body. That is, subjectivity--how one understands, narrates, and lives out their existence out of the particularity of their body-- has been erased.

is neither male nor female' (Gal. 3.28), and the construction of christology through symbols that make it the instrument of patriarchal domination."²² From this point, Radford Ruether asks the question: "Can christology be liberated from its encapsulation in the structures of patriarchy and really become an expression of liberation of women? Or is it so linked with symbols of male-dominance that it is unredeemable as good news for women?"²³ This question motivates and informs Radford Ruether's christology.²⁴

Masculinist Christology: A Solution?

Radford Ruether suggests three models of christology for evaluating its ability to escape patriarchal influence: 1) the imperial christ, 2) the androgynous christ, and 3) the prophetic iconoclastic christ. According to Radford Ruether's descriptions, each model had popularity among Christians in different historical periods. A brief account of these three models followed by Radford Ruether's analysis of them will demonstrate how the patriarchy can influence christology. It will also reveal Radford Ruether's early intuition about subjectivity's relationship with power in theology.

Imperial Christ

According to Radford Ruether, the imperial Christ was a product of Christianity's "twin heritages": Hebrew messianism and Greek philosophy.²⁵ Hebrew messianism believed a Messiah would come in the form of a warrior-king and would restore oppressed Israel to a

²² Ibid., 47

²³ Ibid., 47.

²⁴ I suspect that the connection extends beyond the one Radford Ruether names (christology and patriarchy) and includes the connection between subjectivity and theology. That is, the body one is born with carries the meaning of who they are and what faithfulness looks like according to the particularities of that body. For now, we will stay with Radford Ruether's analysis of patriarchy's influence upon christology.

²⁵ Ibid., 48.

position of power over all other nations. This change in power was not an eradication of the system itself, but more a matter of restoring the proper ruler. Said differently, the problem was not the hierarchical ordering of power amongst peoples and nations, but that the “correct” ruler was not in place to make sure the whole system functioned properly.

This paired well with Greek philosophy, which argued for a hierarchical organization of the world and added to it the concept of the divine Logos or “Nous” of God. This Nous of God was not only the agent of creation, but also the “means through which the universe is governed.”²⁶ This set up a hierarchical ‘chain of Being’ that determined the framework for human relationships. Radford Ruether explains, “Just as the Nous of God governs nature, so the Greeks must govern barbarians, masters govern slaves and men govern women. The free Greek male is seen as the natural aristocrat, representing mind and headship in nature. Women, slaves and barbarians are the ‘body people’ who must be governed, who are ‘servile by nature.’”²⁷ This philosophy was both descriptive and prescriptive. It was descriptive in that it claimed these differences between people were inherent differences in kind (meaning these are inherent capacities not related to individual disposition or character traits). By arguing for a chain of being established by a higher principle, Greek philosophy prescribed how people *should* be ordered. In so doing, Greek philosophy utilized a framework compatible with Christian soteriology in that both relied on a higher organizing principle and asserted a vision for how people should relate. Greek philosophy, however, introduced a soteriological formulation that rooted this order in biology. When brought together, Hebrew

²⁶ Ibid., 48.

²⁷ Ibid., 48.

messianism and Greek philosophy produced a salvation that looked like proper organization of this order, effected by a Messiah who is its proper leader.

By this logic, salvation actually looks different according to one's subject position. A "saved body" demonstrates its salvation by occupying and living into their designated position within the chain of being (woman, child, master, slave, etc.). Masters, for example, participate in maintaining this order through governing those lower in the social order (e.g., women, slaves, etc.). This then is not simply a matter of what they are entitled to, but a work of salvation itself. That is, masters demonstrate their salvation by governing, but also create the conditions for others (slaves, women, etc.) to live out their own salvation by submitting to them. For other subject positions, participation within this order is not necessarily a matter of attaining the position of the patriarch (unless you are the "right kind" of male: cisgender, heterosexual, etc.), but rather living in proper reference *to* the patriarch. A woman, for example, might do this by submitting to her husband while also ruling her children and slaves. A free male child might do this by submitting to his mother while learning to emulate/approximate himself to his father.

Thus, imperial christology sacralized the patriarchy itself as a salvific order. More than this, it created a framework with two significant effects: 1) it was nearly impossible to question or overturn unless you were in a position of power (a patriarch) and 2) it kept the position of patriarch immoveable while allowing the definition of it to change. This latter effect meant that the entire operation could translate itself across changing times and cultures while retaining the hierarchical order and claiming it as the same, God-given order.²⁸

²⁸ See also Emil Brunner and Karl Barth's discussion on Natural Theology. While it is beyond the scope of this dissertation to engage natural theology, the procedure is quite similar. Barth's critique of natural theology was that humans could not get behind their own

Thus, imperial christology reflected the trending ideal patriarch. Dismissing this as an option that holds no liberative possibilities for women, Radford Ruether turns to androgynous christology.

Androgynous Christology:

Some early church leaders recognized the seeming inherent difficulty for women within imperial christology and ideologies that seemed to equate masculinity with holiness. How could a woman aspire to a level of faithfulness that a male could achieve by pure virtue of being born male? Rather than question the entire system, however, androgynous christologies sought to solve the “problem” of being female by developing a theology by which women could either transcend their sex or actually transition into male. Building upon Paul’s words “there is neither male nor female” (Gal. 3:28), this ideology argued that women achieved this by “abolishing their roles as sexual persons and mothers.”²⁹ Furthering this argument, the early Christian text, the Gospel of the Egyptians accounts Jesus as saying “‘I have come to destroy the works of the female’, ie., sexual desire and procreation (ch. 9.63).”³⁰ Thus, the problem of femaleness is solved not by overturning the hierarchical relationship of the sexes but by eradicating femaleness altogether. Radford Ruether summarizes, “Maleness and femaleness are still seen as opposite principles standing for mind and spirit *versus* sense, body and sexuality. The two are brought together in a male-centred

beginning to claim interior knowledge of a “divine order.” Barth identified the first effect named above (impossible to question) and realized that when paired with a hierarchy that claimed divine truths about humans, it could be weaponized to legitimate systems of oppression (c.f., Nazi Germany).

²⁹ Ibid., 49.

³⁰ Ibid., 50.

concept of the self in which the female is neutralized.”³¹ Some communities promoting an androgynous christology were a bit more friendly to females.

Julian of Norwich wrote prolifically about Christ, often describing him with female attributes. Jesus incorporates the roles of mother and father, feeding Christians with his own body and nurturing them with his milk. Though it seems that some Christians at this time accommodated a view of Christ where traits associated with femaleness (e.g., breastfeeding, bleeding, etc.) were incorporated into Christ, this did not improve the status of women within the system. Radford Ruether explains, “It is doubtful that Julian’s society would have allowed her to reverse the relation and give to women, through Christ, the right to exercise the male prerogatives.”³² In a way, androgynous Christ consumes femaleness to his own gain without changing the status of females in any significant way. By this logic then, “male and female” *do* still remain within early iterations of this christology.

Later developments of androgynous christology improved views on women. In the thirteenth century, the Joachimites believed that Christ would return for a third time in the form of a woman. Just as Christ had been the new Adam, this second Christ would be the new Eve. Later developments around this shifted to argue that it was actually the Spirit who would be incarnated as a female and would inaugurate women as spiritual leaders. Proponents of these theologies were regarded as monstrous heretics and were promptly stomped out.

Much later in the eighteenth century a Quaker sect called the Shakers argued again for a coming female Messiah who would complete redemption, but this vision shifted as

³¹ Ibid., 50.

³² Ibid., 50.

cultural ideas around womanhood also changed. In the twentieth century, political and economic patterns shifted and began defining normative woman as the “bourgeois housewife.”³³ At the same time, religion moved from the public to the private sphere. The combination of these two things cast women in a spiritual light. Qualities previously derided as weak were now associated with a higher spiritual goodness. Radford Ruether elaborates, “woman’s sweetness and goodness was fragile and [could] be preserved only by the strictest segregation in the home and renunciation of all desire for education, influence or leadership...the female comes to be seen as the ‘better half’, representing redemptive qualities that will uplift and perfect humanity.”³⁴ Thus, a saved woman looked like an obedient wife, a loving mother, a good housekeeper. The appearance of extending privilege while maintaining complete control characterized this last iteration of androgynous christology. Furthermore, it exacerbated differences between different women. Not all women were wealthy enough to stay home and run a household, and most commonly these privileges ran across racial lines. Common throughout each of these theologies is the sense that the standing christologies did not adequately address the “problem” of femaleness and salvation for women.

While androgynous christology was distinctly friendlier to women, it failed to solve the problems within christology because it left the system in place. This system made biology theology, claiming that theological doctrines worked differently on different bodies and

³³ Ibid., 52.

Lisa A. Keister calls this the “culture of domesticity” in her book *Inequality: A Contemporary Approach to Race, Class, and Gender* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012). 228.

³⁴ Ibid., 52-3.

inevitably justified those in power. From this point, Radford Ruether turns to her last form of christology: prophetic iconoclastic christology.

Prophetic Iconoclastic Christology:

Liberation theologies in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries built upon christology, reading it through the lenses of power and oppression. This reading of Jesus does not support existing ruling classes and instead offers a sharp critique against those benefiting from systems of power. Liberation theologies read the synoptic gospels as an overarching drama in which Christ consistently reveals and denounces systemic oppression. Summarizing this interpretation, Radford Ruether notes, “The leaders of the religious establishment are blind guides and hypocrites, while the outcasts of the society, socially and morally, prostitutes, publicans, Samaritans, are able to hear the message of the prophet...the gospel turns upside down the present order; the first shall be last and the last first.”³⁵ Unlike the previous two models, however, this is not simply a revision of the hierarchical system or an equalization of power, but an overturning of the entire model. Radford Ruether explains, “This reversal of order is not simply a turning upside down of the present hierarchy but aims at a new order where hierarchy itself is overcome as a principle of rule.”³⁶ The fact that the model has been overturned and not simply reorganized has dramatic effects on social organization. Interpretations on servitude reveal this most powerfully.

Prophetic iconoclastic christology challenges the possibility of current oppressors ordering those below them to serve in the name of Christian obedience (and verses that encourage servitude). Conversely, it also does not simply install previous servants as new

³⁵ Ibid., 53.

³⁶ Ibid., 53.

masters who will reproduce old hierarchies of power. As demonstrated in Christ, servanthood is only possible from a place of liberation and consistent resistance to systems of power. Radford Ruether explains how Christ initiates this new mode of existence toward power, “This is why neither existing lords nor existing servants can serve as a model for this servanthood, but only the Christ, the messianic person, who represents a new kind of humanity. The essence of servanthood is that it is possible only for liberated persons, not people in servitude.”³⁷ The theological truth guiding this christology argues that “God as liberator acts in history to liberate all through opting for the poor and the oppressed of the present system.”³⁸ Though Radford Ruether does not name it in this way, what is significant about this model is that it addresses subjectivity and its relationship to theology. That is, it draws an awareness to who one is in relation to systems of power and then relates this to theology. Whereas previous models equated subject positions with theological truth (e.g., maleness equals ruling capacity) and claimed this as an unquestionable truth, prophetic iconoclastic christology casts a spotlight on subject positions, claiming that how one lives out their subject position demonstrates their relationship to Christ and “his” liberative message. This proves immensely emancipatory for women.

With the dismantling of a system that claims subject positions as unquestionable inherent truths, women are neither held captive to or limited by these “truths”. It also eliminates the possibility of women only being interpreted as in-relation-to males. Radford Ruether explains the problem with systems that define subjects as universal principles and why attempts that do not eliminate this action are insufficient:

³⁷ *ibid.*, 54.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 54.

These gnostic and romantic traditions abstract the human person as male and female into a dualism of opposite principles, masculinity and femininity. They give different valuations to each side and then try to set up a scheme to unite the two in a new whole. This sets up an insoluble problem for human personhood until these qualities labelled masculine and feminine are seen as the product of social power relations rather than 'nature'. 'Woman-as-body-sensuality' and 'woman-as-pure-altruistic-love' are both abstractions of human potential created when one group of people in power is able to define other groups of people over against themselves. To abstract these definitions into eternal essences is to miss the social context in which these definitions arise.³⁹

Radford Ruether has identified here a key element for developing a christology cleansed of its patriarchal inclinations. The act of equating subject positions with universal principles establishes a mechanism where those in power always have the ability to retain their power simply by claiming that subject position. By removing this possibility and incorporating the key tenets of liberation theology, Radford Ruether opens up the possibility for a liberative christology.

Christ-as-liberator creates a christology that challenges and exposes systems of power and actively fights for their dismantling. Radford Ruether expands this notion, "Jesus as liberator calls for a renunciation and dissolution of this web of status relationships by which societies have defined privilege and unprivilege."⁴⁰ When read through this lens, Christ's interactions with women are not indicative of some universal principles, but as humans encountering one another. Furthermore, Christ's salvific capacities are not bound to his masculinity or maleness. If anything, his salvific and liberative actions resist power and privilege including those presented to him because of his maleness, "His ability to be liberator does not reside in his maleness, but, on the contrary, in the fact that he has renounced this system of domination and seeks to embody in his person the new humanity

³⁹ Ibid., 55.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 56.

of service and mutual empowerment.”⁴¹ The removal of the mechanism that equates subject positions with theological truths increases the possibility of this christology being liberative for women, and of the three christologies Radford Ruether analyzes, it is the only one to do so. The ability of this prophetic iconoclastic christology to execute this liberation remains a question however. Radford Ruether brings unprecedented attention to the connection between subject position and theology.

It is not surprising that Radford Ruether spies out the problems with subject position and power considering her experiences on both sides of systems of domination. As someone who experienced oppression as a woman and came to recognize her privilege as a white person, Radford Ruether has the helpful vantage point for understanding how these systems operate and why they are dangerous. Furthermore, Radford Ruether’s experiences with the Church upholding systems of oppression (e.g., her experience with racist churchgoers in Mississippi) likely deepened her awareness of how the Church participated in and developed theologies that could justify oppression. Thus, religion did not guarantee a defacto absolution from systems of oppression. Quite the opposite, it seemed to contain the infrastructure necessary to justify these systems (e.g., the hierarchical organization of people in the imperial christology). Yet Radford Ruether also identified within Christianity liberative possibilities. Not only does Radford Ruether’s biography teach us the well-informed and personal stakes of her theology, but it is itself a performance of how subjectivity and subject position inform and influence theology. The complex intersections of Radford Ruether’s identity and experiences affected what capacities she would have and what kinds of

⁴¹ Ibid., 56.

theological concerns would motivate her.⁴² Viewing her work as intimately connected to the specificity of who she is illustrates how all theology should be interpreted and how it has decidedly *not* been interpreted. Masculine and patriarchal theologies position themselves as neutral, unbiased theologies (as if there is such a thing). Beyond this attention to biographical particularity, Radford Ruether's life held together with her theology shows clearly how the setup of some theologies affect different bodies differently.

Both imperial and androgynous christologies demonstrate the dangers of either making theology biology or making biology a problem to be overcome (specifically non-male biology). On the one hand, this makes theological claims about someone purely based on their anatomy. On the other, it fails to acknowledge the goodness of bodily particularity by suggesting that there is no significance of Christ's particularities. Both options provide little theological resources for engaging with the way systems of power interact with different bodies. Furthermore, they demonstrate how christology can be used to reinforce these hierarchical systems. Radford Ruether's analysis of each christology highlights the stakes of dismantling the mechanism of equating subject positions with theological truths.

Overall, Radford Ruether's interrogation of sexism within christology opens up the two larger theological errors that extended to soteriology: making biology theology and the

⁴² This stance is not to be confused with essentialism or nature arguments (in the nature-nurture debates) that determine all of who a person is or will be. Rather, it reflects a synthetic combination of nature and nurture, that who people are is unique to them but shaped by the environments that work upon them, which in turn becomes part of their "natural" wiring (see Anthony Auger and Kristin Olesen's article, "Brain Sex Differences and the Organization of Juvenile Social Play Behavior," which describes the effects of rough and tumble play on the brains of developing mice). A. P. Auger and K. M. Olesen, "Brain Sex Differences And The Organisation Of Juvenile Social Play Behaviour", *Journal Of Neuroendocrinology* 21, no. 6 (2009): 519-525, doi:10.1111/j.1365-2826.2009.01871.x.

mapping of God-human relationship onto human relationships. Though she does not name these as such, Radford Ruether draws this out via her attention to subject position as it relates to christology and her attention to social justice. That said, Radford Ruether's analysis focused solely on the problem of sexism within christology and as such does not address the full scope of the problem in patriarchal soteriology. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza offers a complementary analysis of christology but extends this beyond the sex/gender system by analyzing how many christologies privilege certain bodies over others. As with Radford Ruether, an understanding of Fiorenza's biography helps situate her analysis.

Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza

When asked if she remembered her first book, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza recalls, "I remember that one of my first books was partially damaged--because of the war, books were rare and often damaged--but it was about a little engine, you could see how it went up the hill."⁴³ Schüssler Fiorenza's early memory of *The Little Engine that Could* provides an almost too-perfect metaphor of a life lived in persistent resistance to many forms of oppression. To put it in her own language, Schüssler Fiorenza's life is a microcosm of the many ways intersecting forms of oppression (what Schüssler Fiorenza terms "kyriarchy") manifests. In her own life, Schüssler Fiorenza experienced kyriarchy through her experiences with war, immigration, class, and gender.

Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza was born in Cenad, Romania in 1938 to an ethnically German family. At this time, Romania was allied with Germany and was on the frontlines of war with the Soviet Union. Consequently, Schüssler Fiorenza's early childhood was turbulent to say the least. When she was six, she fled Romania with her parents when the Soviet

⁴³ Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, interview by author, Skype, Feb. 27, 2019.

Union invaded. Schüssler Fiorenza's family walked (the children rode in horse-drawn wagons) from one village to the next, moving through Hungary to Austria where they stayed for a year before moving to central Germany. Schüssler Fiorenza describes the experience of fleeing as mostly a "great adventure" as she was too young to recognize the dangers around her.⁴⁴ At one point, Schüssler Fiorenza's family had to pull her away from investigating a dead soldier because there was shooting all around them. Even so, Schüssler Fiorenza does recall a vague awareness of women fearing sexual assault by Russian soldiers and struggles around food. Her grandmother had to beg for their food as they fled from city to city. In her family, the children always ate first so Schüssler Fiorenza never starved, though one particular story illustrates the stress the adults experienced.

Once, in Hungary, I recall my grandmother managed to bring us a big strudel cake...The grownups--my aunts, my grandmother, my mother; there were no men around--all sat around and cried, while my younger brother, who is two years younger than I, ate. We could not understand what was going on; we were just so happy to get this great strudel cake!⁴⁵

Though her youth spared her from understanding much of what was going on, it's clear that Schüssler Fiorenza's family was deeply affected by the trauma of being refugees. Indeed, more than the specific traumas of war, Schüssler Fiorenza names being an immigrant and a refugee as having deep influence upon her theology. This immigrant status would follow Schüssler Fiorenza her entire life when she moved permanently to the United States in 1970 but did not pursue citizenship (because of objections to the Pledge of Allegiance). She comments about this liminal status, "When I go back to Germany, I am the American. As

⁴⁴ Schüssler Fiorenza, "Looking Back, Looking Around, Looking Ahead: An Interview with Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza," in *Toward a New Heaven: Essays in Honor of Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza*, edited by Fernando F Segovia (Maryknoll: Orbis Books Publishing, 2003) 2.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 4.

long as I'm in America, I'm the German."⁴⁶ This in-between, belonging-but-not-belonging status has permeated Schüssler Fiorenza's theology and made her keenly aware of the vulnerabilities that immigrants experience. She points to this aspect of her social location as one of the main influences on her attention to immigration within the kyriarchy.⁴⁷ Schüssler Fiorenza's subject position was also nuanced by her experience growing up in a working-class family.

Schüssler Fiorenza's lineage within the working-class extended back at least as far as her grandparents. Both sets of Schüssler Fiorenza's grandparents were farmers in rural Romania. At one point, her paternal grandparents migrated to the United States because of financial troubles, working in restaurants until they earned enough money to return. Schüssler Fiorenza's maternal parents also had a farm, but her grandfather worked as a tailor in a very small village. Her father was also a tailor and after the war (where he lost a leg), he worked in a factory and then later at home. Schüssler Fiorenza recalls that while her family fled, they were dependent upon charity for food and had to stay in other people's homes (at that time, people were forced to take displaced people into their homes). Even though she is now one of the most respected theologians in the world and holds a chair at Harvard, Schüssler Fiorenza notes that these early memories of poverty still affect her, "I am always nervous that at some point we could be on the street again."⁴⁸ Observing that her husband does not share these fears, Schüssler Fiorenza attributes this worry over economic vulnerability to her experiences as a refugee, immigrant and part of the working-class. In this way, Schüssler Fiorenza demonstrates the connection between kyriarchy and the particularity

⁴⁶ Interview with Schüssler Fiorenza, Feb. 27, 2019.

⁴⁷ *ibid.*

⁴⁸ *ibid.*

of one's life. Just as immigration cannot be abstracted from class in kyriarchy, so they are interconnected in the particularity of the subject. That is, Schüssler Fiorenza's life demonstrates how kyriarchy functions; she cannot describe her experience with poverty without also discussing her experience as an immigrant refugee. Schüssler Fiorenza's experience with school also demonstrates this intersectionality and her resistance to kyriarchy's oppressive structure.

Once Schüssler Fiorenza's family settled in Germany, she began her schooling. After the first four years of grammar school, students were expected to choose a pathway that would determine what level of education they received and what they were being trained for. Unusual for many reasons, Schüssler Fiorenza chose the pathway that would lead her on to the university. She elaborates why this was unique, "Actually, I always say that I am, so to speak, a 'statistical miracle' in this regard. I was a Catholic coming from a rural area, and Catholics as a group received less formal education. I was also from a working-class family...I was a village girl as well. Only five to seven percent of people from each of these social locations managed to get a university degree."⁴⁹ Even more unusual, it was her Catholic priest who consistently challenged and encouraged her to stay in school. Anytime Schüssler Fiorenza mentioned dropping out of school in confession, her priest would cite the gospel parable of the talents and tell her she should pursue further education (interestingly, this is also what sparked her interest in scriptural interpretation). Schüssler Fiorenza unequivocally attributes her staying in school to the influence of this priest who dissuaded her from both the Church and becoming a hairdresser (a passing fancy of hers). Interestingly, Schüssler Fiorenza speculates that this discouragement from ministry enabled her to stay with the

⁴⁹ *Toward A New Heaven*, 5.

Church as it protected her from its hierarchical and sexist organization (at least until she was older).⁵⁰ Thus, Schüssler Fiorenza's subject position as a working class, Catholic person from a rural area all intersected in ways that influenced her experience of education. It was not only for these subject positions that the educational system was not tailored, however; Schüssler Fiorenza also experienced challenges because she was a woman.

Schüssler Fiorenza's early education was gendered both at school and at home. At school, the children were separated for at least one hour each day in order to teach them skills "appropriate to their sex." In second grade, Schüssler Fiorenza's teacher published a collection of essays written by her students on what they would wish for given three wishes. Schüssler Fiorenza recalls that she wished "that there should be no war, that I should have enough chocolate to eat and that one day I will be Pope."⁵¹ Adroitly analyzing this memory, Schüssler Fiorenza notes, "But that also shows what happens to girls between second grade and puberty because when I was thirteen I no longer said I would be Pope, I said I would be a pastor's assistant."⁵² Schüssler Fiorenza describes her mother as "desperate" to elicit the kind of behavior out of Schüssler Fiorenza that she thought was appropriate for young girls. While she often began these gender-appropriate activities (such as knitting, cleaning or sewing), Schüssler Fiorenza would often leave them half done, preferring to read (which her mother thought was a waste of time). Since books were hard to come by because of the war, Schüssler Fiorenza read the entire library at her parish over ten times. Assumptions around what she could or should do continued on in her later education, revealing themselves in the very structure of the educational system.

⁵⁰ Interview with Schüssler Fiorenza, Feb. 27, 2019.

⁵¹ Interview with Schüssler Fiorenza, Feb. 27, 2019.

⁵² *ibid.*

As Schüssler Fiorenza's studies focused on theology, her experience of sexism in the academy was interconnected with her experience of religion and the Church. In her class, there were four women in a class of forty-six, and two of them dropped out shortly after enrolling. Indeed, Schüssler Fiorenza's presence in the university was such an anomaly that there were no restrooms for her. Schüssler Fiorenza recalls her experience of this around exams, "I'll never forget the exams because they were in the seminary, and the seminary did not have toilets for women. So I would run home every day after the three hour exam because I needed to find a toilet! So you see how my theological experiences are interconnected."⁵³ Though amusing, this anecdote poignantly illustrates the extent to which Schüssler Fiorenza's presence disrupted the masculine norm. When Schüssler Fiorenza later enrolled in a program designed for women to work as ministers in parishes, she experienced similar obstacles.

While most women enrolled in the ministry program ended up as parish secretaries, Schüssler Fiorenza specifically attempted to pursue the path that would train her to be a minister. The monsignor in charge of the program, however, pushed her into charity work with the rest of the women, and when she objected replied, "Elisabeth if you want to work for the church, you have to learn that we will promise you things that we will not keep."⁵⁴ Indignant at this response, Schüssler Fiorenza enrolled in the university to study theology instead.

Schüssler Fiorenza's experiences as a war refugee, Catholic, immigrant, and working-class woman deeply shaped her perspective of the world and theology. It was as she realized

⁵³ *ibid.*

⁵⁴ *Toward a New Heaven*, 6.

how these different social locations intersected and moved through her life that she developed her notion of kyriarchy. Kyriarchy provided the language for naming how these different locations interacted with one another and how systems of oppression affected different people differently because of them. Her own experiences resisting systems of oppression made her keenly aware of people whose struggles were similar but whose subject positions were different. By extrapolating from her own position, Schüssler Fiorenza was able to develop a theory that accounted for subject positions different from her own.

Schüssler Fiorenza's theology demonstrates attention to the complicated network of subject positions in ways that are reflective of her own experiences. As she experienced her own identity as irreducible to one aspect of her life, she sought to develop a theology that attended to these social dynamics. To this end and in order to analyze the multiplicative ways oppression maneuvered through identity structures, Schüssler Fiorenza developed the notion of kyriarchy, which features strongly in her christology.

Christology with Schüssler Fiorenza

Schüssler Fiorenza's understanding of christology and how it has developed historically within theology is deeply informed by what she has termed *kyriarchy*. A brief overview of this term provides the necessary foundation for comprehending her treatment of christology. Expanding the notion of patriarchy as a system that privileges males, kyriarchy names how power extends to other subject locations in complicated webs of power. She notes, "Such a theoretical framework further allows us to understand the subject as 'multiply and contradictorily positioned.' Every 'individual' subject is positioned across

‘multiple social coordinates of race, class, gender, sexuality, and ethnicity among other.’⁵⁵ As a lens applied to theology, this means that the “hermeneutical center of a critical feminist theology of liberation cannot simply be women. Rather, it must be constituted and determined by the interests of women who live at the bottom of the kyriarchal pyramid and who struggle against multiplicative forms of oppression.”⁵⁶ Tracing how this functioned historically and related to her own field in biblical studies, Schüssler Fiorenza argues that a debate arose between social and political orders.

The mechanics of how the social and political debate resolved itself provided the background for the early Church. While political notions of democracy advocated for unilateral equality amongst citizens, it was rooted in the abstract and conflicted with the concrete sociopolitical situation. Attempting to resolve this theoretical conundrum, philosophers like Plato and Aristotle argued that certain groups were inherently incapable of equal participation and should therefore only participate as they were able. Thus, the logics of kyriarchal structures found solid footing and theoretical justification for hierarchical organizations of society. This provided an easy foundation for adding theological language that further justified this order. Schüssler Fiorenza expounds, “Such ‘natural’ or ‘divinely ordained’ differences are supposed to exist between elite men and women, between freeborn slaves, between property owners and farmers or artisans, between Athenian-born citizens and other residents, between Greeks and barbarians--both women and men--and, last but not least, between the civilized and the uncivilized world.”⁵⁷ This hierarchical organization of

⁵⁵ Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Jesus: Miriam’s Child, Sophia’s Prophet; Critical Issues in Feminist Christology* (New York: Continuum, 1999), 13.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 14.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 16.

the social world laced with theological claims about people's natural or inherent differences provided the environmental context for how early Christianity organized itself. Schüssler Fiorenza speculates that this context had deep influence on the structure of the Church, "The hierarchical institutions of Roman Catholicism tend to resemble the imperial kyriarchal pyramid of Rome. For instance, like the Roman emperor, the pope is called *pater patrum* and believed to represent G*d on earth."⁵⁸ Understanding how philosophy, the kyriarchical social order and theology all interacted affects how one interprets doctrines of christology, especially as they were emerging in the early Church.

Schüssler Fiorenza observes kyriarchy's infiltration into christology during the Ecumenical Council of Chalcedon (451 A.D.). Originally written in Greek and then later translated into Latin, the Council of Chalcedon used strikingly different words for translating *incarnatio*, a fact that would go largely unnoticed to English readers. The Latin word *incarnatio* translates two different Greek words from the original document: *enanthropesin* and *oikonomia*. *Enanthropesin*, meaning to "live among or to have the appearance of a human being," is only used once in the original text where as *oikonomia*, meaning "household management/order/administration," is used three times.⁵⁹ Put differently, most of the original document referred to the order of Jesus' incarnation and less about humanity, but this nuance is lost in the translation to Latin (and in subsequent translations to English). Schüssler Fiorenza clarifies, "What is translated as the 'mystery of the incarnation' would be better rendered as the 'mystery of the Lord's (household) management/order/law/economy.'" Such a translation would demystify the Latin derivation

⁵⁸ Ibid., 16.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 20.

and disclose that the mystery of the ‘incarnation’ is that of kyriarchy, since in antiquity the kyriarchal order of the house was the paradigm of the order of the state and the whole universe.”⁶⁰ Thus, the council affirming the two natures of Christ as a key element of Christ’s salvific possibilities simultaneously imported notions of a proper order, one that was hierarchical and divinely imposed.⁶¹ In this way, “kyriarchal rule accordingly is the method of the Lord’s government and dispensation.”⁶² Further than this, the council expanded this divinely ordained order to include the ordering of difference in Christ’s own body. Not only is the dualism of human and divine difference enshrined in Jesus’ body, but it is also starkly gendered.

Begotten of the Father eternally as to Divinity,

Born of the Virgin, Theotokos, temporally as to Humanity.⁶³

Within a christology that has already argued for hierarchical ordering, a duality of opposites that divinizes maleness and associates femaleness with humanity translates directly into social orders. Schüssler Fiorenza concludes, “By associating fatherhood/masculinity with divinity and eternity and by firmly placing motherhood/femininity in the temporal realm of humanity, it introduces not only gender dualism but also the dualism between church and

⁶⁰ Ibid, 20.

⁶¹ Peter Brown expands and affirms Schüssler Fiorenza’s claim about the household being paradigmatic for the order of the universe. According to Brown, the household was how all of society organized itself, transmitted property, honor, distributed jobs, was the grounds for its economy, and had direct connections to politics. Though Brown does not use Schüssler Fiorenza’s term of kyriarchy, his description of the household’s functioning is kyriarchal in how it refracts through gender, race, economy, politics, etc. The “proper” functioning of the household depended on each person fulfilling their role according to their subject position. *The Body and Society: Men, Women and Sexual Renunciation in the Early Church* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008).

⁶² *Jesus: Miriam’s Child*, 20.

⁶³ Ibid., 22.

world, religion and nature, heaven and earth.”⁶⁴ By installing this formulation as a doctrine within the Church, the Church fathers created the logical platform by which they could deem someone as a heretic (read “other” within the dualism) for thinking differently from them. It is worth noting that the emperor at the time was the driving force behind this entire council. It is suspicious to say the least that the head of the State would invest himself so heavily in a Church doctrine that would theologially legitimize his order and (ideally) cultivate citizens who interpreted their obedience to these structures as obedience to their faith.⁶⁵

Schüssler Fiorenza’s account of kyriarchy and its infiltration into Christianity provides a necessary expansion of Radford Ruether’s attention to subject position. Kyriarchy creates language for naming the nuanced and intersecting ways different subject positions interact with each other and experience oppression. Furthermore, Schüssler Fiorenza’s treatment of kyriarchy reveals how this kind of hierarchical ordering was almost surgically added to Christianity and has influenced much of theology. Without attending to this importation, theologians cannot respond in ways that address this problem. Using this as a

⁶⁴ Ibid., 22.

⁶⁵ Jennings develops this idea powerfully in his course *Slavery and Obedience*, specifically in his work with St. Benedict and the aesthetic of order. Contrasting the chaos of society with the aesthetic, contained and immaculate order prescribed by St Benedict and cultivated in his monasteries, Jennings argues that the State would have recognized the immense benefits that could be gained by exporting this order to the rest of society. Building from this idea, I argue that if the state could use religion to motivate and mobilize its citizens into this kind of order, then the power of the State would dramatically increase. If the Church could be recruited to maintain obedience and the State could influence the Church, then the State could rule as a hidden power, weaponizing faithfulness as a tool of State propaganda. That is, citizens who thought they were being faithful to the dictates of the Church would actually be conforming themselves to the desires of the State.

Willie Jennings, *Slavery and Obedience*, course taught at Duke Divinity School, Spring 2013.

methodological framework, Schüssler Fiorenza analyzes christology and its problems for those lower on the kyriarchal scale.

Christology

Beginning with feminist critiques of christology, Schüssler Fiorenza names how feminism began the conversation about Jesus' maleness and how this was a theological problem for women. Beyond the problems for salvation that a distinctly male savior raises (as Radford Ruether describes), Schüssler Fiorenza observes the problem of installing a dualistic system around Christianity's salvific figure. She explains, "By presenting the sex/gender system of male/female or masculine/feminine as universal and 'common-sense,' this preconstructed frame of meaning obscures and mystifies the reality that the very notion of two sexes is a sociocultural construct for maintaining kyriarchal domination rather than a biological 'given' or innate essence."⁶⁶ This demonstrates that the solution for christology does not lie in Jesus being non-male or non-heterosexual, but in the abolition of a system that assumes these subject positions as inherent.

Schüssler Fiorenza also helpfully gestures to the possibility of an "outside" or an "other" way of approaching christology. This is also why she argues kyriarchy is necessary for grasping the complexity and depth of the whole problem. Expanding this point, she says, "Such an analytic [of kyriarchy] enables us to interpret christological androcentric texts and kyriocentric traditions as socioreligious constructions rather than as revealed 'givens' and also to see how gender, race, class and colonialist structures are multiplicative and interdependent."⁶⁷ If the world is "determined by relations of domination," then the

⁶⁶ Ibid., 35.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 36.

sex/gender framework is only one aspect within an entire system that hierarchically orders people according to subject position. Schüssler Fiorenza describes how kyriarchy operates within all four levels of the sex/gender system.⁶⁸

Within the first level of the sex/gender system, Schüssler Fiorenza identifies kyriarchy functioning in how other categories intersect with male/female (e.g. race, class, culture, etc.). These “diverse social, interactive, and multiplicative structures of power” organize people hierarchically under the elite, educated, white Western Man.⁶⁹ Distinctions between groups along this chain are often gendered, categorizing subordinated groups as peoples governed by “emotion, service and dependence.”⁷⁰ Though the system purports a *de facto* superiority in subject positions closer to Man, Schüssler Fiorenza points out that the entire system depends upon the existence of this subordinated class. She notes, “In short, in order to function kyriarchal societies and cultures need a ‘servant class,’ a ‘servant race,’ or a ‘servant people,’ be they slaves, serfs, house servants, kulis, or mummies. The existence of such a ‘servant class’ is maintained through law, education, socialization and brute violence. It is sustained by the belief that members of a ‘servant class’ of people are by nature or by divine decree inferior to those whom they are destined to serve.”⁷¹ Put differently, if there is no one to rule, how can the ruler rule? Furthermore, how can he understand his identity as a ruler, especially if that identity has been socialized to him as an inherent part of his identity?

⁶⁸ According to Schüssler Fiorenza, feminist theory has explicated that the Western sex/gender system operates simultaneously on four discursive levels: 1) social-political level, 2) ethical-symbolic level, 3) biological-natural level, and 4) linguistic-grammatical level.

⁶⁹ Following Sylvia Wynter’s work, “Man” signals a vacant yet organizing subject position. Vacant in that it is not occupied by any actual person(s), but functions ideologically to orient the entire system to itself. This will be explained in full in the next chapter.

⁷⁰ Schüssler Fiorenza, *Jesus: Miriam’s Child*, 37.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 37.

Thus, down to its very bones, this system depends on oppressing and debasing certain people.

The second level of the sex/gender system uses the white European-American elite educated man as the central “human” figure to which everyone else is compared and by which they are evaluated. By declaring everyone else as “other,” the system creates the possibility for justifying the hierarchical organization of people. Schüssler Fiorenza notes, “The definition of other races and peoples as ‘feminine Other’ has enabled colonial Western powers to exploit and utilize religion in the colonial capitalist quest for identity and property.”⁷² This meant that the categorical distinction between men and women—that men were designed to rule and women to submit--translated across larger groups of people, naturalizing colonialism as the proper order of things. Beyond defining and justifying the hierarchical order of subject positions, this system also informs how subjects should occupy their subject positions (their subjectivity).

Schüssler Fiorenza limits her analysis here to gender and religion, asserting that kyriarchy paired with Christianity and created a colonizing force through female service. She notes, “the ethos of ‘true womanhood,’ romantic love, and domesticity defines wo/men’s nature as ‘being for others’ in actual or spiritual motherhood...Like the ‘white lady,’ Christianity as a ‘missionary religion’ had the function of ‘civilizing’ the savages, who were understood as ‘untamed nature.’ The Western discourses on femininity and female nature have here their sociopolitical and religious contexts in the colonial exercise of power.”⁷³ In this way females are supposed to perpetuate the system and remain subject to male power.

⁷² Ibid., 38.

⁷³ Ibid., 38.

With the connection to Christianity and its teaching of self-sacrificing love, this pressure takes on spiritually moral tones. Said differently, being a “good Christian woman” now means pursuing self-effacement while devotedly colonizing those “others” below her. For Christians, the central masculine figure who theologically energizes this entire system is not simply *an* idyllic white, Euro, elite, etc. man, but Christ himself. Thus, it is no coincidence that depictions of Christ often feature him as a subject who looks like contemporary iterations of powerful masculinity. It also reveals the underlying stakes of threatening or changing this depiction. In order for this hierarchical system of domination to continue perpetuating itself effectively, Christ must occupy the central position of power.

Christianity’s integration with this continues in the third level: the biological-natural level.

Acknowledging that male and female are figurative categories, Schüssler Fiorenza argues that they “*appear to be ‘natural’ or ‘factual’ sex differences* in commonplace discourse and everyday understanding,” and it is this socialization that continues women’s oppression.⁷⁴ Christianity participates in this education by naturalizing biology within theological discourse. By applying patriarchal marriage relationships to the relation between God and the individual, Christianity creates a hierarchical dichotomy onto which human relationships can map. Similar to Radford Ruether, Schüssler Fiorenza observes the position-switching males do by taking on the female position in the God-human relationship while taking on the God/male position in the human-human relationship. While it is somehow acceptable for males to move between these two positions, females are strictly relegated to their category. The extent to which the biological has become theological demonstrates itself powerfully in the Church’s historical exclusion of women from ordination. Schüssler

⁷⁴ Ibid., 38-39, emphasis in original.

Fiorenza summarizes how the justification for this exclusion has shifted over time, “Whereas traditional theology had rationalized the exclusion of women on Aristotelian and scriptural grounds of subordination, modern theology argues that women cannot physically resemble Christ, the bridegroom of the church...It is female sex that disqualifies a person from representing Christ.”⁷⁵ Thus this system imbues socially constructed categories with theological import and declares it an immutable fact.⁷⁶ This naturalization of biology and its connection to theology was not limited to sex and gender, but extended to all categories of people. Schüssler Fiorenza quotes N. Leys Stepan’s analysis of nineteenth-century scientists,

lower races represented the “female” type of the human species, and females the “lower race” of gender...By analogy with the so-called lower races, women, the sexually deviate, the criminal, the urban poor, and the insane were in one way or another constructed as biological “races apart” whose differences from the white male, and likeness to each other “explained” their different and lower position in the social hierarchy.⁷⁷

The subtle maneuvering of claiming subject positions as clear, “common sense” categories and then filling them with theological meaning created a system that invisibilized power and convinced all (even those subjugated within it) to maintain the system. To summarize Schüssler Fiorenza’s analysis up to this point, Christ requires the category of slave/servant in order to be coherent (as lord/master), functions as an ideal figure that powers the system of domination, and all of this is now rooted irrevocably in his maleness. This powerful “saving” figure who justifies this system only intensifies in the fourth level: linguistic-grammatical.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 39.

⁷⁶ Schüssler Fiorenza demonstrates how this biology is constructed discursively, arguing that what is “inherently male” is always a construction. She uses the example of facial hair as a solely male physical characteristic, and points the multibillion dollar cosmetic industry devoted to removing all facial hair from women as evidence of this construction.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 40.

From Stepan, N. Leys, “Race and Gender,” in *The “Racial” Economy of Science: Toward a Democratic Future*, ed. Sandra Harding (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 361.

Language itself also participates in constructing meaning for sex/gender differences. That is, the process of deciding which gender words (“he” vs. “she”—and only these two options) were appropriate for different objects and situations was anything but a neutral process. Not only did this extend to using “he” as the generic reference to groups of differently sexed people, but it also meant that male pronouns were applied to objects seen as more masculine (e.g., active, strong, etc.). Schüssler Fiorenza quotes influential grammarian Lindley Murray who used these cultural grounds as the justification for sex-based classification,

Figuratively, in the English tongue, we commonly give the masculine gender to nouns which are conspicuous for the attributes of imparting or communicating and which are by nature strong and efficacious. Those again are made feminine which are conspicuous for the attributes of containing or bringing forth, or which are particularly beautiful or amiable. Upon these principles the sun is always masculine, and the moon, because the receptacle of the sun’s light, is feminine.⁷⁸

Thus, even the processes of speaking or writing reinforce gender stereotypes. Again, the application of a kyriarchal lens reveals that context nuances language and its symbolic meaning. Schüssler Fiorenza explains, “We can perceive the slippages, cultural constructedness, and historical ambiguity of the meaning of ‘woman’ much more easily in the term ‘lady,’ because this discursive appellation readily ‘reveals’ its race, class and colonial bias.”⁷⁹ In this way, language is crucial for maintaining and defining the kyriarchal order. This kyriarchal symbolism within language extends to theology as well.

While feminists have made a strong case against the use of only male pronouns for a supposedly androgynous God, the question of Jesus’ maleness and its meaning therein provides more complications. Reactions to feminist inquiries around Jesus’ maleness usually

⁷⁸ Ibid., 41.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 42.

elicit strong reactions and anxieties from all sides. Schüssler Fiorenza speculates that this is because religious men are “culturally stereotyped as ‘feminine,’ [and] need to establish their cultural-religious self-identity by professing and upholding masculine standards.”⁸⁰ As the salvific center and figurative ideal for humanity, Christ-as-male provides the symbolic “casing” into which men can import their ideas for what it means to be male. For many women who were educated to be “women for men,”⁸¹ Christ-as-male provides the model for all of their relations to men.⁸² The stakes of Jesus’ maleness are directly tied to the kyriarchal organization of society and people’s own sense of identity within that structure. Both this and the fact that christology (as it has been set up) is vulnerable to people importing meaning into Christ’s subject position, provide challenges for feminists.

Schüssler Fiorenza follows this analysis of how the sex/gender system has influenced christology with a brief critique of how some feminists and liberation theologians have attempted to correct this. Though the nuances of this critique are beyond the scope of this project, Schüssler Fiorenza’s ultimate objection remains poignant: christological solutions that employ a paradigm rooted in the particularity of Jesus’ subject position do not solve the problem and often end up reproducing kyriarchy in some fashion. For Schüssler Fiorenza, Radford Ruether does not solve christology’s patriarchal problems because she remains within the male/female sex/gender system. Schüssler Fiorenza wants to abandon this paradigm altogether and instead proposes a hermeneutical paradigm shift that employs praxis of liberation as its organizing center.

A New Christology/A New Approach

⁸⁰ Ibid., 42.

⁸¹ Schüssler Fiorenza quoting Rousseau, 42.

⁸² Ibid., 42.

Practices of liberation performed by particular communities changes the theology from being a dogmatic model contained by history, subject position, etc. and allows for it to be an ever-changing mode of resistance to kyriarchy. Schüssler Fiorenza points to Sojourner Truth as providing a brilliant crystallization of how kyriarchal christology is a rhetorical construction of male clerics: “the little man in black there say a woman can’t have as much rights as a man cause Christ wasn’t a woman.”⁸³ Sojourner Truth goes on to argue that women must come together to “turn the world right side up again.” Schüssler Fiorenza points to this as an example of the kind of living, communal, liberative work christology should be about, one that accounts for the multiplicative ways kyriarchy attempts to maintain its order. Thus, a “critical feminist reconstruction of early Christian christologies should not adopt doctrinal concepts as its organizing model. Instead it must elaborate the multiplicity of christological images and arguments found in Christian scriptures as theological resources for constructing feminist Christian identity formations in the struggle for liberation.”⁸⁴ For Schüssler Fiorenza, this kind of work happens in what she terms the “ekklesia of Wo/men.”

Turning traditional frameworks on their head, Schüssler Fiorenza proposes a model that is both historical and living, both attentive to identity politics and not limited to them. The fractured spelling of “women” indicates that women “are not a unitary social group but rather are fragmented and fractured by structures of race, class religion, heterosexuality, colonialism, age and health.”⁸⁵ Schüssler Fiorenza imagines “ekklesia” as an “alternative

⁸³ Ibid., 58.

⁸⁴ Deirdre Good, "Jesus, Miriam's Child, Sophia's Prophet: Critical Issues in Feminist Christology. By Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza." Continuum, New York, 1994. *Scottish Journal of Theology* 52, no. 4 (1999), 505

⁸⁵ Schüssler Fiorenza, 24.

reality of justice and well-being [that] is for all people.”⁸⁶ Performing her feminist hermeneutic, Schüssler Fiorenza turns to the Lucan story of Mary going into the “hill country” as a metaphor for “feminist christological discourse as ‘wandering in the “ups and downs” of feminist struggles for liberation--a journey and a joyous embrace of two women pregnant with the possibilities of new life.”⁸⁷ In this way, Schüssler Fiorenza attends to particularities of varying subject positions, how they interact with each other and across different kyriarchal lines while not landing in one particular dogma, model or subject position for christological truth and liberation.⁸⁸ Though she does not name it as such, Schüssler Fiorenza seems to sense kyriarchy’s ability to insert itself into models that are settled. Put differently, kyriarchy utilizes existing social orders to insert its hierarchical agendas.

Considering her own nomadic life as a “migrant worker,” it is perhaps not surprising that Schüssler Fiorenza’s theology operates in a similar kind of nomadic space, both belonging and not-belonging. In this vein, Schüssler Fiorenza’s analysis provides a more comprehensive and rigorous critique of christology’s connection with oppression and opens up the possibility for a different christological approach. This kind of nomadic approach to

⁸⁶ Good, 505.

⁸⁷ Good, 505.

⁸⁸ Though Schüssler Fiorenza does not name her as an interlocutor, her christological approach here offers a fascinating response to Sylvia Wynter’s notion of Man. Wynter traces how systems of power are always reinventing themselves, always innovating new ways to maintain their power and remain invisible. This will be explored extensively in the next chapter. Working from Wynter’s hypothesis, J. Kameron Carter proposes his notion of a fugitive theology that is always improvising, adapting itself--performing a rejection of Man’s desire to settle and control. I explore and work with Carter’s term “fugitive theology” in the conclusion as one strategy for resisting patriarchal soteriology.

christology allows attending to the particular manifestations of oppression while refraining from naming any one of them as the new framework or order.

Thus, Schüssler Fiorenza extends Radford Ruether's analysis of christology's problematic relationship with systems of power beyond the sex/gender system. By pointing out the deficiency of only critiquing the sex/gender problem within christology, Schüssler Fiorenza reveals that the theological root of this problem is much deeper. Beyond this, Schüssler Fiorenza captures how systemic oppression does not depend on a subject position and can alter itself in order to retain its hierarchical structure. Her solution of a theology that moves and adjusts proves immensely helpful for theological responses to patriarchy. In these ways, Schüssler Fiorenza demonstrates that making biology theology is not just a problem of sex/gender but is a theological error that encompasses many bodily particularities and connects them to standing social systems.

Conclusion

Both Radford Ruether and Schüssler Fiorenza provide key analyses of the ideological structure operating within twentieth century doctrines of salvation. Radford Ruether was pivotal in bringing about the attention needed to the sexism within the doctrine. Furthermore, her work provided the historical legacy and drew out the relationship between subject position and theology. Radford Ruether's analysis begins to outline the shape of this structure of oppression, revealing how men in power have protected that power through theology. Not only does her work demonstrate the need for different people within theological discourse, but it shows how patriarchal theology has collapsed biology with theology. By connecting Christ's salvific efficacy with his maleness, patriarchal theology set up an ideological structure that justified the hierarchical ordering of all humans and invisibilized the power-grab by coding it as divinely ordained and "natural." For women, this

now meant that their subordination to men was divinely ordained; to question it was equated with questioning God (or even used as evidence of their weaker faith). As long as Christ occupied the top tier of this structure because of his maleness, he provided the canvas onto which patriarchal theology could endlessly paint and reinterpret to their own advantage.

Working on this same problem, Schüssler Fiorenza nuances the system with her notion of kyriarchy and provides a deeper understanding of how the system functions. Kyriarchy names the multiple, interconnected ways oppression manifests for different people. In so doing, Schüssler Fiorenza demonstrates that the problem for women within christology cannot be reduced to the sex/gender system but must also account for any and all other manifestations of oppression. This is not simply a matter of expansion, however; dismantling kyriarchy requires an approach that is not systematic or dogmatic (as these only end up reproducing kyriarchy). What Schüssler Fiorenza has identified here is that when the proposed solution to kyriarchy fixates on one system (location, oppressed group, etc.), it remains vulnerable to kyriarchy's ability to keep the power structures in place by reinventing itself.

Together, Radford Ruether and Schüssler Fiorenza reveal the scope and breadth of the problem and how it has manifested across Catholic and Protestant theologies. Both theologians demonstrate the result of making biology theology and the inherent dangers in mapping the God-human relationship onto human-human relationships. While Schüssler Fiorenza and Radford Ruether analyze the way systems of oppression have intersected with Christianity, they do not explain how these systems function and reproduce within society. For this, we will turn to the work of Sylvia Wynter and Denise Ferreira da Silva who offer theoretical analyses for this sociological phenomenon.

Chapter 2

Foundational Theories of Patriarchy

While the interventions of Radford Ruether and Schüssler Fiorenza demonstrate patriarchy's infiltration into soteriology, they do not provide an analysis of the sociological roots of this problem. It is not just that soteriology implemented sexist and racist frameworks, but that the entire formulation often relies on a colonialistic schematic. That is, salvation has become a colonial project. Jamaican philosopher Sylvia Wynter and black radical theorist Denise Ferreira da Silva each provide helpful analyses that explore the theoretical structures of patriarchy and how it operates. Wynter's work resources a variety of disciplines (e.g., black studies, economics, history, literary analysis, etc.) and aims at unsettling what she terms "the coloniality of being."¹ In the late twentieth and twenty-first century, Wynter has emerged as a critical theorist whose articulation of colonialistic structures has provided new approaches and methodologies for the field. Demonstrating the interdisciplinary nature and massive scope of her work, Wynter's intellectual project connects conceptualizations of the human with concepts like blackness, modernity, migratory politics, and theoretical resistance. In this way, Wynter provides a macro-analysis of sociological systems and how they intersect with human praxis. For this reason, her analysis of patriarchy's structures proves immensely helpful for this project and its endeavor to understand how theological structures fit into patriarchal agendas. Similarly, Denise Ferreira da Silva proves to be a valuable interlocutor for reinforcing the connection between Wynter's analysis and patriarchy and for conceiving of possible subversions to it.

¹ Wynter, Sylvia. "Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, After Man, Its Overrepresentation--An Argument." *CR: The New Centennial Review* 3, no. 3 (2003): 257-337.

As an ethicist, sociologist and feminist theorist, Ferreira da Silva combines these fields in her work, analyzing patriarchy as a system that perpetuates oppression and dehumanizes people. Ferreira da Silva demonstrates how the “patriarch form” functions as an icon requiring worship (submission) and emulation. Ferreira da Silva also utilizes mathematics as a resource for devising a theory that dismantles patriarchy. Her notion of hacking the subject provides a beginning for imagining soteriologies not dependent on patriarchal foundations.

Taken together, Wynter and Ferreira da Silva provide the theoretical framing of patriarchy. Sylvia Wynter’s notion of Man₁ and Man₂ reveal the theological architecture of patriarchy and how it identified and resourced the soteriological framework for colonialistic purposes. By connecting this with Denise Ferreira da Silva’s “patriarch form”, we see the performative nature of this kind of salvation project and how it affects different kinds of bodies. This chapter will proceed by tracking Wynter’s notion of Man₁ and Man₂, arguing that its theft of Christian soteriology established a framework that continues to serve colonialistic ends. It will then turn to da Silva’s notion of the Patriarch Form as a way of understanding how subjectivity and deferred subjectivity reinforce this patriarchal/colonialistic soteriology.

Man₁

Wynter describes Man as the overrepresentation and overdetermination of the human, a category or identity that imagines and claims itself to be human and functions as the definition against which all other humans are measured. Man as a system requires three mechanisms that allow it to move through the world as a dominating power: 1) it establishes itself as *the* definition of human, 2) it claims this over against the Other, and 3) this

distinction is decidedly hierarchical (the Other is always deficient). What Man will never acknowledge is that it *needs* the Other in order to represent the human at all. Man's entire identity and foundation is dependent on the negation of this Other.² Because Man overrepresents itself as *the* human, it requires an internal mechanism that allows it to continuously adjust and reinvent itself as culture, technology and information change. This means that over the last few centuries, Man has had several different iterations, in which it shifts slightly the terms and content of how it defines itself. The underlying principle of overrepresentation and overdetermination, however, does not change--only the specific content of the definition of the human and how it is measured. The shifts in how Man defines human mark Man's different iterations. The Wynter traces these different iterations, terming them Man₁ and Man₂.

The first iteration of Man (Man₁) established these distinctions theologically and with reference to Christ/salvation. Following Jacob Pandian's argument in *Anthropology and the Western Tradition: Towards an Authentic Anthropology*, Wynter describes how the Judeo-Christian framework for understanding self and world provided a key foundation for Man₁'s development. Describing the way religion defined and justified categorical distinctions between people, Wynter notes, "the physical referents of the conception of the Untrue Other to the True Christian Self had been the categories of peoples defined in religious

² Hortense Spillers suggests that this dependency at least partially energizes the absolute hatred of Man toward Other.

Hortense Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book," *Black White and in Color: Essays on American Literature and Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 206.

terminology as heretics, or as Enemies-of-Christ infidels and pagan-idolaters.”³ Not only does this reveal the religious distinction highlighting the hierarchically moral distinction between peoples, but it also maps this aesthetically via the “physical referents.”

Initially, this separation was coded geographically, later using the physical referents as further proof of essential difference. Wynter elaborates, “The geography of the earth had also had to be known in parallel Spirit/Flesh terms as being divided up between, on the one hand, its temperate regions centered on Jerusalem—regions that, because held up above the element of water by God’s Providential Grace, were habitable—and, on the other, those realms that, because outside this Grace, had to be uninhabitable.”⁴ Declaring lands “uninhabitable” simultaneously declared that anyone living there were categorically different and outside God’s intended divine order. The creation of a “theocentric slot of Otherness” declared non-European peoples as “Enemies-of-Christ, pagan idolaters” and led to “papal bulls from the 1455 Romanus Pontifex onwards, [that] provided the framework in whose terms their ostensibly “lands of no one/terra nullius” had been seeable as justly expropriable, and they themselves justly enslavable as such pre-classified populations.”⁵ Thus, geography unequivocally determined what kind of human one was and defined this in a theological register. Furthermore, employing the Spirit/Flesh distinction within Judeo-Christian theology made this distinction hierarchical, claiming some humans were closer to God (Spirit) while others were naturally associated with Flesh. Aristotelian dichotomy merged with Christian soteriology and mapped out geographically, creating the foundational logics

³ Sylvia Wynter, “Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, After Man, Its Overrepresentation--An Argument,” in *The Centennial Review* 3, no 3 (Fall 2003), 266-7.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 279-80.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 293.

for colonization. By defining some humans as subhuman and closer to “fallen flesh,” this system justified the domination of one group over another. Just as God should rule over humans who needed God’s wisdom and rulership, so Spirit-humans should rule over those who were inherently fallen and in need of their wisdom and rulership. This theological claim was rooted in biography based upon geography.

The conflation of this bio-theological move created a system in which the justification for hierarchy could maneuver and waffle between the biological (read racial) and the theological. Significantly, this theological claim established a plan of salvation in which one group needed to convert or approximate themselves to the other group. Wynter explains how this mapped out theologically,

This series of symbolically coded Spirit/Flesh representations mapped upon the “space of Otherness” of the physical cosmos had not only functioned to absolutize the theocentric descriptive statement of the human, its master code of symbolic life (the Spirit) and death (the Flesh), together with that statement’s overall explanatory thesis of supernatural causation. It had also served to absolutize “a general order of existence,” together with its “postulate of significant ill,” whose mode of affliction then logically calls for the particular “plan of salvation” or redemptive cure able to cure the specific “ill” that threatened all the subjects of the order, in order to redeem them from its threat of nihilation/negation that is common to all religions (Girardot 1988).⁶

This reframed colonization as a salvific gesture and established a sociological system where it seemed the only path out of oppression lay in the emulation of the oppressor. That is, the closer one could approximate themselves to Man, the less “ill” needed to be corrected or put under proper rulership in order to “save” it from negation. In this way, soteriology itself became a colonialistic project. By grounding this project theologically, Man₁ (vaguely)

⁶ Ibid., 280.

disguised its colonial agenda. Man retained this colonial agenda but the terms for establishing Otherness shifted from theology to reason.

The “discovery” of worlds outside of European expansion questioned the accuracy of the previous “theological system of legitimation.” It foundered on this stubborn fact: How could people be considered Christ-refusers if Christ and Christ’s apostles had never come to them? Spanish missionary-priest, Bartolome de Las Casas attempted to find a work-around to this stumbling block by fashioning a document called “The Requisition.” Wynter describes the theo-colonialistic logic here at play in this document,

A hybridly theologico-juridical document, written in Latin, the Requisition was supposed to be read out to groups of assembled indigenes by a notary who was to accompany any slave-raiding, land-expropriating expedition that sailed from the first settled Caribbean islands to the mainland. This document was intended to ensure that the indigenes in question literally heard the Word of the Christian Gospel, so that they could then be later classified as having refused it, and therefore as Enemies-of-Christ. The document proclaimed to the indigenes that Christ, who was king over the world, had granted this sovereignty to the pope, who had in turn granted the lands of their “barbarous nations” to the king of Spain, who had sent the expedition members as his emissaries. The expeditionaries had been sent to give the indigenes the choice of accepting the king of Spain’s sovereignty over their lands, together with their acceptance of Christ’s Word and, with it, of conversion to Christianity. If they accepted the king’s sovereignty together with conversion, they would be unharmed. Should they refuse (thereby making themselves Christ-Refusers and Enemies-of-Christ), they would be attacked, captured, justly enslaved—their lands justly expropriated.⁷

Conveniently, this logic gave the illusion of choice (convert to Christianity or not) yet both entailed Westerners conquering other peoples and bringing them under their rule (either as converts or slaves). The theological justification of this massaged any unethical unease at these actions by baptizing it as a salvific act. Either way pagans were brought under the rule and mentorship of Christ and Christ’s earthly representatives (read Westerners). What is

⁷ Ibid., 295-6.

significant here is not just that theology provided the framework for expropriating lands and enslaving people, but that the architecture of salvation established the basis of relationship between colonizers and colonized. This relationship was hierarchical and demanded the efforts of approximation toward its pinnacle: Man.

With the Enlightenment, the terms for establishing Otherness shifted from theology to reason. Wynter terms this iteration of Man as Man₂. Reason (as it was defined by Man) provided a better explanation for the hierarchical organization of humans that justified the domination of one group over another. Wynter describes the replacement of one lack (being a pagan or a Christ-refuser) by another (being irrational or incapable of reason), “In this transmuted reformulation, while the ‘significant ill’ of mankind’s enslavement was no longer projected as being to the negative legacy of Adamic Original Sin, the concept of enslavement was carried over and redescribed as being, now, to the irrational aspects of mankind’s human nature.”⁸ Though this framework did not operate as explicitly theological, the salvific framework remained in place--the terms and methods had changed. Rather than religious conversion, salvation took the form of performing Western civilization. Putting this in terms of state citizenship, Wynter elaborates, “this meant that the primary behavior-motivating goal, rather than that of seeking salvation in the *civitas dei*, was now that of adhering to the goal of the *civitas saecularis*.”⁹ Similar to the theological framework that determined salvation geographically, reason was also initially geographically determined as it was the property of Man₂. As colonial expansion and enslavement mixed bodies, however, Man₂

⁸ Ibid., 289.

⁹ Ibid., 290.

needed a better tool for evaluating who was rational and who was not, who was a ruler and who was not. The modern phenomenon of race provided the answer.

Race provided a category that expanded geographic othering to encompass skin color, culture, and a myriad of other categories that could be conflated or separated at will. Ultimately, Man2 claimed that race was biological and that it was a natural indicator for reason and the capacity for reason. Race emerged as a new way of interpreting the world through the practice of reading bodies along racialized lines. Retaining the same framework, Man2 placed whiteness at the top and conflated it with reason, civilized behavior and leadership qualities. This meant that would-be colonizers were given a nearly irrefutable lens with which to interpret the people they wanted to enslave and/or conquer. Wynter expounds the deployment of this lens, “For the indigenous peoples of the New World, together with the mass-enslaved peoples of Africa, were now to be reclassified as “irrational” because “savage” Indians, and as “subrational” Negroes, in the terms of a formula based on an a-Christian premise of a by-nature difference between Spaniards and Indians, and, by extrapolation, between Christian Europeans and Negroes.”¹⁰ While race replaced geography as the prime mechanism for categorizing people as others, reason replaced theological providence for the natural order.

Rather than claiming that non-Europeans were theologically deficient, Man2 rooted deficiency in reason and the capacity for it. Wynter traces the shift in Man2’s mechanism, “Instead, the projected “space of Otherness” was now to be mapped on phenotypical and religio-cultural differences between human variations and/or population groups, while the new idea of order was now to be defined in terms of degrees of rational

¹⁰ Ibid., 297.

perfection/imperfection.”¹¹ Though their function and meaning were different, race and reason had a corresponding relationship where the degree of separation from whiteness indicated the degree of separation from reason. By conflating race and reason, Man₂ cleverly retained both the absolute Other (the negation of his existence) and the possibility of salvation via education and emulation. Significantly, race also indicated capacity for reason, which meant that some people would be “naturally” less successful at this approximation and would therefore need more rulership.

While salvation no longer carried its explicitly theological overtones under Man₂, it still operated as a foundational framework in this new iteration of Man. The Judeo-Christian deployment of salvation in Man₁ clearly defined the Other and laid out the pathway to correcting this position of exteriority. While Man₁ articulated salvation as a theological project invested in the soul, the practice of it remained the same: cultural approximation to Man. Man₂ also established the Other (now in geo-racial terms) and though the content was different the path was the same; salvation lay in the emulation of Man, this time via that accumulation of and performance of reason. Put differently, salvation was the sole property of Man, and it was a destination that had to be worked toward. Thus, salvation gets recast as a work of improvement, something that always has to be proved and performed. In this way, the structure of Man resourced the idea of salvation into its own colonial project. This way of thinking about soteriology, the move from fallen to chosen, irrational to rational, from one category to another has become so ubiquitous it’s hard to imagine anything else. This framework is a framework of Man though, of patriarchy, not of Christianity.

¹¹ 297.

Untangling Christian soteriology from Man's framework requires an interrogation of Man and its relationship to subjectivity. This relationship not only demonstrates the connection between salvation and subjectivity, but it also illuminates the cracks in Man's overdetermined position. These cracks provide the beginning point for a new soteriological framework. Revealing Man's already precarious foundation reveals what exists *a priori* Man: modes of being and relating that are not reducible to this schematic and therein create openings for imagining soteriology beyond Man's control. Denise Ferreira da Silva offers such an analysis in her article, "Hacking the Subject: Black Feminism and Refusal Beyond the Limits of Critique." Before understanding how the Subject can be "hacked," however, we must first take a brief look at da Silva's notion of the patriarch-form and its relationship to subjecthood.

The Patriarch-Form

Da Silva's notion of the patriarch-form is similar to Wynter's concept of Man in that both offer analyses of the socio-political system and how they are configured around a central figure. Da Silva defines the patriarch form as "the *formal condition* of enunciation of any juridical (political) subject, including social (racial, gender-sexual) subjects, as a thing with authority, that is, a deciding entity."¹² Put differently, the patriarch-form defines the container that bestows agency and subjecthood and describes the kind of body that can fill this container. While sometimes the person and the container are conflated (and they definitely intermingle), they are distinct. Da Silva elaborates, describing the patriarch-form as "a shape, a mold: that is, it is an assemblage *as well as* a rule or a formula."¹³ In this way, the

¹² Denise Ferreira da Silva, "Hacking the Subject: Black Feminism and Refusal Beyond the Limits of Critique," in *Philosophia* 8, no. 1 (Winter 2018), 26.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 26.

patriarch is both an individual person and the form, the idea of the human/ruler/master and the individual occupying that socio-political location.

Da Silva's explanation also shows how as an assemblage the patriarch-form is not just one shape, but a collection and one that operates under a specific rule. For this reason, it can adjust with technology, socio-political shifts, and value changes. Much like Wynter's Man (who changes from Man₁ to Man₂) the patriarch-form retains the form and agenda, but shifts the specific content as needed in order to maintain its position and structure within society. Da Silva shows how this form will accept many iterations of how society marks an individual's power/agency, "The *arché-form* of the subject emerging in the moment of decision/determination, the patriarch-form is the mold onto which any framing of the determining entity must fit: the one that knows (Descartes), judges (Kant), recognizes (Hegel), and measures (science)." ¹⁴ That said, the patriarch-form's existence depends on another position: that which it negates. For example, when the patriarch-form defines itself as reasonable it does this over-against a counter position that it terms unreasonable. Thus, there are two stable positions within this schematic: the positive, deciding entity and the negation, the absence of agency. Even as the patriarch-form needs this other in order to define itself, it defines itself in such a way as to reject the possibility of any other outside itself. The patriarch-form is *the* subject. Thus, the patriarch-form not only denies the existence of this other-as-negation but also attempts to eviscerate it in order to claim the universality of being the only subject. Furthermore, the negated other exists either as failure or as pure negation in the relational framework the patriarch-form establishes.

¹⁴ Ibid., 27.

The patriarch-form not only shapes the patriarch, but places (or attempts to place) all relationships in reference to itself. This means different things for different subject positions, according to the particular iteration of the patriarch-form. Currently, it means that those who are able attempt to approximate maleness, whiteness, ableness, etc. It also means that those termed “women”¹⁵ should approximate themselves to patriarchal definitions of femaleness and masculine desire. It is both the determinacy of the form and the consequent need for approximation that have influenced soteriology. I will expand upon this after providing a fuller analysis of da Silva’s formulation of the patriarch form and how it relates to other subject positions.

Though some of the content has changed (e.g., faith, reason, etc.), race and gender have remained relatively stable categories within this system and these are the two categories with which da Silva works most closely. Da Silva combines the fields of mathematics and theory to explain how these categories interact with each other and to theorize a possible way forward for breaking the patriarch-form, or “hacking” it. A brief overview of her formula will further explain how the patriarch-form functions and its possible end.

The Patriarch-Form Formula

Following da Silva’s formula, the four subject positions (white male, white female, black male and black female) are construed as follows. 1) The white male form operates as the rational, free, equal, and authoritative subject. Applying a mathematical formula here, da

¹⁵ I use the phrase “termed ‘women’” to indicate that patriarchy largely decides this for people and naturalizes it via its construal of biology. Not everyone termed woman is a woman and some women are excluded from this category. The term also extends across racial lines where what was properly feminine was considered only attainable by white women. So the term and its meaning are much more complicated than patriarchy would acknowledge.

Silva credits each of these categories with (1), and after multiplying these categories together arrives at (1). Thus, the white male is the patriarch form, the site of positive subjectivity. The white female operates as rational, free and equal, but has maternity (valued at 0) rather than authority. Da Silva clarifies here that the lack of authority for white females “does not mean negation but absence of determination.”¹⁶ When all these terms are multiplied together, the resulting value is (0).

Following Wynter’s assessment that “racial subjugation refigure[s] hierarchical opposition,” da Silva uses (+) for privilege and (-) for subordinate positions.¹⁷ According to da Silva’s formulation of this system, the black male then receives the (-) in all four categories (rational, free, equal, and authority). Da Silva elaborates what this signifies, “What this figure shows is how, even as the patriarch-form remains conflated in the male form (Y), black maleness consistently signifies the negation—as a failed (here signified by -1) patriarchal authority.”¹⁸ The black female resembles the black male in all categories except authority where da Silva argues she has a (0) because “when figured in the scene of patriarchy, she has no relation to form and its value assignation (+ or -). Here she stands for the Thing (Kant’s *das Ding*), or what elsewhere I name the sexual in the female colonial (slave and native) body, which is my name for Spillers’ “Female Flesh Ungendered” (Ferreira da Silva 2013).”¹⁹ As such, the black woman figures neither as negation nor absence, but rather something altogether different. Da Silva elaborates, “As such, she is a referent to that which is without determination, without the Kantian program; not because she was excluded, but

¹⁶ Ibid., 29.

¹⁷ Ibid., 29.

¹⁸ Ibid., 30.

¹⁹ Ibid., 30.

because her non-value does not mean negation but nothingness—she is without the patriarchal norm.”²⁰ Within this framework, the black female subject position is beyond negation or failure in that she has no connection to the patriarch-form. It is here that da Silva finds rich potential for cracking the system and hacking the subject of the patriarch-form. Before exploring da Silva’s exploration, however, a brief assessment of how this theory intersects with soteriology will enrich the significance of da Silva’s solution.

The Patriarch-form & Soteriology

Parallels between Christianity and patriarchy entangled the processes of Christians attempting to live in accordance with their faith and people being brought into alignment with the patriarch. Theological notions of election, *imago dei*, divine order, and even providence translated into theories of racial superiority, inherent biological hierarchy, divinely intended mastery, manifest destiny, and the like. Theologian Willie James Jennings tracks how by erasing the Jews and imagining themselves as God’s chosen people, white people were able to imagine themselves as God’s chosen people who enacted God’s salvation throughout the earth.²¹ Thus, colonization and cultural extermination was legitimized as evangelism. Significantly, many of these colonizers were sincere in their faith and many others converted voluntarily. We see here the entanglement of these two processes. With soteriology specifically, the installation of a theological patriarch-form would direct Christian motivation for faithfulness toward the patriarchal system. Thus, Christianity’s saving figure, Jesus Christ, would need to be deployed as the ultimate patriarch.

²⁰ Ibid., 30.

²¹ Willie James Jennings, *The Christian Imagination: Theology and the Origins of Race* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2020).

As mentioned in chapter one, Christ's significance as the salvific figure and one that offers the possibility for reorientation toward God and a holier, fuller life make Christ the perfect candidate to install as the ultimate patriarch. Christ as the ultimate patriarch subtly shifted reorientation toward life as working to improve oneself to be like Christ. Significantly, "being like Christ" shifted from the radical freedom to just *be* to approximating Christ's subject-position as closely as possible. With Christ as the ultimate patriarch, this meant following patriarchy's order. Furthermore, it bequeathed the over-determined and universal claim of the patriarch-form with divine authenticity; the uniqueness of the God-Man justified the absoluteness of the patriarch-form. In this way, Christian messages of salvation often became confused or conflated with obedience to the patriarchal order. When this happened, conversion took on patriarchy's hierarchical structure, promising an improved self--a self that God intended. This improvement was not granted all at once but had to be worked for; conversion was the path toward the ideal self imaged in Christ and intended for "all". With Christ as patriarch, this improvement looked like movement toward western civilization, reason (as defined by the West), and whiteness.

The conflation of the work of devotion with the improvement required by the patriarchy created confusion for Christians discerning what a faithful life looked like. This was further complicated by the fact that nearly all of the people offering instruction in this matter were men. Often, patriarchy informed how these men answered questions about what it looked like to be a faithful woman or man (of course for them, there were just the two genders). Thus, improvement and the work toward it became one of the primary ways Christians were taught to express their faithfulness and devotion to God. Conversely, "salvation" and its promises shifted in meaning. By using the Christian framework of conversion and its promises (whether this meant the promise of eternal life, liberation,

comfort, or relationship with God), patriarchy found a useful motivation for encouraging people to submit to and endlessly work at improving their position within its system. The nature of the improvement required of course depended on one's subject position.

As mentioned in da Silva's account, one's position within patriarchy largely determined the salvific work (or improvement) needed. Though this took many forms, for women, improvement often looked like calibration to men's desires, which established them as entirely referential. Frequently, this manifested in exhortations for obedience to the authorities (read men) and attention to their appearance. Often these two went hand in hand. This was refracted through race (and education, language, and class) by patriarchy's association with whiteness and by declaring femininity and beauty as the property of whiteness. Thus, obeying authorities by properly attending to one's appearance *also meant* approximating whiteness. We will explore the practical manifestations of this fully in the next chapter.

Of course, the fallacy here was that just as the patriarch-form required a negation, so this construal of salvation destined some for damnation. Just as the patriarch-form rejects its dependence on this other, so this patriarchal salvation rejects the notion that some must not be save-able, for the framework depends on this distinction. That is, even as patriarchal salvation proclaims the possibility for salvation for everyone (universal application/determinism), it depends on the form of the Christ-refuser/heathen as that which it has progressed beyond. (How will Christians know on whom to exert their evangelical work if they cannot distinguish Christian from heathen?) Yet patriarchal soteriology proclaimed that everyone could improve and approximate themselves toward Christ/the ultimate patriarch. With this formulation, those who did not (or could not) succeed were deemed lazy, reprobate, immoral and/or irrational.

The universality of patriarchy and its over-determined claims to subjecthood paired with its entanglement with soteriology create a formidable dilemma. How can subjectivity be recovered (or can it)? How can Christians retain the good and liberation within soteriology without reproducing a system invested in something entirely other (namely, hierarchical ordering and domination)? Da Silva offers us one possible avenue forward.

Hacking the Subject

For da Silva, the (0) that the black female receives in her formula does not represent simple negation, but also, “beyond any means for measuring (excess); and, more importantly, (d) the plenum (virtuality, as a possible new origin or beginning), that is, she is $\infty - \infty$.”²² This indexes exactly what the patriarch-form/Man must deny: that there is anything outside of this framework, any other way of being. Significantly, this potentiality is not bestowed on her by virtue of the patriarchy or its formula, but because patriarchy does not have and cannot contain universal reality (i.e., life cannot be contained). Da Silva explores how exactly the black female can “hack the Subject” within her formula. Though a close analysis of her mathematical formulations would take us too far afield, one example will illustrate the kind of work da Silva is doing here.

Following a complicated analysis in which da Silva explains formulas for sexual reproduction and sexual desire (in which women, specifically black women, represent lack and negation).²³ An analysis of her patriarchal formula for sexual desire followed by her

²² Ibid., 31.

²³ Da Silva describes how the sexual reproduction formulas deny female agency, “In any event, these figures indicate how the female particle cannot re-present (or re-produce or in-form). Without the male, all it does is to copy itself ($XX=XX=0$) or nullify the male form ($XY=XX=0$). This is patriarchy! The male particle (XY) holds representational power (see equation A), in this case signifying authority as it is necessary for signaling differentiation.” *ibid.*, 31.

method of hacking this formula elucidates the potentiality of the black female subject position.

Using the chromosomal markers for female and male (XX and XY), da Silva posits that $XX + XY \Rightarrow 0$ configures (hetero) sexual desire, where the female subject and the male subject's desire for the other leads to possibility (0). She recomposes this under patriarchal circumstances to: $XX \Rightarrow -XY$ or as $XY \Rightarrow -XX$. Da Silva argues for the necessity of this recomposition, stating, "The relevant critical move here—the departure from Hegel—is that X figures negation without the possibility of sublation, that it stays in the moment of opposition: she (the Other) as negation (lack) is what he (the Subject) is when lacking the ability to self-represent and vice versa—each signifies the death ("-") of the other."²⁴ This is not simple or equal confrontation, but demonstrates the fundamentally violent exchange of sexual desire under patriarchy; one cannot desire the other freely without collapsing the entire patriarchal structure (a possibility that patriarchy firmly denies).²⁵ As an alternative to this formulation, da Silva suggests activating "female flesh ungendered" (what she also terms the cypher or $\infty - \infty$). Staying within the framework of her formulas, she terms this activation the "hack."

For da Silva, the hack (" \backslash ") "is a mark that has the ability to cut through forms and to suspend the usual meaning of anything following it."²⁶ The "hacked female" is never mother or wife and figures as "0" or the cypher $\infty - \infty$ (the plenum). What da Silva

²⁴ Ibid., 33.

²⁵ I'm thinking here of males desiring females and being called "henpecked" or "whooped" and females desiring males and being criticized for being too submissive, slutty, or manipulative. That is, they each lose their status as "proper female" or "proper male" in the desire for the other. Often, this translates to desire that takes the form of violence or consumption.

²⁶ Ibid., 35.

accomplishes with this slight shift in female assignation is a subject who is not determined by or in reference to the patriarchy. Significantly, the hacked female must also be black. Though both black and white females figure as 0 within her formula, da Silva carefully points out that because of the valuations in the other categories (1 vs. -1), they each occupy “two different positions in the ethical scene of value.”²⁷ When the hacked female is applied to the formula for sexual desire, “*female flesh ungendered* performs a radical transformation (a re\composition) of the terms of *the equation of sexual desire*, one which also destabilizes the racial (oppositional) form.”²⁸

Deploying the hack upon the sexual desire formula simply replaces the XX in the above formula with \XX, but da Silva argues that this hack releases female flesh ungendered into the formula. This changes the formula in its entirety. Da Silva argues, “figures matter before/without form, or *materia prima*, as we saw before, where she expresses ($\infty - \infty$) or indeterminateness. If we further explore the hack’s (‘\’) destabilizing capacity, then, it is possible to image; instead of relying on the stability of XX, one can unleash the hack sign to transfigure the whole, every element in the equation.”²⁹ The hack applied to the XX allows an entirely different formulaic configuration that destabilizes patriarchy in its gendered, racial, and sexed terms, beginning with hacking the cisfemale. The new formula is now \XX $\Rightarrow -XY + 0$, which becomes $\backslash X \Rightarrow -Y + 0$. She explains,

Let me explain de\composition once more move by move. First move: I activate the hack [\] and use it to split the female signifier (XX) into \X and X. This move releases the *female flesh ungendered* [\X] from biological (chromosomal) signification of femaleness (XX), which is sent to the other side of \Rightarrow where it becomes a denominator, that is it divides $-XY + 0$.³⁰

²⁷ Ibid., 34.

²⁸ Ibid., 36.

²⁹ Ibid., 37.

³⁰ Ibid., 37.

Thus, one side leaves the hacked X and the other side has been freed of its X via division. This leads to her formula $\backslash X \Rightarrow -Y + 0$. Da Silva explains the theoretical consequence of this move, arguing that the hacked X releases “the un-measurable, non-calculable, indeterminate in spacetime (-Y), which is the real without form.”³¹ In this way, the patriarch form, the Subject has disappeared and each entity exists in its own freedom and possibility (i.e., XX is no longer cisfemale, XY no longer makes XX referential to itself; each are connected yet separate). Summarizing the results of hacking the sexual desire formula, da Silva posits,

This is, I find, the gift of the X: the possibility of being-in-the-world anew, of becoming of/in the world without the presumed necessity for resolution and determination and thus without the modes of knowing—framed as the logic of opposition (Aristotle and Aquinas) or sublation (Hegel)—which always already describes existence as a scene of violence, and imposes the necessity of domination or obliteration, as in a hierarchical ordering (Natural History) or a deadly struggle for existence (Evolution), respectively.³²

Though da Silva acknowledges that this argument “hovers in the domain of thought,” she argues that this kind of work may have the possibility to create new ways of being and relating in the world, new methods for deconstructing patriarchy. She concludes, “Because, as my experiment with hacking the patriarch-form indicates, I am convinced that what lies outside the equations, in which the sexual black (and native) female body means nothing, is a Nothing by which I mean Everything and Anything else than the World as we know it today.”³³

³¹ Ibid., 38.

³² Ibid., 38.

³³ Ibid., 38.

What da Silva has illuminated with her theoretical mathematical formulas is the very real possibility of dismantling patriarchy from the inside out--that the lie of absolute determinacy actually indexes a wild, unsettled existence that has the possibility to shatter the entire patriarchal system. The significance of this kind of thinking for soteriology is immense.

If the hacked female subject is free from her referential and subordinate status to the male, then salvation cannot lie in approximation to him. If the hacked female subject is also no longer cisfemale, then being “properly female” (however that is defined) cannot be a measurement of faithfulness or proximity to divinely intended ordination. Furthermore, if all subjects exist in relation to the plenum (possibility, new origin, new beginning), then the determinacy required within patriarchal salvation no longer makes any sense. That is, the plenum eradicates the determinacy within patriarchy that was used as the logic for improvement toward salvation.³⁴ This means that salvation now looks like possibility and freedom. The possibility of new orientations and the freedom to just be. This is not a common approach to soteriology today.

Within twentieth century America, patriarchy and capitalism have pushed hard for a vision of soteriology that depends on improvement. Specifically for women, this has emerged within beauty culture. Perhaps this is an unexpected place to turn as it seems to

³⁴ Of course the worry here would be that we are headed toward some kind of extreme radicalism. I would posit, however, that this is a misunderstanding in our theology. Theology has foundations that acknowledge that God is always beyond it, and it is in this that I find the logistical platform for this foundation. In a sense, God must be understood more as a verb than a noun in order to fully deconstruct the way patriarchal theology/soteriology has established itself. Patriarchy wants to settle, to establish God/salvation in order to co-opt it into its own regime. Denouncing this does not mean relativism, but rather acknowledging this fallacy. Perhaps we could use more directional language to get around this--that God is a *telos*, guides people by orienting them toward life and relationship.

have little to do with soteriology. Yet beauty culture is a profound articulation of this exact project, and as we have seen above, the workings of this project and how it is understood have grave implications for soteriology. Beauty crystallizes the patriarchal hold on women: deeming their *telos* as referential (to please men), reinforcing racial divisions, and moralizing women's efforts at beauty in order to remain as absolute authorities. Furthermore, beauty is where biology meets mythos; it is where the physical aspects of who we are meet the stories we tell about ourselves. Beauty moves at the biological (what do you actually look like, what actually are you) and at the performative level (what could you be, how are you living out who we say you are). In beauty culture we see the performative and practical mechanics of Man/the patriarch-form as they emerged in twentieth century America. It is by a careful examination of this mechanism that we can observe the deep identity-shaping that happened for women and how this translated to their visions of salvation. In beauty culture, we can see the deadly serious stakes within aesthetics.

Chapter 3

The Third Shift: The Moralization and Making of American Beauty Culture

In the twentieth century West, beauty became both a weapon of oppression and a practice of survival. At the same time that women were blamed for their beauty causing men's sexual misbehavior, they were also censured if they did not make an effort to be beautiful. American historian Kathy Peiss describes how a racially gendered cultural narrative emerged that told women two things simultaneously: beauty is a requirement for femininity and something women must work to achieve. Peiss tracks how this message manifested in the advertising industry that taught women to see their own deficiency as well as the possibility for their improvement. The beauty industry presented a plethora of solutions to women (even as it informed them of their "problems"). Makeup, skincare, hair products, and weight loss regimens all reinforced these two messages. Makeup, for example, congratulates women on their efforts while endlessly communicating that they could be more beautiful (e.g., through better technique, new technology, different products, etc.). Similarly, skincare regimes parade women who have defied their age while warning women of the dangers of laugh lines or age spots. These advertising images functioned by establishing an ideal beauty, and it was no accident that this ideal featured a western, white woman. In this way, beauty culture reinforced existing power structures and imported colonial ideas on race and civilization into beauty. This meant that one's approximation to the beauty ideal simultaneously signaled one's relationship with the larger patriarchal system.

The development of beauty culture under patriarchy demonstrated the practical outworking of Man as it related to a particular population: women.¹ Furthermore, it shows the mechanisms by which patriarchy became entangled with a soteriological framework that understood improvement as directly correlated to salvation. Beauty culture was unique, however, in that its emergence offered women a rare chance for agency at a time when possibilities for female subjectivity were severely limited. Thus, beauty culture reveals the negotiation for control over women's bodies fought out on the terrain of women's bodies themselves. The historical progression of men installing themselves as experts over women, gradually taking over the beauty industry, and weaponizing images of beauty against women all worked to protect the patriarchal order by infecting women's imagination and self-perception with a masculine notion of what a woman could/should be. This chapter will explore each of these three historical moments, exploring how women came to participate in beauty culture, how beauty crystalized differences between women in the patriarchal order, and how participation within beauty culture became a moral obligation.

The Male Expert and the Formation of the "Improving Female"

Significantly, the emergence of makeup as culturally acceptable coincided with a pivotal flux in female identity at the end of the nineteenth century. Science had only recently

¹ At least initially. While the cisgender heterosexual couple remained the predominant fixture of American society, patriarchy invested in retaining the imbalance between men and women, using beauty as a tool. This kept the structural order, keeping women financially and psychologically dependent upon men. Of course, as American capitalism has adjusted to incorporate LGBTQ relationships into its order, the deployment of beauty as a weapon has changed. I will address this directly at the end of the chapter. First, it is important to understand how beauty developed and was weaponized as a gendered and sexed tool of oppression.

declared that females were a second sex (not just failed males)² and work was exported out of the home, crippling the cultural idea of what it meant to be a woman (i.e., a middle/upper class white woman running a household). Male scientists, psychoanalysts and physicians rushed to answer the question left by this vacuum: What was a woman's purpose? or What *should* be a woman's purpose? or What was a woman? The explosion of experimentation on women at this time reveals the extent to which men were invested in retaining the power to answer this question. If men could define women's purpose and keep it referential to their own, they would not only retain their own power in the system, but would entrench a normative "ideal woman" within society that would keep women endlessly working toward this ideal.³ In their seminal text *For Her Own Good*, Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English track the progression of men coding themselves as experts in order to define women.⁴ This process had three significant results: it normalized women looking to men for their identity, it invisibilized the power dynamic of only men defining all women, and it protected the entire patriarchal order.

The medical field was one locus where these three results demonstrated themselves powerfully. As women were excluded from the medical field, they depended upon male doctors for their health and for understanding the cause of their symptoms. Ehrenreich and

² Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002).

³ Though men were largely the actors in this pursuit and definitely participated in protecting their own position, the system itself is not reducible to men. More precisely, power protects power and the particularities of the position of power are subject to change. Though patriarchy cannot be an actor in the proper sense (how can a system perform an action), it is a helpful shorthand for naming both the participation of those in power and the changeability of this position. Thus, going forward, this dissertation will name patriarchy as an actor and subject in this sense.

⁴ Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English, *For Her Own Good: Two Centuries of the Experts' Advice to Women*, (New York: Anchor Books, 2005).

English note how this exclusion dates back all the way to witch hunts in the medieval era where women were executed for practicing medicine. In some villages executioners only left one woman alive, executing as many as four hundred in one day.⁵ Not only did this destroy the communal sharing of medical knowledge, but it also eviscerated hundreds of generations of medical knowledge. This is just one example of how patriarchy intervened to retain power. Ultimately, this meant that the power-dynamic between men and women was decidedly tilted in men's favor and this was vectored again through class and race. Furthermore, this meant that masculine input, advice, and perception were brought into women's bodies. For what may have been the first time in recorded history, women depended upon men for medical care of their own bodies. It was not only medical care, however, that women received; doctors imported their biases into their medical advice and treated women as an object of study rather than a subject in their own right.

In an effort to understand their new object of study, many male doctors contrived graphic experiments and medical procedures that revealed their patriarchal biases. While middle and upper class white women received the bulk of medical treatment, doctors turned to society's most vulnerable women to enact their experiments. Ehrenreich and English describe the violence of gynecological developments,

The pioneering work in gynecological surgery had been performed by Marion Sims on black female slaves he kept for the sole purpose of surgical experimentation. He operated on one of them thirty times in four years, being foiled over and over by post-operative infections. After moving to New York, Sims continued his

⁵ Ehrenreich and English report estimates of over six hundred executions per year in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. Nine hundred witches were executed in a single year in the Wurzburg area, and a thousand in and around Como. Two villages executed all but one female inhabitant each. Many writers have estimated the total number of executions for witchcraft to be in the millions.

Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English, *For Her Own Good* (New York: Anchor Books 2005), 39.

experimentation on indigent Irish women in the wards of the New York Women's Hospital. So, though middle-class women suffered most from the doctors' actual practice, it was poor and black women who had suffered through the brutal period of experimentation.⁶

Though all women suffered under this patriarchal medical regime, it was experienced disproportionately through the vectors of race, class and nationality. Unsurprisingly, the findings of these studies proved women's inferiority in the name of science, cementing women's place within the patriarchal order. Rather than questioning the humaneness and validity of their experiments, doctors concluded that women were frail, prone to infection and hysterical. Furthermore, the products of these experiments were hardly liberatory for any women.

Centering their research on what they perceived was the essential difference between males and females (the reproductive system), male doctors both blamed it for any maladies and used it to justify the standing social hierarchy. Doctors diagnosed anything from anxiety to tuberculosis as proof of a malfunctioning uterus or ovaries, "When men were consumptive, doctors sought some environmental factor, such as overexposure, to explain the disease. But for women it was a result of reproductive malfunction."⁷ The prescriptions were therefore also always focused on these organs. Ehrenreich and English describe one popular practice of placing leeches right on the vulva or neck of the uterus as a cure for anything from backaches to indigestion (doctors were cautioned not to "lose" any as leeches advancing to the cervical cavity was noted to cause extreme pain).⁸ Not only were these practices violent to women's health, they reinforced the cultural idea that everything that was

⁶ Ibid., 137.

⁷ Ibid., 134.

⁸ Ibid., 135.

“wrong” with a woman was precisely what made her a woman. Said differently, being ill, inferior, or inadequate was a natural result of being a woman. As these findings were presented as the results of objective, scientific research and women were largely barred from these scientific inner circles, there was little they could do to refute these “truths.” Furthermore, the sly erasure of these scientists’ subject position (mostly educated, white, upper class, male) enabled them to sell their findings as objective truth, shielding them from any unsavory accusations of perpetuating their own biases. Conveniently, the natural sciences provided a useful foundation for answering the Woman question while justifying the patriarchal order.

Natural sciences presented the idea that humans’ methods of organizing themselves, their “social order” was the natural result of a hierarchical chain of being along an evolutionary scale of progress. According to these “scientific” theories, just as parents were naturally more developed than their children, so some races (a recently constructed category) were inherently superior, more civilized and should rule others. The application of this scientific approach to the Woman question allowed scientists to provide answers while reinstating their own superiority as men. Even the way biologists framed the question itself was telling. Rather than beginning with the subject herself, biologists asked what it was about women that justified her frailty and subordinate social location. For example, biologists did not question societal expectations around fashion that required women to wear corsets that not only limited them but harmed them physically. Ehrenreich and English detail the health effects of these kinds of fashion,

A fashionable woman’s corsets exerted, on the average, twenty-one pounds of pressure on her internal organs, and extremes of up to eighty-eight pounds had been measured. (Add to this the fact that a well-dressed woman wore an average of thirty-seven pounds of street clothing in the winter months, of which nineteen pounds were suspended from her tortured waist.) Some of the short-term results of tight-

lacing were shortness of breath, constipation, weakness, and a tendency to violent indigestion. Among the long-term effects were bent or fractured ribs, displacement of the liver, and uterine prolapse (in some cases, the uterus would be gradually forced, by the pressure of the corset, out through the vagina).⁹

It is important to note that “fashion” at that time was not a matter of personal choice or individual expression, but was dictated by society and declared a woman’s respectability--a woman’s dress determined how society was “allowed” to treat her (e.g., respectable woman or harlot).¹⁰ Rather than questioning the harm dealt to women by these fashions, scientists pointed to women’s proclivity to faintness and frailty as evidence of her inferior nature.

Natural Scientists put Darwin’s theory of evolution to use to explain how all people had a “natural” place within humanity’s chain of being. In an impressive display of logical gymnastics, they simultaneously argued that “coarser” women (i.e., poor, immigrant and non-white women) were suited for hard work and *that* is what made them inferior.

Ehrenreich and English describe nineteenth century medical professionals who believed that “‘Civilization’ had made the middle-class woman sickly; her physical frailty went hand-in-white-gloved-hand with her superior modesty, refinement, and sensitivity. Working-class women were robust, just as they were supposedly ‘coarse’ and immodest.”¹¹ This justification of the social hierarchy not only normalized women’s subordinate position, but also rationalized differences between women of different races, economic classes, etc. This justification of patriarchal ordering, however, was anything but static. In order to protect it

⁹ Ibid., 120.

¹⁰ One could argue that despite women’s current options for clothing that the same mechanism is at play: women declare their adherence to societal expectations around dress. This is why “what was she wearing” still operates within “logical” responses to sexual assault cases.

¹¹ Ibid., 125.

absolutely, this patriarchal order would have to extend beyond male imposition; women would have to participate.

Patriarchy gained women's participation by establishing an ideal and asserting that true femininity demonstrated itself by working toward this ideal. Weaving through all of these scientific examinations of what a woman *was* were messages about what a woman *should* be. This vision of an idealized woman took on definitions of class, race, etc. and communicated that all women should work toward this ideal. Within Wynter's framework, this was an iteration of Man specifically tailored to women that simultaneously reinforced their inferiority and kept them working to rectify it. In this way, patriarchy merged proper womanhood with self-improvement. This evolved in several different iterations throughout the twentieth century.

Initially this ideal woman took on the image of a sickly lady who was prone to faintness "did nothing." Interestingly, the sickly woman who had nothing also functioned as a status symbol for her husband who could afford to "keep her." Of course, this kind of idylness simultaneously indexed the couple's economic status. In this way, the ideal already worked to separate women from each other, reinforcing the lines of oppression by locating the ideal closest to women in (proximal) power. Proximity to this ideal, however, did not mean attainment; women were still expected to work toward this ideal. Indeed, an endless willingness to work was built into the ideal with the next iteration of the "ideal woman."¹²

Around the turn of the century, patriarchy moralized the image of an ideal woman and infused it with the value of ceaseless effort. This coincided with the scientific discovery

¹² This notion of the shifting and elusive ideal springs from the continuation of Wynter's evolution of Man. If Man can continually reinvent itself in order to retain power, then the mechanisms that reinforce that power must also retain this ability.

of germs and produced the image of a housewife who would keep her family healthy by endless cleaning. This evolution of the ideal woman added a new level of moral responsibility: the health of her family. Striving for the ideal was no longer simply for her own benefit. The stakes had risen such that “neglect of housecleaning [was] tantamount to child abuse.”¹³ Thus, a heightened morality cloaked the imposition to strive for this ideal. Women’s response to this was largely positive. In housework, women were given the opportunity to *do something*, to be active agents in their own life. Many feminists hoped this signaled the beginning of equality with men: equal labor, equal pay, equal participation in the building of society.¹⁴ The founder of domestic science, Ellen Richards, argued that “science transformed housekeeping into an endless adventure, a quest for new knowledge,” and one that impelled housewives to ask, “Can I do better than I am doing?”¹⁵ By teaching women to ask this question, patriarchy added a new layer to the identity of the ideal woman: the tireless and self-policing worker. In so doing, patriarchy built the spectre of self-improvement into the foundations of female subjectivity. Women would work tirelessly regardless of how close to the ideal they got and would continuously search for new ways to improve. The moralization of ceaseless work paired with the internalization of self-improvement to create a vision of female subjectivity that declared these qualities inherent to womanhood or being a good woman. Thus patriarchy established an ideal woman alongside the expectation for women to approximate it and made both the achievement and the work of improvement an issue with decidedly moral stakes. Patriarchy secured its stranglehold on female subjectivity when it established men as the judges of women’s performance of “womanhood.”

¹³ Ibid., 175.

¹⁴ Ibid., 180-6.

¹⁵ Ibid., 177.

Language around the nuclear family crystalizes the cementing of this identity and the effort to cultivate a subject who would work to improve and would look to men for the content of this improvement. Cultural perceptions on the nuclear family and the woman's role in it also highlight the increasing sense of moral pressure women experienced.

By the mid twentieth century, the image of the nuclear family promoted a profound sense of order that supposedly provided the foundation for American society. Quite obviously termed "right living," this order demanded

living like the American middle class lived, or aspired to live. It meant thrift, orderliness, and privacy instead of spontaneity and neighborliness. It meant a life centered on the nuclear family, in a home cleanly separated from productive labor (chickens and lodgers would have to go!) [read immigrants and alternative means of organizing life], ordered with industrial precision and presided over by a full-time housekeeper.¹⁶

Within this order, the ideal woman took advice from her superiors and found fulfillment in her role as wife and mother. The message to women was clear: in order to protect American society, women would have to work tirelessly to become the ideal woman by listening to the advice of those superior to her and therein also ensuring her own fulfillment (though of course her own fulfillment was certainly not the goal). Exactly who counted as her superior depended entirely on her subject position. Within patriarchal order, all men were superior to all women, but as with every other iteration of the ideal woman this also ran through the gamut of other hierarchies. Within this logic, non-white women should take advice from white women, the poor from the upper class, the ugly from the beautiful and so on. Submission to this order paired with continuous work demonstrated the qualities of a proper woman. Thus, a properly run household required a wife/mother who would never stop

¹⁶ Ibid., 190.

working to improve herself for the benefit of those around her, most importantly her husband and children. Indeed the idealization of the nuclear family as the cornerstone for American life cemented the idea that women received their identity from the statuses of wife and mother, statuses that were inherently referential. In the twentieth century, this was demonstrated particularly in motherhood's role in the nuclear family.

As Darwinian scientists theorized about how society progressed, new focus and concern centered around the child. Children were no longer simply necessary for the continuation of the family line but represented the future of the human species. In the child lay the key to the “*control* of human evolution.”¹⁷ As such, pressure around motherhood and the investment into this key dramatically increased. Encapsulating this pressure upon women at this time, President Roosevelt remarked to a gathering of women,

The good mother...is more important to the community than even the ablest man; her career is more worthy of honor and is more useful to the community than the career of any man, no matter how successful...But...the woman who, whether from cowardice, from selfishness, from having a false and vacuous ideal shirks her duty as wife and mother, earns the right to our contempt, just as does the man who, from any motive, fears to do his duty in battle when the country calls him.¹⁸

Motherhood not only became a career but a moral obligation and one under the watchful eye of the State. Children were the future of the country, little girls would become future mothers and little boys would become the future. That is, children weren't the future of the country, young boys were the future. As ideology around the importance of the child grew, however, concerns around the woman's ability to effectively perform this task increased as well. If boys were the future, they would need instruction on how to be properly male. But

¹⁷ Ibid., 204. Emphasis in original

¹⁸ Ibid., 208-9.

how could women raise men? Here again, patriarchy secured its foothold of control by contending that mothers would need coaching from male experts.

In response to this growing anxiety, a whole field of experts began developing theories on behavior and motherhood. Motherhood became a scientific field where women again were told to rely on external, masculine advice. Ehrenreich and English note, “The younger generation of experts in the early nineteenth century was not interested in the amateurish contributions of mothers. As far as they were concerned, only scientists could gather the data and formulate the rules: all that was left for mothers was to follow the instructions.”¹⁹ While the content around this advice shifted over time, the coincidental compatibility with male desires was suspicious at best. Mothers were encouraged to be submissive to their husbands, cheerful, clean, and sexually available to their husbands (all for the benefit of the children of course). When concerns around mothers being overly protective emerged, leading psychiatrist David Levy taught,

A wife devoted to her husband cannot be exclusively a mother. In a more fundamental sense, the release of libido through satisfactory sexual relationship shunts off energy that must otherwise flow in other directions--in the case of our group, in the direction of maternity. The child must bear the brunt of the unsatisfied love life of the mother. One might theoretically infer that a woman sexually well adjusted could not become overprotective to an extreme degree.²⁰

Thus, sex was the antidote to bad mothering. Patriarchy tailored female subjectivity to masculine imaginations of control and desire. The employment of this masculine expertise by women was the forerunner to women also teaching daughters about what it means to be an ideal woman. In this way, masculine conceptions of what a woman should be shaped female subjectivity, influencing it from childhood. While the communication of expertise

¹⁹ Ibid., 220.

²⁰ Ibid., 266.

was decidedly masculine, the communication of the *visual* was presented as female. That is, representation of the ideal woman came in the medium of other women (e.g., celebrities, magazine covers, fashion models, etc.). This reinforced the idea of masculine authority and the possibility of feminine success. Not only this, but it taught women to see other women in terms of comparison.

A properly run household also meant that the wife-mother looked for ways she could improve by comparing herself with the wife-mothers around her, whether they be mothers, neighbors or magazine models. What largely went unnoticed, however, is that these women were a complicated product of their own subject position and the external influence of patriarchal influence. Male doctors diagnosed women, male therapists analyzed the “female brain” and male advertising executives drove the market that depicted the visual aesthetic of the ideal woman. Patriarchy presented these women as if their success was a simple result of their beauty and vice versa. In this way, the fact that men were selecting these women and crafting the messages around them was completely invisibilized.

The installation of male experts and their acceptance by women with extremely limited alternatives created a scenario where men shaped the societal imagination of what a woman was. Furthermore, they shaped the subjectivity, or the performance of womanhood, such that being a proper woman also meant constantly self-improving. As this was all presented as advice from the “experts,” the fact that it was *men* shaping this subject position and subjectivity went largely unnoticed and unquestioned. In this way, it protected the power dynamic of men over women and ensured the future of this dynamic with the installation of this ever-working-never-succeeding woman.

The continually shifting grounds on which patriarchy rationalized women’s inferiority provides an example of how Wynter’s Man retains power. Establishing men as the

experts disguised systemic sexism and allowed patriarchy to claim the universality Wynter identifies as intrinsic under Man. The neutrality demonstrated in men claiming authority as the experts also illustrates Wynter's notion of the over-determined, sovereign-self and da Silva's notion of the Patriarch Form. The deployment of an ideal that required approximation demonstrates the beginning foundations of patriarchal soteriology in how the idea of improvement promised amelioration but actually reproduced submission to the system itself. Despite the seeming directness of this systemic oppression, women's experience of this was anything but flat.

While women received advice from doctors and therapists and did their best to navigate advice on mothering, cleaning and wifery, they also carved out a bit of their own agency through beauty culture. At a time when independence and their own agency was hard to come by, many women found self-expression in makeup, skin care and going to the hairdresser's. At the turn of the turn of the twentieth century, much of the beauty industry was owned and run by women, and as this changed the image of the beautiful woman changed with it.

Take-over of the Beauty Industry & the Crystallization of the Wealthy, White, Beauty:

The origins of American beauty culture began in the tangled web of beauty parlors, women's magazines, and exchanges of "beauty tips" between women around the turn of the century. After the Civil War, an entire culture developed around these products, practices and routines that was (largely) unique to women. Women were not only the consumers and participants of this culture, but also key business leaders and developers. While famous figures like Helena Rubinstein, Elizabeth Arden, Madam C. J. Walker and Annie Turnbo Malone were most notable, they also signaled a much larger cultural shift. Since it was outside the typical jurisdiction of the masculine world of business, the beauty industry

offered ideal employment opportunities for women. American historian Kathy Peiss describes how women “became inventors, manufacturers, and distributors of beauty products. The full extent of their business activity remains unknown.”²¹ When women experienced sexism and resistance in other fields, many turned to various aspects of the beauty industry. Would-be scientists, chemists and doctors turned to the scientific cultivation of beauty or simply founded beauty parlors.

The women who found opportunity and often a kind of refuge in the beauty industry came from a wide variety of backgrounds. Educated women entered into fields of research and development, wealthier women with access to funding opened beauty shops, immigrants and lower class women worked in the shops or pedaled their products within their communities. According to Peiss, many of the women who became successful in the beauty industry came from lower class backgrounds. She notes, “Most women entrepreneurs, however, started out in less fortunate circumstances. They were farm daughters and domestic servants, immigrants and African Americans, ordinary, often poor women.”²² Elizabeth Arden’s family were tenant farmers in Canada, and she grew up in poverty and with a limited education. The beauty industry provided opportunity for women with few other options for supporting themselves, granting them security and independence otherwise not available to them. In many ways, it also offered an escape from the marginalization and oppression many women faced. This was especially true for African American women in the early 1900s.

²¹ Kathy Peiss, *Hope in a Jar*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), 63.

²² *Ibid.*, 64.

The difficulties white women experienced via sexism were compounded for African American women via race and class.²³ The jobs available to African American women were mostly limited to manual labor (textiles, laundry, etc.) and domestic labor (housework, child-rearing, etc.), neither of which paid well and both of which kept them dependent on (and therefore exposed to the oppressions of) white people. The beauty industry offered independence from white employers and the possibility of financial stability. Annie Turnbo and Madam C. J. Walker were two such women who created escape and opportunity through the beauty trade.

With society's changing perceptions around appearance-making for women, Turnbo and Breedlove successfully identified a market of women desiring products that would allow them participation in this culture. Having learned herbal remedies from a female relative, Turnbo employed them to develop hair and scalp care. Peiss notes that "many of them [black women] needed remedies for such common problems as hair loss, breakage, and tetter, a common skin ailment, but women also considered lush, well-groomed hair a sign of beauty."²⁴ Developing a partnership with her sister, Turnbo began to manufacture the product and sold it door to door until demand outstripped their production abilities. Shortly after, Turnbo hired three young women as assistants, registered her product and by 1906 had a thriving, nationwide business. Turnbo's business acumen not only shifted her own situation from one of poverty to wealth, but also brought a measure of financial stability and the unusual (at the time) experience of working for an African American woman to those in

²³ While it's true some white women experienced class oppression, the mechanisms of racism meant that class was a nearly ubiquitous issue for non-white women. The point here is to highlight the interconnections of how these systems of oppressions interacted and compounded around the issue and industry of beauty.

²⁴ *ibid.*, 67.

her employment. In this way, the beauty trade and women's desires for beauty created an unusual niche market where women were outside the thumb of typical manifestations of oppression. This demonstrates the ongoing possibility of disruption under Man and the inaccuracy of its claim to universality. Walker's experience with the beauty trade underscores this reality.

Madam C. J. Walker also utilized the hair-care business to transform her life to one of the most successful women of her time. After marrying, having a child and becoming a widow all before she was twenty, Walker worked to support herself and her daughter doing housework and laundering. When her own hair began to fall out, she experimented with remedies and eventually began selling her own product. Beginning with house-to-house canvassing, Walker later expanded to a mail-order business and soon owned a business with national distribution. Similar to Turnbo, Walker's success affected the women around her. Peiss reports, "in a time when Southern black domestic workers earned only one or two dollars a week, the Walker Company claimed its agents could 'easily make from three to five dollars a day.'"²⁵ In this way the beauty industry unleashed incredible financial opportunity for women and the possibility of a modicum of freedom from sexism, classism and racism in ways that were previously unheard of. Additionally, these forerunners in the beauty industry actively combatted these systems of oppression.

The ways that systemic sexism functioned at the turn of the century created significant obstacles for women endeavoring to succeed in the beauty industry. As women had less access to credit, business education or societal acceptance as business owners in their own right, they developed creative alternatives for growing their businesses. Though

²⁵ *ibid.*, 91.

some women (like Elizabeth Arden and C. J. Walker) had male relatives or spouses who were able to secure financial credit or supervise production, other women invented distribution methods based on house-to-house canvassing and mail-order business models. Peiss notes how other women “pioneered in the direct sales methods known today as multi-level marketing or ‘pyramid’ organization.”²⁶ Walker and Turnbo were particularly successful with this strategy, recruiting black women who were trained and in turn recruited more sales agents. Thus, women found ways around the systemic sexism that would otherwise have inhibited their success. This included navigating a system designed solely for white men.

African American women beauty entrepreneurs faced obstacles in gaining access to distribution networks and retail spaces. The combination of male-owned businesses with segregation created uniquely difficult challenges for the African American beauty entrepreneur. Not only did male store owners view women and their beauty products skeptically (over-against their more trusted male counterparts), but many white retailers were not interested in carrying products tailored for black women. Peiss describes how it was “only after Malone and Walker had created demand through other means [that] their goods were accepted onto drugstore shelves.”²⁷ In response to this, African American business women pioneered alternative marketing and distribution techniques (e.g., the aforementioned pyramid marketing and word-of-mouth canvassing). As beauty culture became a national industry, the cultural imagination for what counted as beautiful crystallized and also routed through race.

²⁶ *ibid.*, 76.

²⁷ *ibid.*, 72.

As the beauty industry moved toward self-improvement, a cultural vision of beauty shaped in racist ideology formed with it. In the same vein that ointments promised to remove unsightly blemishes (thereby communicating that blemishes were undesirable), other creams promised to bleach the skin to an ivory white. This

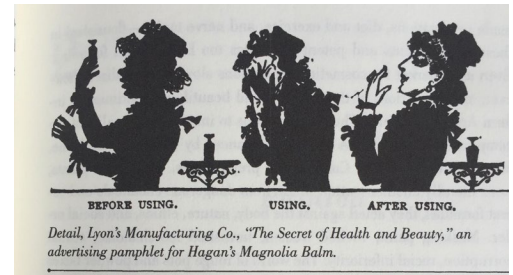


Figure 1

“noxious racial aesthetic” placed beauty as the sole property of white women. Peiss elaborates the political underpinnings of racially determined beauty:

Notions of Anglo-American beauty in the nineteenth century were continually asserted in relation to people of color around the world. Nineteenth-century travelers, missionaries, anthropologists, and scientists habitually *viewed beauty as a function of race*. Nodding in the direction of relativism--that various cultures perceive comeliness differently--they nevertheless proclaimed the superiority of white racial beauty...And because appearance and character were considered to be commensurate, the beauty of white skin expressed Anglo-Saxon virtue and civilization--and justified white supremacy in a period of American expansion.²⁸

²⁸ Ibid., 31 (emphasis mine).

If beauty remained the property of white women and also connoted her virtue and

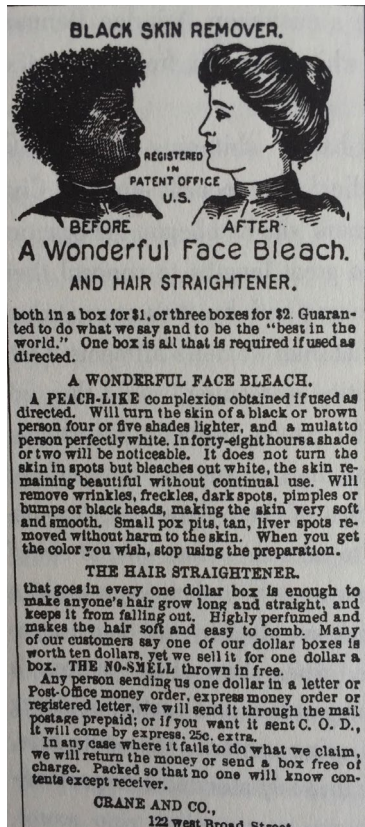


Figure 2

capacity for civilized behavior, then non-white women were simultaneously excluded from being beautiful and the inferiority of their position within society was justified. Put differently, the only way to become beautiful (and attain all the privileges therein) was to become white. Reflecting on a 1903 advertisement in *The Colored American Magazine*, Peiss elaborates, "Still, the aesthetic dimension of racism--gradations of skin color, textures of hair--shaped work opportunities, marriage changes, and social life, giving advantages to those with lighter complexions and straighter locks."²⁹ What is particularly significant about this advertisement is the twofold message that white emulation is possible *and* necessary for non-white women to achieve

beauty. In this way beauty intersected with race and class. The jobs available to working class women and immigrants were often determined by beauty calibrated to white ideals.

Elaborating this connection between race and class, Peiss notes, "A very dark complexion especially hampered women seeking work as secretaries, waitresses, doctor's assistants, actresses, or other positions involving face-to-face contact with the public...Those with lighter skin tones were viewed as more refined, while their darker sisters were considered better manual laborers."³⁰ Declaring black *as beautiful* was not just an aesthetic claim, but also

²⁹ Ibid., 42.

³⁰ Ibid., 234.

intensely political. Thus “beauty culture targeted not only native-born, affluent white women but other women aspiring to middle-class respectability.”³¹ The possibility for uplift via financial opportunity was often tied to white emulation.

Around this time, the development of beauty trading cards and photography increased the solidification of a beauty ideal. The connection between the women chosen, how they were presented, and the product advertised communicated specific messages to the public about what constituted beauty (read whiteness). Magazines and movies featured white women almost exclusively (no doubt because they were also primarily owned and operated by white people). Unsurprisingly, the message of these advertisements was clear: beauty was calibrated to

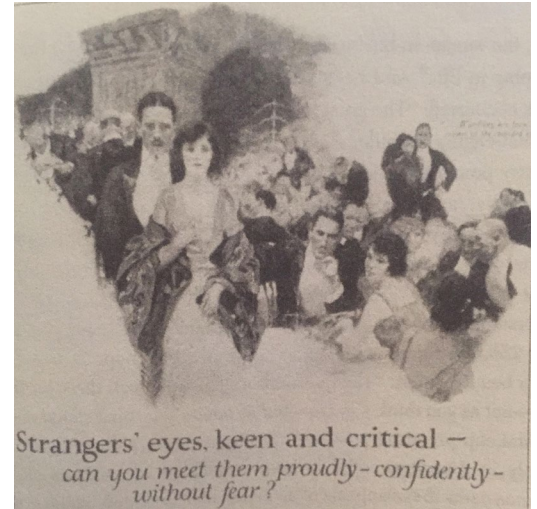


Figure 3

whiteness. They also promoted the idea that there was something to aspire to for all women, creating a consciousness of being observed and scrutinized. Peiss notes how “mirrors, movie cameras, and spectators placed in the ads underscored the idea that the eye constantly appraised women’s appearance. Women were thus urged to transform the spectacle of themselves into self-conscious performances.”³² A kind of Foucaultian beauty-panopticon emerged, with women policing themselves according to cultural (white) beauty standards and looking to men for their performance evaluations. The pressure for constant vigilance over appearance blended with beauty’s conflation with whiteness reinforced standing narratives of

³¹ Ibid., 85.

³² Ibid., 142.

progress that justified the existing patriarchal order while promising the possibility of change with work and determination. The response of African Americans in the beauty industry was understandably varied.

Notably, two of the most successful African American women in the beauty industry resisted narrations that their products had anything to do with white emulation. Against critiques that accused, “beautiful black and brown faces by the application of rouge and lily white are made to assume unnatural tints, like the vivid hue of painted corpses,” Walker and Malone argued instead that “improved appearance would reveal the inner worth of black women, especially those who, laboring as domestics or farmhands, were most demeaned and ill-treated.”³³ Significantly, they also both refused to sell skin bleaches and never spoke of hair straightening as part of their beauty systems. In fact, their vision of beauty culture was entirely counter-cultural in this respect. Malone and Walker drew the beauty practices and routines into the social lives and community of black women. In so doing, they “created a singular form of beauty culture in which profit making was intertwined with larger ethical and political purposes.”³⁴ Peiss describes the community-building aspects of this beauty culture, “Hair grooming had long brought black women together to socialize while engaging in the time-consuming rituals of washing, combing, and plaiting, the tactile pleasures of working with hair mingling with the diversion of visiting and chatting.” Most likely, the communal aspect of this kind of beauty culture proved a great advantage to the word-of-mouth and door-to-door canvassing at which Malone and Walker were so successful. Interestingly, these communal beauty practices often led to great community activism and

³³ Ibid., 90.

³⁴ Ibid., 90.

political involvement for African American women. Despite this subaltern approach to beauty, dominant white culture continued narrowing the mainstream definition of beauty and its equivalence with whiteness.

The crystallization of the white beauty happened concurrently with male takeover of the beauty industry. This was of course no accident as male control signaled the overarching system of Man and its accompanying commitments to power. Even so, white women were complicit in this shift, gaining power via their proximity to beauty standards. As the beauty industry gained momentum as a viable and growing market, it gained the attention of prominent businessmen who were more advantaged in the business world than women (see above regarding finances, education, etc.). Peiss reports that “by the 1920s, men with little cosmetic expertise saw easy money in selling beauty and hustled into the trade.”³⁵ Despite their lack of expertise or personal experience with cosmetics, these men asserted themselves as experts and quickly owned and operated huge portions of the industry. As women entrepreneurs struggled to compete with a solidly patriarchal business world, the “men who controlled the industry appropriated the methods of beauty culturists, engaged in female impersonation, and hired a new ensemble of business and professional women to translate beauty into business.”³⁶ This shift meant that the beauty industry was no longer primarily run by women with women’s values and interests in mind. Though of course it was not free of problematic messages before (e.g., race, class, etc.), the shift to predominantly male ownership introduced messages about beauty calibrated to masculine ideas. Noting the irony of this male takeover, Peiss observes, “Even as women were displaced from ownership of

³⁵ Ibid., 100.

³⁶ Ibid., 133.

cosmetics firms, manufacturers and advertisers increasingly turned to them for their leadership and knowledge of beauty matters.”³⁷ While this led to an increase in female presence within advertising, it did not negate masculine perceptions of femaleness. On the contrary, male ownership meant that women in advertising had to create a product they thought would actually sell to women while appeasing masculine ideas of what a woman actually was/should be. In other words, many of the advertisements simply “repackaged age-old stereotypes about women.”³⁸ These messages were demonstrated most clearly in the advertising campaigns they initiated.

With the introduction of mainstream marketing to the beauty industry, the cultural vision of beauty quickly narrowed. New male executives brought their big-business practices with them and soon the beauty industry moved away from word-of-mouth/mail order

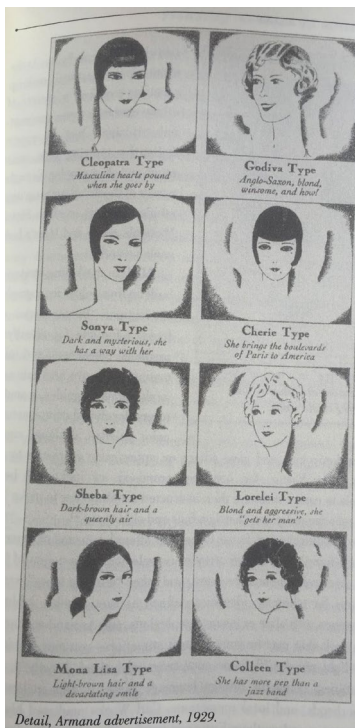


Figure 4

marketing toward mass distribution and product development. This meant fewer messages to a much greater audience. Rather than a vast array of marketing techniques usually localized to (if not personally known by) the seller, companies sold beauty products through national campaigns that utilized drawings, models, actresses. While the mass-market approach had occurred to some degree in the earlier mail-order approach, now the advertising was primarily male-orchestrated and driven. Unsurprisingly, the images advertised to women cemented a narrow vision of thin, white beauty. An

³⁷ Ibid., 118.

³⁸ Ibid., 120.

ad by Armand in 1929 aimed at showing the great versatility of individual beauty demonstrates the extent to which variations in what was “beautiful” were actually accepted. Remarking on this irony, Peiss points out that “female individuality clearly had its limits: except for hair style and color, the women’s faces were virtually indistinguishable.”³⁹ This “systematic cultivation of beauty” clearly reinforced the racial aesthetic of whiteness.

Once whiteness was established as a concrete requirement for beauty, makeup products that claimed to move women toward whiteness abounded encouraging all women to emulate accordingly. Skin bleaches, hair relaxer, hair removers, skin toner and many other products flooded the market. Changes to approximate European white beauty promised social and financial uplift. One advertisement for Zip depilatory depicted an eastern or southern European immigrant before-and-after removing unwanted hair. In the before picture, the woman looks down with a subdued expression, giving the impression of someone ready to defer to others. The second picture (with the removed hair) shows her looking up, conveying the confidence that accompanied white Western women. Peiss aptly observes that these kinds of marketing campaigns advertised “makeup as a leveler that broke down earlier class distinctions marking feminine appearance.”⁴⁰ Of course these aspirations

³⁹ Ibid., 146.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 145.

across racial lines were only acceptable as long as the line between white and black remained clear.⁴¹

Beauty trends reflected both the assumption of white interiority and the exclusion of African American participation. While non-white women were expected to work toward white beauty, white women were free to explore with different ethnicities through the application of makeup. One manual explained how to “appear Italian by applying dark, moist rouge and olive powder.”⁴² Peiss notes how white women were even “encouraged to play with their looks; ethnicity, defined as style, could, like makeup, be easily applied and washed off.”⁴³ The message was clear: white women could become anyone, but not just anyone could become them.

While racism was clearly present within the beauty industry before male involvement, the introduction of mass-produced advertising and influx of white money definitively



Figure 5

established white women as the standard for beauty. The standards for this beauty were also largely influenced by what the males in charge perceived as beautiful and/or what a woman should aspire to. Here again, men involved themselves in the process of defining women. It also reinforced the idea that women *should* be improving according to this standard.

Capitalism taught male business owners that if they could create a need within the market,

⁴¹ This is a direct example of the negation Wynter and da Silva describe Man requiring for his own coherence as a subject.

⁴² Ibid., 148.

⁴³ Ibid., 149.

they could make a lot of money. They did this by convincing women there was an innate deficit in their appearance begging for improvement. In this way, capitalism retained its hold on women's bodies as a commodity and aimed at convincing them that their participation was in their best interest. While Man was clearly at work here by claiming men's universal authority and inherent superiority, this shift also demonstrates how Man deployed a salvific structure that presumed deficiency and required self-work. Thus, the beauty industry took a decided shift away from empowerment toward new forms of oppression. Peiss succinctly summarizes this surprising twist, "Ironically, a period that began with cosmetics signaling women's freedom and individuality ended in binding feminine identity to manufactured beauty, self-portrayal to acts of consumption."⁴⁴ This manifested further in the weaponization of images against women and the moralization of participation within beauty culture.

Weaponizing Images and Moralizing Beauty Practices

As women gained new footholds in the previously masculine space of the workplace and further gains in their political equality through Suffrage, patriarchy needed new leverage to preserve its order. With women largely demoted to (at best) secondary positions of power within the beauty industry, those in power (read wealthy, white, men) had a powerful platform through which to manipulate their audience. Beauty became the perfect weapon to undermine women's power and exhaust them with additional labor. Advertisements in women's magazines paired with jobs that required beauty as a qualification made participation in the beauty industry compulsory. At the same time, the consistent failure of women's sexual assault lawsuits demonstrated that beauty was a vulnerability, one with

⁴⁴ Peiss, 135.

distinct moral connotations. In this damned-if-you-do-damned-if-you-don't atmosphere, women walked the razor sharp line of "making an effort" without "asking for it," thereby sustaining an incredibly powerful economy in beauty products. In this way, patriarchy simultaneously destabilized women and checked their political progress while securing a financial market dependent on female inadequacy. As with most aspects of beauty culture, women's magazines revealed a complicated dance between empowerment and oppression, agency and dehumanization.

Women had few outlets that were specifically designed for them or created a shared culture specific to women. As such, women's magazines gained a strong following. In them, women found content that was specific to their lives, advertisements aimed at eliciting their desires, and advice columns filled with tips on how to survive in a man's world. It is no wonder that many of these magazines developed a mass of faithful followers who found solidarity in their pages. Unfortunately, the potential for creating political change through this solidarity was undercut by the market.

In these "glossies," advertisers quickly identified a captive audience and used their financial leverage to influence content within women's magazines. Magazine companies depended upon the large financial capital brought in by advertising companies, but this also required them to ensure their content supported the ads. In her book, *The Beauty Myth* Naomi Wolf details the extent of this censorship ad companies imposed on magazines,

Ms. lost a major cosmetics account because it featured Soviet women on its cover who were not, according to the advertiser, wearing enough makeup. Thirty-five thousand dollars worth of advertising was withdrawn from a British magazine the day after an editor, Carol Sarler, was quoted as saying that she found it hard to show women looking intelligent when they were plastered with makeup. A gray-haired editor for a leading women's magazine told a gray-haired writer, Mary Kay Blakely, that an article about the glories of gray hair cost her magazine the Clairol account for six months. An editor of *New York Woman*, a staff member told me, was informed

that for financial reasons she had to put a model on the cover rather than a remarkable woman she wished to profile.⁴⁵

As mentioned above, need sold products, and this was communicated through the medium of models who changed (or were swapped out) as often as the trends. These changed from curvy women, thin women, heavily makeup-ed to the “effortless nude” look (which still required a lot of makeup), long to short hair, porcelain skin to suntanned. Women learned to see themselves in reference to these images. More accurately, they learned to see what they were *not* and what they *should be*. Not only did this severely limit the freedom women’s magazines had to empower and liberate women, it also sharply narrowed the cultural definition of beauty. Women who didn’t conform to the standards and styles of women’s magazines felt the pressure to do so lest they risk their own beauty. Thus, beauty (as defined by these magazines) became a standard pursuit for many women. The efficacy of this pursuit, however, depended on the illusion of attainability while ensuring that the ideals were almost impossibly high. This demonstrated itself powerfully with the advent of airbrushing photographs.

Editing photography with the specific intent of altering women’s appearance heightened the unattainability of beauty and underscored the unacceptability of women’s natural state. Airbrushing that removed wrinkles told women that aging and its effects must be fought with beauty creams and (if you had the money) eradicated with face lifts. Editing that narrowed the waist and sculpted the arms and legs set expectations for impossibly strict diets and gym routines. Wolf summarizes the commodification of female insecurity through this marketing tactic: “The advertisers who make women’s mass culture possible depend on

⁴⁵ Naomi Wolf, *The Beauty Myth: How Images of Beauty Are Used Against Women* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2002), 81.

making women feel bad enough about their faces and bodies to spend more money on worthless or pain-inducing products than they would if they felt innately beautiful.”⁴⁶ Put differently, the market deemed the natural progression of a woman’s body, the grey hairs, wrinkles, softening of her muscles as she aged signs of her failure, or worse: her disobedience.

Once these advertisements convinced women of their inadequacy and shamed them for it by making beauty seem attainable (“I lost 30 pounds in 30 days!” “Flawlessness even you can achieve!” “An effortless look”), all it had to do was offer the solution to women via the product advertised. One of the results of this form of marketing was the cultivation of faithful followers who religiously followed new beauty tips and obediently accepted that her body was the canvas she was responsible to mold, paint and trim to size. Accordingly, her body became the medium through which those in power (read men) evaluated her success or failure at this endeavor. Since these ads equated beauty with womanhood, dignity, respect for men (and later, self-respect) and the achievement of beauty was only a matter of effort, a woman’s failure to *be beautiful* was a matter of immense personal shame. Thus, men gained a powerful weapon via their “right” to evaluate and communicate a woman’s beauty (or lack thereof) to her. This manifested powerfully in job opportunities that had beauty as a prerequisite.

As women entered the workforce in growing numbers, men retained their positions of power by inserting beauty as a requirement for the positions most widely available for women. Since beauty was culturally conflated with youth, this meant that few women had experience and/or were fired by the time they did for failing to fulfill the Professional Beauty

⁴⁶ Ibid., 84.

Prerequisite (PBQ). Wolf tracks how the PBQ functioned as a workaround for sex discrimination, using the bona fide occupational qualification (BFOQ) (exceptions usually applied to femaleness for a wet nurse or the ability to lift twenty pounds for a postal worker) to name beauty as a job requirement. She expounds, “By taking over in bad faith the good-faith language of the BFOQ, those who manipulate the professional beauty qualification can defend it as being non-discriminatory with the disclaimer that it is a necessary requirement if the job is to be properly done.”⁴⁷ Not only did this block many women from higher paying positions, it also made participation in the beauty industry compulsory and kept women financially dependent upon men (especially since the beauty products and procedures cost money). Significantly, beauty had no legal definition and was defined by the men evaluating a woman. Wolf explains how this functioned in the legal system. She reports, “In 1971, a judge sentenced a woman to lose three pounds a week or go to prison.”⁴⁸ In 1972, a Playboy Club waitress was fired because she had “lost her Bunny Image.” Margarita St. Cross took her case to the board, not on the basis of discrimination but that she was in fact beautiful. St. Cross argued that she was beautiful, Hefner’s spokesman said she was not. The board sided with Hefner, assuming that “the employer is by definition more credible about a woman’s beauty than is the woman herself.”⁴⁹ In 1975, Catherine McDermott sued Xerox for withdrawing a job offer on the grounds of her weight. In 1977 Ingrid Fee was fired because she was “too fat” to work as a stewardess. Significantly, though beauty was used as the rationale for hiring and/or firing in all of these cases, it was never defined in a court of law. Rather, it was left to men (as the literal judge and jury) to discern the woman’s beauty.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 28-9.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 32.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 32.

Perhaps the most troubling case for cementing the PBQ into American culture was Christine Craft's charge of sex discrimination against Metromedia Inc.

In 1983, Craft filed a suit against her ex-employers for firing her on the grounds that she was "too old, too unattractive, and not deferential to men." Craft described how she was "subjected to fittings and makeovers by the hour and presented with a day-by-day chart of clothing that she would not have chosen for herself and for which she was then asked to pay."⁵⁰ None of her male colleagues shared this experience. The case soon gained national attention and testimonies emerged from other anchorwomen who admitted they had been forced to quit due to Metromedia's fixation on their appearance. Wolf extrapolates on the psychological effects of weaponizing beauty, "But because 'beauty' lives so deep in the psyche, where sexuality mingles with self-esteem, and since it has been usefully defined as something that is continually bestowed from the outside and can always be taken away, to tell a woman she is ugly can make her feel ugly, act ugly, and, as far as her experience is concerned, *be* ugly, in the place where feeling beautiful keeps her whole."⁵¹ While this made bestowing or stripping beauty away from women in the workplace a powerful psychological weapon, it also provided *legal* justification for this form of discrimination and harassment. Again, Wolf clarifies these power dynamics, "No woman is so beautiful--by definition--that she can be confident of surviving a new judicial process that submits the victim to an ordeal familiar to women from other trials: look her up and down to see how what happened to her is her own fault. Since there is nothing 'objective' about beauty, the power elite can, whenever necessary, form a consensus to strip 'beauty' away."⁵² Thus, what was on trial in

⁵⁰ Ibid., 35.

⁵¹ Ibid., 36.

⁵² Ibid., 36.

Craft's case was not simply her beauty, but men's right to evaluate and weaponize women's beauty in defense of their own power. Unsurprisingly, Craft lost her case. Though two juries sided with her, a male judge overturned their rulings. Craft's case provided a legal precedent for sex discrimination and communicated to women in no uncertain terms that beauty was a vulnerability, and it was not optional. After interviewing several reporters shortly after Craft's case, Wolf reports at length the effect it had on women and their understanding of power dynamics in the workplace:

The outcome of the trial was one of those markers in the 1980s that a woman may have witnessed, and felt as a tightening around the neck, and knew she had to keep still about. When she read the summation, she knew that she had to distance herself from her knowledge of how much she was Christine Craft. She might have reacted by starting a new diet, or buying expensive new clothes, or scheduling an eyelift. Consciously or not, though, she probably reacted; the profession of 'image consultant' grew eightfold over the decade. Women and work and 'beauty' outside the sex professions fused on the day Craft lost her case, and a wider cycle of diseases was initiated. It will not, the woman might have told herself, happen to me.⁵³

Thus, while women were "free" to reject beauty culture and its messages, their independence and escape from oppression was tied to their cooperation. If they wanted to keep their jobs, they had to become experts fighting signs of aging, highlighting their best features and figuring out how to remain appealing to their male superiors. This was of course balanced with the need to emit modesty lest they risk sexual harassment.

Even after the introduction of Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, which was amended to protect women from sexual harassment and discrimination, women consistently lost sexual harassment lawsuits on the basis of beauty. Mechelle Vinson sued her employer for sexual harassment and the (male) judge ruled in favor of the employer, citing the woman's appearance as sufficient enticement that absolved the man of his actions ("her

⁵³ Ibid., 37.

beauty in her clothes was admitted as evidence to prove that she welcomed rape from her employer”).⁵⁴ In another case, a woman was awarded the insulting sum of seventy-five dollars for four years of harassment on the grounds that “her feelings couldn’t have been much injured since she wore ‘scanty and provocative clothing’ to work.”⁵⁵ Thus, women could be fired for not being attractive enough, not making enough of an effort to look feminine, but if they met this requirement, they were also vulnerable to sexual assault. Wolf pithily summarizes this situation, “Is it any surprise that, two decades into the legal evolution of the professional beauty qualification, working women are tense to the point of insanity about their appearance? Their neuroses don’t arise out of the unbalanced female mind but are sane reactions to a deliberately manipulated catch-22 in the workplace. Legally, women *don’t* have a thing to wear.”⁵⁶ While the PBQ lawsuits made participation in beauty culture a practical/financial decision for women, sexual harassment cases maintained old moral codes that a woman’s appearance determined how she should be treated.⁵⁷ They also added legal precedent for males having the right to evaluate and judge women’s appearance.

Working women were thus in the nearly impossible situation of compulsory participation in the beauty industry if they wanted to retain their jobs (because of the PBQ) while being cognizant that their appearance might be weaponized against them to justify assault. Sexual harassment in the workplace reinforced the power dynamics between men

⁵⁴ Ibid., 38.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 41.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 42.

⁵⁷ Peiss describes how before the twentieth century makeup was commonly associated with women who did sex work. At this time, this often meant that men could do whatever they wanted to women who “painted” and “decent” women would never wear it. Any confusion on this point was the woman’s fault and the evidence usually lay in her appearance (clothes, makeup, etc.).

and women and effectively kept women aware of this. The possibility of being condemned for either trying too hard or not trying hard enough kept many women politically and socially destabilized, dependent upon male's decisions to hire and/or not attack them. In a world where men could beat, rape, or even kill women with little to no repercussions, and beauty could either liberate or condemn them, the stakes of the beauty game were impossibly high. The thinness of this line achieved four things for maintaining the patriarchal order: 1) it retained the token ideal woman who "successfully" maintained this balance, 2) it protected those in power (men) with legal justification for actions that harmed and disempowered women, 3) it kept women working at and investing in beauty culture and 4) it moralized participation in the beauty industry.

Both the PBQ and the harassment lawsuits established beauty as a political action, but they also set the foundation for beauty as a moral act. According to the logic of these lawsuits, if women wanted equality and financial independence, they only had to "make an effort" at their appearance in order to get a job. If women wanted to be safe from physical assault, they only had to dress modestly. Put differently, beauty became the mechanism by which men could blame women for systemic sexism. To be clear, the deployment of morality was less about building a society of righteous women than it was a tool of control. Wolf explores how men evaluating women's appearance shaped their identity, "society doesn't really care about women's appearance per se. What genuinely matters is that women remain willing to let others tell them what they can and cannot have. Women are watched, in other words, not to make sure that they will 'be good,' but to make sure that they will know they are being watched."⁵⁸ In this sense, women's sense of self and their notion of what it

⁵⁸ Wolf, 99.

meant to succeed at being a woman was directly connected to their relationship with beauty and beauty practices. Thus, beauty simultaneously became a mechanism of control and a survival practice.

Women's response to beauty culture via sharing knowledge and participation demonstrated the extent to which it had become a part of American female identity. If beauty was the means through which women navigated the dangerous waters of patriarchy, then sharing beauty knowledge was not just a form of community, but also a form of feminist solidarity. For this reason, a "good mother" would thoroughly educate her daughter in beauty culture so that the daughter could successfully manage patriarchy's weaponization



Figure 6

of beauty against her.⁵⁹ Tangled within this teaching, however, was the sense that true womanhood was found in her willingness to work toward beauty. Women were often thus portrayed as doing their duty as women when they participated within beauty culture. After World War II, one housewife responded to a criticism in the New York Times about women's concern for beauty by arguing that beautification showed "'women's sense of pride' and respect for the men 'we try most to please.'"

Beauty was a form of patriotism, demonstrating the female version of good citizenship. Advertising agencies and movies promoted the pin-up

⁵⁹ It is also worth mentioning that as with women's magazines, the amount of space allotted solely to "women's activities" was limited at best. As a result, many women enjoyed the agency and pleasure of an activity that was just for them. Sharing these activities with one another also carried the possibility of creating a subversive community where women could define and design themselves.

girl to show soldiers what they were fighting to defend: a world that promised beautiful and available women to men who performed the “proper” masculinity of being a soldier. The message to women was clear: it is your patriotic and moral duty to work as hard as you can at being beautiful. While the Women’s Movement of the 1960s greatly challenged this patriarchal moralism of beauty, the aforementioned lawsuits pressured women to please men visually. Whether survival or moralism inspired women’s participation remained an impossibly entangled distinction. Regardless of the motivation, women’s relationship with beauty became highly politicized.

Patriarchy utilized the beauty industry to keep women disempowered and destabilized. It achieved this by creating a complicated web that connected an ideal, job possibility, gaslighting the victim, and a sense of duty with beauty. Additionally, it established beauty as by women *for men*. As advertisements primarily targeted women and men were the (sometimes literal) judge and jury of what counted as beautiful, beauty became a tool that exacerbated the power dynamics between men and women. It also created a dynamic in which men could insert themselves between a woman and her sense of self. That is, men determined if a woman could count “beautiful” as one of her identity markers. By establishing beauty as the reason for reward or punishment and men as the deciders of it, patriarchy kept women’s advancement at men’s pleasure and positioned women to need (and look for) male approval.

The cost of participating in the beauty industry also put additional strain on already disempowered women. To date, patriarchy sustains a 445 billion dollar business in the

beauty industry⁶⁰ (approximately 8% of the average women's monthly income)⁶¹ and occupies approximately 335 hours of women's time each year in application alone,⁶² to say nothing of the psychological and energy expenditure toward this end. As the image of beauty consistently changed in order to support the "need" for new products and tools, the trends for fashion and makeup changed as well. Thus, participants also needed to expend energy purchasing magazines and watching makeup instructional videos in order to approximate beauty's shifting definition. Wolf describes this additional labor as the "third shift" pressed upon women, "Superwoman, unaware of its full implications, had to add serious "beauty" labor to her *professional* agenda...Women took on all at once the roles of professional housewife, professional careerist, and professional beauty."⁶³ In this way, the beauty industry kept women occupied working extra hours at a higher financial cost..

Though the last few decades have seen some changes, the beauty industry remains caught in the tension between agency and oppression. While some people have advanced beauty culture's possibility for agency and self-expression (e.g., Jonathan VanNess, people in the LGBTQ community, etc.), cultural events like the "Me Too" movement reveal the extent to which these dynamics remain present within contemporary American culture. Even

⁶⁰ Chloe Sorvino, "Why The \$445 Billion Beauty Industry Is A Gold Mine For Self-Made Women," *Forbes*, Last modified 2020, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/chloesorvino/2017/05/18/self-made-women-wealth-beauty-gold-mine/>.

⁶¹ Steve Fiorillo, "What Is The Average Income In The U.S.?", *Thestreet*, Last modified 2020, <https://www.thestreet.com/personal-finance/average-income-in-us-14852178> (women's average income)

Rheanna Murray, "You Could Buy A House With All The Money You Spend On Makeup", *TODAY.Com*, Last modified 2017, <https://www.today.com/style/women-spend-200k-makeup-lifetime-skinstore-com-survey-t109772>. (amount women spend on makeup)

⁶² Megan Segura, "How Much Time We Really Spend On Beauty", *Stylecaster*, Last modified 2014, <https://stylecaster.com/beauty/time-spent-on-beauty/>.

⁶³ Wolf, 27.

more troubling, the influx of people who were not cisgender women into beauty culture did not defeat its message of inadequacy, rather beauty culture simply expanded to communicate that they too were not α enough. That is, the system (Man) shifted to accommodate new subject positions without altering its basic functions.

Beauty culture provides a poignant case study for tracking the practical manifestation of Man for specific bodies. Man's takeover of the beauty industry complicated its position as a site of possible resistance and liberation from patriarchy by infusing it with an ideal, inherent lack, and referential identity. Consequently, beauty culture reproduced Man's system, teaching women they needed to approximate beauty (according to its definition) or be punished (e.g., sexual assault, job loss, etc.). Not only did this reinforce men's control over women, but it also promoted the illusion that women could determine their experience of this system by simply making the right choices. Conversely, any suffering women experienced in this arena was cast as a result of their poor choices. In these ways, a salvific structure was already at work: self-improvement will save you from the suffering you are experiencing. In actuality, this form of self-improvement reinforced Man's patriarchally ordered system and disguised the fact that this suffering was a result of the system, not a failure to improve.

Christianity's entanglement with this salvific structure lent theological justification to these patriarchal practices and drew patriarchal themes into Christian soteriology. The next chapter will identify the roots of patriarchal soteriology and how theology consequently became caught up within Man's system.

Chapter 4

The Theological Roots of Self-Improvement

The roots of beauty culture lie deep within doctrines of salvation that are tied to patriarchal logics. These patriarchal soteriologies are by no means fringe doctrines but are at the heart of mainstream theologies in both Catholic and Protestant traditions. Doctrines that retain the position of the Patriarch in their soteriological framework inevitably reproduce a patriarchal ordering of bodies. Most often, this manifests by theorizing God the Father as the benevolent Patriarch (read Man) around whom relationships must be properly “ordered.” Indeed, most soteriologies reproduce hierarchy (oppression) *because* they are committed to keeping the figure of Man and have confused/conflated God as such. Installing Man as the “Saving God” imports into Christianity an organizational framework deeply tied to patriarchal logics. As seen in the previous chapter, these logics and this organizational framework are deeply aesthetic: who you are, who you should be, and how you should behave are aesthetic questions. Thus, the way Christians understand salvation deeply informs their imagination for how they respond. When Man is the Savior, participation within the form of the patriarch gets redefined as the work of salvation. Salvation has become a matter of aesthetics. This does not mean, however, that soteriology is simply a matter of appearances. Rather, appearances--how a body appears--have become a matter of salvific import.

A closer look at two theologians who have been formative for Christian thinking in the twentieth century will demonstrate the subtle ways this manifests. Catholic theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar and Protestant theologian and ethicist Dietrich Bonhoeffer reveal the infiltration of Man into their soteriology. Von Balthasar is important because he is one of

the few traditional and contemporary theologians who treats mysticism seriously and connects beauty's relationship to theology while maintaining a patriarchal soteriological framework. Von Balthasar's framework for salvation relies on natural order, which he interprets within a particular sex/gender framework. This is demonstrated in his emphasis on the role of obedience in the crucifixion and his characterization of Mary as the ideal Christian.

Bonhoeffer's soteriology begins with a promising account of relationality in his doctrine of creation and sin. Here we see the beginnings for a theology that precludes the possibility of the patriarchal form establishing itself theologically. This is not to say, however, that Bonhoeffer's theology is above reproof as seen in his slippage toward correcting brokenness with *good* rulership. Most significantly, Bonhoeffer betrays his earlier relational theology by using the God-human relationship as a paradigm for interhuman relationships. This allows him to position Christians as God to the rest of the world and firmly re-entrenches the patriarch form (Man) as a soteriological framework.

This chapter will proceed with an analysis of these two theologians with an aim of revealing the depth of patriarchy's infection into Christian soteriology. The subtlety of its manifestation within each theologian's work as well as the commonality of the way they frame their soteriology proves the pervasiveness of this problem. The telos of this chapter is not to demonize either theologian, but rather to show the scope and depth of the problem through a careful analysis of their soteriological frameworks. By exploring a theologian whose formulations are nearly ubiquitous in atonement theories (von Balthasar) and a theologian widely praised for his liberatory theology (Bonhoeffer), this chapter will show that patriarchal soteriology remains embedded within Christian ideology in ways that prove devastating for female (and non-male) bodies.

Hans Urs Von Balthasar

Sin & Atonement

In many respects, Balthasar presents a fairly standard doctrine of salvation and atonement. Though he offers some unique nuances in his theology by equating Christ with Christ's mission and extending *kenosis* to the Father, his overarching atonement theory retains much of the structure of traditional penal substitutionary atonement theories. Balthasar's formulations for soteriology are mainstream within much of Christian theology, but his language around *kenosis* and obedience provide much more explicit outworkings of these formulations, making him an ideal interlocutor for identifying the theological roots of patriarchal soteriology.

Understanding von Balthasar's notion of salvation first requires a consideration of his formulation for sin. Framing sin as an existence that "denies its ultimate dependence on God...and arrogates to itself a false freedom," von Balthasar equates sin with a false sense of independence.¹ Summarizing von Balthasar's position on sin, W.T. Dickens writes, "He labeled this false freedom 'autonomy' to indicate the error of assuming we govern ourselves when we are in fact at God's disposal...Sin is a denial of our creaturely dependence on God and a refusal of God's proffered gift of forgiveness and the promise of communion with God in Christ."² Humanity rejecting its dependency upon God represented a disordered creation. That is, in this state humanity departed from the intended or divinely ordered state of dependence upon God. Balthasar describes this as the human rejecting the relationship with God and God's absoluteness and instead trying to establish themselves on their own

¹ W.T. Dickens, "Hans Urs von Balthasar and Karl Rahner," in *Christian Theologies of Salvation* (New York: New York University Press, 2017), 325.

² Ibid., 325-6.

terms. He explains, “Wherever the self tries to prescind from its rootedness in God and establish its own autonomy, it is attempting to consolidate its freedom; it is attempting to seize power.”³ For Balthasar, humans using their freedom to attempt autonomy from God leads to a problematic relationship with power, “An essential constituent of this freedom, at all points, is that man has attained control over what his own humanity is; such control, essentially and explicitly, implies power.”⁴ This pursuit of power is demonstrated in how “Man's (*sic*) aim is to secure unconditional mastery over the whole earth.”⁵ While Balthasar’s treatment of autonomy and power could have proven useful counters for theologically undermining Wynter’s Man, Balthasar’s argument for the solution to this ends up reinscribing the patriarchal system. For Balthasar, rejecting dependence upon God manifested not simply as independence but as a failure to submit. If Balthasar’s diagnosis of sin is “pride, self-assertion, [and] Prometheanism,” then the renunciation of sin required “obedience, indifference and abandonment.”⁶ Conversely, a properly ordered humanity was not simply cognizant of its dependence on God but enacted this through radical obedience.

Von Balthasar’s treatment of *kenosis* and how this plays out in the crucifixion provide a poignant and succinct depiction of his understanding of obedience’s role. Though *kenosis* is very common in Trinitarian theology, von Balthasar’s analysis of it is unique in its characterization of *kenosis* as self-loss. Drawing together von Balthasar’s language on this, systematic theologian Karen Kilby writes,

³ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory*, volume 4. trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1992), 148.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 157.

⁵ *ibid.*

⁶ Karen Kilby, *Balthasar: A (very) Critical Introduction* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2012), 64.

What is far less familiar is the way Balthasar consistently glosses this giving as a giving *up*, giving *away*, a self-stripping: ‘the Father strips himself,’ without remainder, of his Godhead and hands it over to the Son’; the Father ‘can give his divinity away’; the Father ‘lets go of his divinity’; this is an ‘original self-surrender’ in which the Father ‘must go to the very extreme of selflessness.’⁷

This last quote on selflessness especially emphasizes the relational dynamic Balthasar believes occurs between the Father and Son. The Father endures a loss of self by giving completely to the Son, and the Son experiences a loss of self in the crucifixion. Thus, the relationship within the Trinity is characterized by a loss of self by (at least) one party.

Balthasar notes, “such ‘fatherhood’ can only mean the giving away of everything the Father is, including his entire Godhead (for God, as God, ‘has’ nothing apart from what he ‘is’); it is a giving-away that, in the Father’s act of generation--which lasts for all eternity--leaves the latter’s womb ‘empty’.”⁸ Whether Balthasar understands this dynamic as indicative of love or simply what was required to overcome sin is unclear. Regardless, Balthasar’s view of the Trinity includes critical elements of sacrifice and exchanges of power. Balthasar’s account of what happens in the crucifixion highlights this even more dramatically.

The crucifixion reveals the *telos* of obedience in its most extreme form: complete self-abnegation. Jesus’ acquiescence to go to the Cross demonstrates the properly ordered relationship of humans to God.⁹ Furthermore, for Balthasar, the Cross is not *just* God

⁷ Ibid., 99, quoting Balthasar who goes on to say, “Inherent in the Father’s love is an absolute renunciation: he will not be God for himself alone. He lets go of his divinity and, in this sense, manifests a (divine) Godlessness (of love, of course). *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory*, vol 4, 323.

⁸ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory*, volume 3. trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1992), 518.

⁹ Balthasar actually closes the space between action and God’s will for Christ. He does this by conflating Christ with Christ’s mission. Thus, everything Christ does *is* Christ’s mission and therefore in accordance with the Father’s will. This space remains open for humans, however, and this is where acquiescence and obedience to God’s will is an attempt to

incarnate experiencing death and suffering in place of sinners. Even more than this, it is the Incarnate God experiencing forsakenness *by the Father*. While Balthasar interprets this as God resolving the drama of sin within God's own Trinitarian life, it also means that violence, self-abnegation, and rejection have a place within the divine life. Kilby elaborates, "On the Cross we see God rejected by and alienated from God. On the Cross the relationship between God's wrath and sin is played out between the Father and the Son, and therefore taken over *into* God, into the relationship between the Father and the Son."¹⁰ Christ's submission to this punishment is absolutely necessary in order to extinguish the Father's rage at sin. Describing how this functions, Balthasar writes, "God's anger at the rejection of divine love encounters a divine love (the Son's) that exposes itself to this anger, disarms it and literally deprives it of its object."¹¹ Dickens explains this even more explicitly, "the Son's 'omnipotent powerlessness' outlasts sin's hatred and eliminates its source." Because Balthasar imagines the problem of sin being resolved by the obedience and violence demonstrated within the crucifixion, he reasons that both justice and sin must exist in their most extreme forms on the cross. That is, Christ must bear/represent the most abject sin and the Father must exhibit the utmost righteous anger at this sin. Thus, God extinguishes the problem of sin by expressing and absorbing absolute wrath.

For this reason, Christ's submission must be so absolute, his sense of self and boundaries so relinquished that he can absorb the fullness of God's wrath. Kilby observes that if God is immutable, these qualities (the wrathful punishment of the Father and the self-

emulate Christ. As with Christ's experience on the cross, this necessitates absolute submission and loss of self. *Ibid.*, 149-151.

¹⁰ Kilby, 101 (emphasis in original).

¹¹ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory*, volume 3, 349-50.

abnegation of the Son) are inherent within the Trinity. Not only does this mean that violence and martyrdom are sanctified as having a place within God's created order, but it also establishes a framework for conceiving holiness inside a patriarchal paradigm that equates obedience with self-loss and violence as a corrective for sin. Balthasar explains the necessity of divine punishment for restoration, "Rather must he take seriously his covenant partner and by judgment, correction, punishment lead him back to the law which the deviant is incapable of restoring by himself."¹² In this paradigm, the two extreme poles (wrathful/righteous Father and penitent "sinner" Christ) establish that properly ordered relationships include elements of submission and domination, someone who rules and someone who submits. Additionally, this sets up the framework for human relationships with each other and with God for Balthasar. As Balthasar notes, "Jesus' gift of self becomes the model for our imitation. First, it is Paul who is selected to reproduce in himself Christ's sufferings."¹³ This is demonstrated most powerfully in Balthasar's treatment of Mary as the ideal Christian, which is formed inside his understanding of gender's role in theology.

Gender & the Ideal Christian

Balthasar imagines the effects of soteriology manifesting as relationships ordered according to this patriarchal hierarchy. Given his understanding of soteriology (e.g., submission, domination, self-abnegation, punishing, etc.), this is the natural (and only?) progression of this theology. For Balthasar, subjectivity deeply informs these properly ordered relationships. This is deeply informed by his commitment to a hierarchical system that assumes some are designed to rule and some to follow. Within human-human

¹² Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale*, trans. Aideon Nichols (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1990), 121.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 112.

relationships, this is determined by sex: men are the active leaders and women are submissive receivers. In the human-God relationship, God takes on the masculine role and humans the feminine role. Curiously, Mary accomplishes two things for Balthasar: she is a proper receptive woman and yet also represents the right relationship for all humans with God. Understanding Mary's dual role as proper woman and ideal Christian first requires a deeper analysis of Balthasar's consideration of gender.

Gender and sex difference are absolute and determinative for what faithful behavior looks like. For Balthasar, not only are there only two genders but these categories influence every aspect of a person's being. Describing Balthasar's position Kilby notes, "Human beings do not exist apart from, independently of, their maleness or femaleness: we are not each an abstract individual, but specifically a man or a woman."¹⁴ Indeed Balthasar goes as far as to claim that males and females share no common ground besides "human nature" (which he also does not define). Elaborating on this, he writes

The male body is male throughout, right down to each cell of which it consists and the female body is utterly female; and this is also true of their whole empirical experience and ego-consciousness. At the same time both share an identical human nature, but at no point does it protrude, neutrally, beyond the sexual difference, as if to provide a neutral ground for mutual understanding. Here there is no *universale ante rem*, as all theories of a nonsexual or bisexual (androgynous) primitive human being would like to think.¹⁵

With the categories so firmly established and set up as opposites, Balthasar has the framework in which to describe *what it means* to be male or female and then to connect this to properly ordered relationships.

Balthasar founds his gender theory on the Genesis creation (particularly the second)

¹⁴ Kilby, 124.

¹⁵ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama*, Volume 2, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1990), 365.

account. His interpretation of this passage leads him to argue for the equality of the sexes but also the primacy of males. He notes, "In sum: the man retains a primacy while at the same time, at God's instigation, he steps down from it in a kenosis; this results in the God-given fulfillment whereby he recognizes himself in the gift of the 'other'."¹⁶ Kilby helpfully distills Balthasar's argument, "Man is primary, for 'in this original situation he is alone before God and with God,' but on the other hand 'the man's (persisting) priority is located within an equality of man and woman."¹⁷ For Balthasar, equality exists in reciprocity between man and woman in that man "needs the woman for his fulfillment" and she provides this answer. This last term, "answer" or "Antwort," is pivotal in Balthasar's construction of male-female roles. Kilby again helpfully elaborates, "The woman is the *Antwort* because 'If man is the word that calls out, woman is the answer that comes to him at last'...Altogether, woman is both 'man's delight' and 'the help, the security, the home man needs...the vessel of fulfillment especially designed for him.'"¹⁸ Though Balthasar asserts a kind of equality here between the sexes, the contingency between them is lopsided, "First of all, since she is both 'answer' and 'face' (*Antwort* and *Antlitz*), she is dependent on the man's 'word' (*Wort*)."¹⁹ For Balthasar this means women and men compliment and fulfill one another, men by having needs and women by fulfilling them. It is worth pointing out, however, that Balthasar frames this complementarity in terms of male need and male fulfillment. Put differently, within this formulation there is one who acts and one who responds, and these roles are determined by gender. This means there is an asymmetry inherent in male-female relationships whereby

¹⁶ Ibid., 373.

¹⁷ Kilby, 126, quoting *Man in God* by Balthasar, 368.

¹⁸ Ibid., 126-7, quoting *Theo-Drama*, Volume 3: *The Dramatis Personae: Persons in Christ*, 284, 285.

¹⁹ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama*, volume 2 *Dramatis Personae: Persons in Christ*, 292.

“the woman answers the man in a way that the man does not answer the woman.”²⁰ This asymmetry prevents summarizing Balthasar’s gender theory as each gender fulfilling and completing the other. Additionally, it provides the framework Balthasar employs for understanding God-human relationships.

In order to understand the nature of humans properly ordered to God, we must first understand how Balthasar believes women must be ordered to men. According to Balthasar, a woman’s role is to “provide the man with the response he needs,” and in this way her function revolves around him in a way that his does not revolve around her.²¹ Analyzing a vast swath of Balthasar’s treatment of gender, Kilby summarizes his characterization of males and females,

To be male is to be strong, to take initiative, to be active and goal-orientated; to be woman is to be open, receptive, surrendering, passive, to be characterized by weakness and dependence, to be contemplative. And within these clusters, perhaps the most insistent, frequently mentioned, the defining contrast, is that man takes initiative and is active, while woman is receptive.²²

While Balthasar insists on equal reciprocity between males and females, the roles are gender-specific and revolve around male fulfillment. Balthasar’s views on gender permeate much of his theology, framing not only how males and females should interact but also much broader principles like the dynamics between humans and God.

Balthasar argues that in the God-human relationship, humans should take up the position of the receptive, answering female and God occupies the active male role. Expanding on Ephesians’ language of the Church as the Bride of Christ Balthasar applies his gender framework to the overall intended interaction and disposition of humans before

²⁰ Ibid., 129.

²¹ Ibid., 129.

²² Ibid., 129.

God. Referring to this explicitly as a “nuptial encounter between God and the creature,” Balthasar frames the relationship as one constituted by the same intimacy and moral codes as marriage. Indeed, Balthasar is quite explicit on this point,

The bride is essentially woman, that is, receptive: one who, through acceptance of the seed but also through all her own female organs and powers is made competent to bring forth and bear fruit...The office and Sacrament are forms of communicating the seed: they belong to the male aspect, but their end is to lead the bride to her womanly function and fortify her in it. Part of this, indeed is her ability to receive a supernatural seed.²³

The passivity present in this passage is consistent with Balthasar’s understanding of a hierarchically ordered universe in which females are passive/submissive before males and humans are passive/submissive before God. This applies both at the individual and corporate level for Balthasar, meaning that all individuals are “brides” before God and some people within the Church may be “God” to others. Kilby elaborates, “The masculine/feminine imagery of Christ and Church is extended to describe relations within the Church, between the official, hierarchical element of the Church and the laity.” Thus, Balthasar purports an order of creation that determines its hierarchical arrangement by gender. Performing both the individual and corporate level of human obedience, Mary represents the proper female and ideal Christian.

Mary as Submissive Ideal

Mary is a central figure for how Balthasar understands the faithful subject and the outworking of salvation. Not only does she perform the submission appropriate to her gender and position before God, but she also prefigures the Church’s intended position in

²³ Balthasar, “Who Is the Church?” in *Explorations in Theology*, Volume 2: *Spouse of the Word*, trans. A.V. Littledale (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1991), 158.

this way before God. Balthasar asserts that Mary achieves this via her “answer” to God, which for Balthasar implies submission and self-renunciation.

Balthasar interprets the Annunciation as an integral moment for understanding Mary’s position before God. Mary’s consent to the angel’s announcement demonstrates obedience and a willingness for self-sacrifice. In confrontation with the divine (the male principle), Mary offers the appropriate answer (female principle). Balthasar elaborates this interaction, “This implies, in effect, that two affirmations must be made simultaneously: the absolute sovereignty of God, who in Jesus Christ alone set up his new and eternal covenant with humankind; and the obtaining of a consensual 'Yes' of humanity as represented at the Cross – the 'Yes' which Mary had to give, at the moment of the Incarnation.”²⁴ In this way, she properly performs as female before a male principle and as a human before the divine.

Significantly, the content of this response also implies the loss of self. Kilby elaborates, “Allowing oneself to be molded and stamped by God, allowing oneself to become as wax is, for Balthasar, the perfection of faith...it is constructed very much in terms of self-abnegation.”²⁵ Balthasar emphasizes the significance of Mary’s self-loss even more explicitly, noting that her achievement was the “unconditional self surrender,” “pure transparency. Pure flight from self. Pure *emptied space* for the Incarnation of the Word.”²⁶

For Balthasar, Mary’s response to the Christ Event prefigures the required human response to God: a feminized obedience. He notes, “it is Mary's obedient Yes, the counterpart to Eve's disobedience, that provides the spiritual presupposition for this physical

²⁴ Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale*, 133.

²⁵ Kilby, 118.

²⁶ Balthasar, *First Glance at Adrienne von Speyr*, trans. Antje Lawry and Seriga Englund, O.C.D. (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1981), 51, 52, emphasis mine.

birth--in the obedience of faith.”²⁷ Significantly this obedience is understood within Balthasar’s sex/gender system that understands female obedience as deference to the male authority. Balthasar posits that we see this appropriately feminized obedience when Mary continues subservience in Jesus’ youth by continually adjusting her will to his “she allows her consent to be molded by the Son’s will; her role is continually undergoing fundamental change, from the period of his youth to his public ministry, from the Cross to Pentecost, in step with the needs of him whose ‘helpmate’ she is.”²⁸ Thus, obedience and faithfulness are directly connected to personal lessening, *and* this is a distinctly feminine quality. Couching his interpretation of Mary in his understanding of freedom, Balthasar describes Mary as demonstrating the proper position of the creature before the Creator. As noted above, for Balthasar this means absolute submission. He posits, “The figure of Mary exhibits an utterly exuberant form of creaturely freedom (and, for that very reason, it is utterly simple); as such she is the prototype who fulfills everything said in the previous volume concerning the relationship between finite and infinite freedom. This is the finite freedom that hands itself over and entrusts itself to the sphere of infinite freedom, which, through grace, stands wide open...putter herself irrevocably at God’s disposal.”²⁹ Thus the male/divine and female/human exist in an inverse relationship: humans decrease in order for the divine to increase. For Balthasar, this self-lessening indexes the health and holiness of a divine-human relationship. Interpreting Mary’s response as perfectly emblematic of this posture before God, Balthasar argues that Mary is instructive for all humans relating to God.

²⁷ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama*, volume 3 *Dramatis Personae: Persons in Christ*, 296.

²⁸ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama*, volume 3 *Dramatis Personae: Persons in Christ*, 295.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 299-300.

According to Balthasar's interpretation, Mary's acquiescence and subsequent selflessness provides an archetype of faith for all of humanity. Comparing her to Christ's similarly effeminate obedience, Balthasar notes, "But just as Christ came in order to serve, so Mary's motherhood vis-à-vis the Son and his Church is pure selflessness."³⁰ Dickens elaborates Balthasar's thoughts on this point, "when Mary said 'yes' to being the bearer of God and to its salvific consequences, she did so 'in the name' of all humans, even sinners who reject God. Her faith thus undergirds and sustains all humans, 'representing and answering for them' and overcoming and compensating for our deficiencies."³¹ In this way, Mary represents not just the ideal/emblematic Christian, but also prefigures humanity's relationship with God after the Christ Event. Balthasar states this even more explicitly, arguing that Mary *is* the Church. Again, Dickens summarizes Balthasar's perspective, "He regularly and without hesitation contended that she was at once Christ's Mother and, appropriating the image for the Church in Ephesians 5, his Spotless Bride."³² Thus, Mary figures predominantly in Balthasar's understanding of humanity in right relationship with God, and this is only understood in the context of his sex/gender system. Put differently, Mary's righteousness is directly connected to her femaleness before God, and this is a femaleness construed in direct relationship with maleness and masculine desires.

Curiously, though Balthasar is quite strict about one's sex determining the content of what righteous behavior looks like, there is a substantial amount of position swapping within his formulation. Christ takes on the female principle in "his" crucifixion, emptying himself completely before the Father, Christ then takes on the male principle before his Church

³⁰ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama*, volume 2 *Dramatis Personae: Persons in Christ*, 290.

³¹ Dickens, 336, quoting Balthasar's *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory*, vol. 4.

³² *Ibid.*, 336.

bride, male Christians take on the male principle to all other females, but take on the female principle before God. Significantly, it seems only males can vacillate between these categories; females are absolutely static on this point. That is, while males may alternate between ruling and submitting, females always submit. Their status is referential and *deferential* to both males and God. Here Balthasar reveals his deep commitment to gender as a framework for understanding healthy/holy relationships, but also demonstrates his strong belief that females are (or at least should be) inherently passive, selfless, and giving to males (and divine male principles). Though Balthasar's adherence to this gender framework might at first seem like a random commitment unique to him, its foundation in Balthasar's soteriology should not be missed.

Balthasar's soteriology depends on a particular hierarchical arrangement that requires an absolute top and an absolute bottom and conceives of the universe as existing within this spectrum. Within this theological framework, sin manifests as some iteration of the rejection or disordered organization of a hierarchical order dependent upon biology. Salvation thus becomes the restoration of this disordered universe to its divinely intended order. For Balthasar and the many theologians who operate in this framework, God accomplishes this restoration by occupying both ends of the spectrum and releasing God's wrath on sin, thereby freeing humans to enter a relationship with God as if they were sinless. By making the God-human and the human-human relationships models for one another, Balthasar imports patriarchy into the God-human relationship and then justifies its presence in human relationships because it exists in the God-human relationship. In this way, the patriarchal hierarchy of males over females takes on a divinely ordained register. The justification of both this hierarchical framework and the righteousness of one end of the spectrum punishing the other is a side effect of this soteriology. It also establishes the foundation for

humans working out the effects of their salvation; if God has saved humans in this way, what does it look like for humans to live out that salvation? To save other humans? How does salvation look differently depending on one's physical body? These questions index the space between objective soteriology (God's actions of saving) and subjective soteriology (how humans should/do live out this salvation). The biologically based hierarchy within Balthasar's soteriology shapes a vision of humanity that is also hierarchically ordered and rooted in obeisance.

The acceptance of this particular hierarchical framework for soteriology positions Christians to think about their place within this hierarchical order. Put differently, Christians imagine salvation as a properly ordered hierarchy in which they have a place they must work to occupy depending on their subject position; this may involve ruling, obeying or a combination of both. The quandary over how to know one's place within this order led theologians to ask: What does a saved body look like? The underlying assumption to this question was that it was possible to distinguish soteriological differences between human bodies and that soteriology manifested as a physical reality.

To be clear, this is not simply a version of Natural Theology, but a theology that takes Natural Theology's belief in a natural order and combines it with a patriarchal vision of what the saved body looks like. Thus, salvation takes on a specific optic, determining what qualities represent this saved body. To use the language of Wynter and da Silva, the Man gets baptized as the natural order and the Patriarch form becomes the vision of the saved body. This is a theology that teaches Christians how to see. This theology enters the subjective consciousness (How am I seen?) and subjective action (How do I see others?). That is, it is a theology shaped in physical externalities that is practiced and experienced internally. Not

only does this support the idea that theological truths manifest physically, but it also interprets “reading” bodies as a theological practice.

Answers to the question of what a saved body looks like have ranged in many directions: along racial lines, sex differences and orientation, ableism, gender, etc. All of these answers depended upon a normalized, ideal body that is then interpreted as a saved body within Christianity. It is here that theologians deploy Christ as an ideal human, extrapolating about which of “his” bodily particularities index salvation in ways that translate to other human bodies. In other words, biology becomes theology as Christ’s physical traits are interpreted theologically. Balthasar’s easy connection to a gender framework as informative for righteous behavior and his subsequent affirmation of submission and self-loss are thus unsurprising in their deep connection to his conception of atonement. More significantly, his soteriology necessarily produces this kind of theology. That is, a soteriology that makes biology theology will also conceive of saved bodies as a biological reality, and a soteriology that preserves hierarchical ordering rooted in biology will reproduce this in its vision of salvific relationships.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer provides another useful example of the connection between soteriological formulations and how they deeply shape the theological imagination for lived salvation.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer

Writing within Nazi Germany, Bonhoeffer’s theology reflects a keen awareness of the stakes within theology and its capacity to be mobilized in violent directions. As he witnessed German nationalism and eugenics take hold of the national German Church, Bonhoeffer invested in producing theology that could separate Christianity from these violent ideologies. This manifested on many fronts from his development of situational

ethics to his articulation of radical obedience as a key component of discipleship. Bonhoeffer also developed a rich doctrine of sin that offered a robust response to the immense societal and individual sin he perceived around him. This characterization of sin deeply informed his conception of soteriology. For Bonhoeffer, God solves the problem of sin by punishing sin as a cosmic whole by crucifying Christ, the God-Man/divinely embodied human/first human. This salvation from sin (and restoration to God) extends to humanity through their participation with Christ and is offered to them via Christ's presence in the world. This section will proceed with a brief analysis of how Bonhoeffer conceives of sin as disordered relationships, followed by an exploration of Bonhoeffer's configuration of God-human and human-human relationships. It will conclude with a consideration of Bonhoeffer's unique theological contribution of Christ's continued presence in history and how this betrays his relational soteriological vision.

Sin

Bonhoeffer's notion of sin utilizes a relational understanding of limits and pairs it with an understanding of disorder that is the denial and transgression of these limits. This reveals itself powerfully in his doctrine of creation. Although it is beyond the scope of this project to analyze this doctrine in full, a brief overview of how Bonhoeffer conceives of humanity and its relationship with God pre and post-Lapsarian will illuminate our later discussion of his soteriology.

For Bonhoeffer, God created humans with natural limits that they experienced in relation to God and to one another. Bonhoeffer uses the imagery of "the Middle" to explain this:

Man's [sic] limit is in the middle of his existence, not on the edge. The limit which we look for on the edge is the limit of his condition, of his technology, of his possibilities.

The limit in the middle is the limit of his reality, of his true existence...He [God] is at once the limit and the middle of our existence; Adam knows that.³³

Before the Fall, humans find the limits of their existence in relation to God. Bonhoeffer furthers this to say that humans actually live out of this center, understanding the basis of life and creatureliness in relation to this limit. He expands, “The limit is grace because it is the basis of creatureliness and freedom; the limit is the middle. Grace is that which supports man [sic] over the abyss of non-being, non-living, that which is not created.”³⁴ Thus, humans’ self-knowledge (e.g., what it means to be created, the limits of that existence) is experienced in relation to God. It is also experienced and known in relation to the other.

Bonhoeffer suggests that before sin, humans experienced relationship with one another as a kind of lateral limit. The other is not a center humans orient around, but another iteration of understanding and accepting limitation. Explaining this relationship, Bonhoeffer suggests, “There is knowledge of the other person as a creature of God, and knowledge of the other person as simply the other person who stands next to me, limiting me; there is at the same time the knowledge that the other person derives from me, from my life and therefore there is love of the other person and being loved by him because he is a piece of me.”³⁵ In this way, humans experience the edges of their existence relationally with both God and other humans and the experience of this limit is positive. Additionally, although Bonhoeffer does not articulate it in quite this way, there is a strong notion within his thinking here that the individual’s limits are actually *constituted by the other* in a way that creates interrelationality. That is, the individual experiences their limit (and thus their sense

³³ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall* (New York: Touchstone, 1983), 57. Emphasis in original

³⁴ Ibid., 58.

³⁵ Ibid., 66.

of self) in their encounter with the other and actually needs this encounter in order to know themselves as individuals. Curiously, this dynamic both establishes the individual and establishes the other as a prerequisite for this individuality. What is significant about this formulation for understanding relationality is that it is inherently anti-patriarchal. There is not the possibility to rule over the other if you understand yourself as partially constituted by the other.³⁶ In this sense, Bonhoeffer's work here provides a corrective to von Balthasar's order that grants males primacy and casts righteousness as obedience to a natural order.

Before sin, humans receive the other as both gift and limit to their own existence. While Bonhoeffer uses this metaphor to articulate a kind of orientation to both God and other humans, there is also a sense that the self literally extends to the other and is received back from the other. The fluidity of this interrelationality precludes the absolute autonomy required for hierarchical domination. If this had been the extent of Bonhoeffer's understanding of sin, it would have positioned his soteriology to do liberative work against patriarchy's hierarchical structures. Bonhoeffer betrays his own relational account of sin in how he describes the human-creation account as one constituted by mastery. In so doing, he demonstrates how patriarchal frameworks have influenced aspects of his theology.

For Bonhoeffer, ruling and lordship are all qualities inherent within creation. Using the language of freedom, he describes humanity's relationship with creation in this way,

And just as his freedom over against man consisted in the fact that he was to be free *for* him, his freedom over against the rest of the created world is to be free *from* it. This means that he is its master, he has command over it, he rules it. And here is the other side of man's created likeness to God. Man is to rule--of course as over God's

³⁶ Domination of the other requires absolute othering of the dominated subject. This is also why the would-be dominator hates the other and desires their death. The very existence of the other reveals what the dominator does not want to face: that their existence is not autonomous, that they only ever exist in concert with the other.

creation, as one who receives the commission and power of his dominion from God.³⁷

Though Bonhoeffer certainly describes a benevolent and caring relationship between humans and the earth, the language of ownership and dominion indicates a distinctly hierarchical relationship in which humans dominate the land. He expounds, “But my freedom from it consists in the fact that this world, to which I am bound as a lord to his servant, as the peasant to his soil, is subjected to me, that I am to *rule* over the earth which is and remains my earth, and the more strongly I rule it the more it is *my* earth.”³⁸ Bonhoeffer understands this right to rule as an authority given by God. Though he conceives of the human-human relationship as interrelational (and thus non-hierarchical), the human-creation relationship incorporates mastery and ownership. Hence, the solution to a disordered human-creation relationship is *proper* rulership, not an interrelational reconciliation. Indeed Bonhoeffer perceives the loss of the earth after sin a result of a “sentimental backing away from dominion over the earth.”³⁹ In other words, the proper response to the earth is to enact *more* dominion over it, not less. Though Bonhoeffer is less explicit on this point, he demonstrates this influence in his account of Eve and the Fall.

As Bonhoeffer moves through his account of the Fall, he sets it up as a series of events that lead to Adam’s temptation. Within this account, Bonhoeffer describes Eve as part of a series that leads to Adam’s fall. He notes, “The command not to eat of the tree of knowledge, the creation of Eve, and the serpent must be understood as a connected series in the assault upon the tree of life.” Although Bonhoeffer asserts that each of these come from

³⁷ Ibid., 42.

³⁸ Ibid., 42. Emphasis in original

³⁹ Ibid., 43.

God, he also argues that “they form a common front with man against the Creator.” He goes on to explain how each of these creations were created for good but are now experienced as threat, “Woman, who was created as a companion for man, to help him bear his limit, becomes a seducer.” Thus, Bonhoeffer understands the Fall as the Fall of *man*, the male-sexed human. Eve functions as an element or instrument in Adam’s demise. Eve’s own experience of sin is reduced to a climactic and tragic explanation for the true tragedy: *man*’s descent into sin. Bonhoeffer makes this explicit, referring to Eve as “the weaker one,” and arguing that the “culmination of the story is the fall of Adam. Eve only falls totally when Adam falls.”⁴⁰ While it is only fair to note that Bonhoeffer’s argument here is in part an affirmation of interrelationality, framing the narrative with Adam as the apex makes a clear argument about hierarchy extending to sex. To be clear, Bonhoeffer’s overarching framework for humans and sin is deeply relational and does not privilege any kind of human over another. What we observe in his articulation of this account is a lapse into patriarchal formulations that privilege and center the male experience. This is significant insofar as it demonstrates that Bonhoeffer is not infallible with regard to patriarchal influence. Bonhoeffer’s account of sin reflects a similar fluctuation between patriarchal tones and his relational framework.

For Bonhoeffer, sin is the rejection of limits and the attempt for absolute sovereignty and self-determinacy. In a sense, Bonhoeffer’s account of how humans shift relationally under sin is similar to Wynter’s notion of Man and da Silva’s Patriarch Form. Bonhoeffer describes this shift as a move to the middle. He describes what he means by this spatial understanding of sin,

⁴⁰ Ibid., 83.

Now man (*sic*) stands in the middle, now he is without limit. That he stands in the middle means that now he lives out of his own resources and no longer from the middle. That he is without a limit means that he is alone. To be in the middle and to be alone means to be like God. Man is *sicut deus*...He no longer needs the Creator, he has become a creator himself, to the extent that he creates his own life. With this his creatureliness is finished and destroyed for him. Adam is no longer creature. He has torn himself away from his creatureliness.⁴¹

Thus, Adam is attempting to occupy a space for which he has no resources or ability, yet by moving into this position Adam declares just the opposite: that his existence is self-determined, self-sustained and exists in isolation to any other creature. Much like Wynter and da Silva's Man/Patriarch Form, Bonhoeffer asserts that this shift to the middle caused humans to hate any reminder of the truth of their dependency upon the other. He expounds, "Now that he (*sic*) has transgressed the limit, he knows for the first time that he was limited. At the same time he no longer accepts the limit as the grace of God the Creator but hates it, looking upon it as the envy of God the Creator."⁴² Bonhoeffer finds a similarly changed dynamic in humans' relationships with one another.

Bonhoeffer argues that after sin humans no longer received the limit of the other in love, but rather hated them. He states, "Where love towards the other is destroyed man can only hate his limit."⁴³ Domination thus replaces interrelationality, "Then he only wants to possess or deny the other person without limit. For now he is appealing to *his* contribution, to his claim upon the other person, to the origin of the other person in him."⁴⁴ As the other reveals the fallacy of their claim, the human under sin desires either to eviscerate or dominate this other, thereby proving the truth of their position as a self-contained, isolated

⁴¹ Ibid., 80.

⁴² Ibid., 87.

⁴³ Ibid., 67.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 67.

self. In this way, Bonhoeffer's analysis of sin provides a helpful framework for understanding some of the mechanics and operations of patriarchy. In part, this continues in Bonhoeffer's theory of atonement, but it is intermixed with several theological positions that have patriarchal underpinnings.

Atonement with Bonhoeffer

For Bonhoeffer, Jesus resolves sin for creation by entering the Middle with humanity in order to mediate all their relationships and restore them to a proper orientation toward God, each other and creation. His description of these events reveal a Christ who achieves this through a mediation that restores contingency and offers healing via Christ's substitution. In so doing, Bonhoeffer repeats some aspects of Anselmic atonement theories while introducing a version of mediation that actually counters patriarchy's dependency on the sovereign self.

For Bonhoeffer, Christ's mediation comes between the human and all relationships, reorienting them toward God and relieving them of the attempt at self-sufficiency. He notes, "Since the coming of Christ, his followers have no more immediate realities of their own, not in their family relationships nor in the ties with their nation nor in the relationships formed in the process of living, Between father and son, husband and wife, the individual and the nation, stands Christ the Mediator."⁴⁵ Thus, Christ interrupts the overdetermined Man/Patriarch Form/human trying to live out of their own existence and in so doing reaffirms interrelationality and the already is-ness of contingency. This affirmation and interruption opens the possibility of receiving the other as gift and affirmation rather than threat. This aspect of Bonhoeffer's soteriology remains generative for destabilizing

⁴⁵ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 96.

patriarchy. That said, Bonhoeffer still employs aspects of substitutionary atonement theories that resource patriarchal frameworks.

Bonhoeffer's soteriology mixes classic substitutionary atonement theories where Christ takes human punishment with his own notion of mediation. Significantly for Bonhoeffer, the driving force of his soteriology is not a vengeful God in need of retribution, but rather a God willing to accept the effects of sin in order to ameliorate them for humanity. He notes, "Jesus Christ is for his brethren because he stands in their place...He is the Church. He not only acts for it, he is it, when he goes to the cross, carries the sins and dies. Therefore, in him, mankind (*sic*) is crucified, dead and judged."⁴⁶ Making this equation even more explicit, Bonhoeffer argues that Christ *is* all human beings, "Jesus is not *a* human being but *the* human being. What happens to him happens to human beings. It happens to all and therefore to us."⁴⁷ The trouble for Bonhoeffer emerges when he begins to imagine how Christ is present today and in whom. This problem manifests most clearly in his treatment of Christ and the West in his article "Ethics as Formation."

Atonement: Jesus & the West

Shortly after the start of World War II and his second trip to the United States, Bonhoeffer wrote a short article on Christianity, the West and Christians' moral obligations. In it, Bonhoeffer lays out a brief soteriology and then argues how this soteriological work emerges presently. Ultimately, the way Bonhoeffer conceives of soteriology and its present work determines how Christians should be ethically formed.

⁴⁶ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Christ the Center* (New York: HarperOne, 1978), 48.

⁴⁷ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009), 85.

For Bonhoeffer, humanity's reconciliation with God happens as they are formed into the form of Christ by "being conformed to the unique form of the one who became human, was crucified, and is risen."⁴⁸ Further, in this formation humans become *true* humans, "to be conformed to the one who has become human--that is what being really human means."⁴⁹ Though Bonhoeffer often refers to this "true form" as a "new humanity," there is a distinct connotation that something intrinsically human and divinely intended has been recovered via soteriology, which raises the question: are non-Christians fully human for Bonhoeffer? Drawing this distinction from humans (or perhaps more accurately "humans") who have not yet been formed in Christ, Bonhoeffer puts this argument forward even more explicitly,

The real human being is allowed to be in freedom the creature of the Creator. To be conformed with the one who became human means that we may be the human beings that we really are. Pretension, hypocrisy, compulsion, forcing oneself to be something different, better, more ideal than one is--all are abolished. God loves the real human being. God became a real human being.⁵⁰

While Bonhoeffer does seem to be offering a correction to the impulse to improve one's self as a response to salvation, it is rooted within a framework that extends the Creator/creature difference to human relationships. The problem is that the difference between Creator and creature is read with a patriarchal lens as dominance and subjugation and then applied to human-human relationships as indicative of what divinely ordered relationships should look like. Not only does this mean that the God-human relationship is now read as patriarchal, it also means that ontological differences are read into human-human relationships, with one group claiming the superior (divine) side and the other inferior (human). Within Bonhoeffer's formulation, in order to qualify as a "real human," humans must be formed to

⁴⁸ Ibid., 93.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 94.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 94.

Christ. Significantly, this is an act that *Christ performs*, not a human effort. Bonhoeffer explains, “This does not happen as we strive ‘to become like Jesus,’ as we customarily say, but as the form of Jesus Christ himself so works on us that it molds us, conforming our form to Christ’s own.”⁵¹ At first blush, this may seem like liberation from self-improvement, but a closer look at how Christ’s form manifests shows otherwise. That is, who is doing the forming gains significance when we consider Bonhoeffer’s notion of how Christ takes form in Bonhoeffer’s present moment.

For Bonhoeffer, Christ forms humans into Christ’s form and this takes the shape of the Church. So the Church is the literal presence of Christ in the world, “He who bore the form of *the* human being can only take form in a small flock; this is Christ’s church. ‘Formation’ means therefore in the first place Jesus Christ taking form in Christ’s church. Here it is the very form of Jesus Christ that takes form.”⁵² Bonhoeffer makes this even more explicit when he notes, “So the church is not a religious community of those who revere Christ, but Christ who has taken form among human beings.” Thus, the church does not simply represent Christ in the world but is itself the current manifestation of Christ. Christ *is* the church. If Christ not only redeems humanity but bestows upon them their true humanity and Christ is the modern-day church, then it seems to follow that the church (Christ) does this redeeming/humanizing work in the world now. It follows then that the church also has the ability to bestow “true humanity” on people via conversion. While Bonhoeffer’s aim here is about Christ’s continued presence in the world, the colonial framework is already at work here in insinuating ontological differences dependent upon theological beliefs. This

⁵¹ Ibid., 93.

⁵² Ibid., 96.

becomes even more explicit when Bonhoeffer makes one further clarification about who constitutes the present-day church.

Further establishing that Christ as the church is not a metaphor but rather a concrete reality, Bonhoeffer asserts that Christ has taken the form of the West. He notes,

So we, as historical people, therefore stand already in the midst of Christ taking form in a segment of human history that Christ has chosen. In this sense we understand the domain for which we wish to speak and must speak to be the West [Abendland], the peoples of Europe and America who until this time have been unified by the form of Christ.⁵³

Bonhoeffer further elaborates that Christ's form cannot be limited to Germany, but also cannot extend to the whole world lest we overlook "the mysterious fact of the distinctive character of the Western world."⁵⁴ While it is likely that Bonhoeffer was attempting to correct a Christian nationalism that had taken hold in Germany, his solution reveals his underlying commitments to a patriarchal worldview that incorporated colonialism into its soteriology. Bonhoeffer makes the salvific nature of Jesus as the West explicit when he immediately follows this claim by arguing, "It remains true that no other form can appear alongside the form of Jesus Christ, for only he is the one who overcomes and reconciles the world. Only this form can help."⁵⁵ At this point, Bonhoeffer's theology has lost its earlier relationality and slipped into a patriarchal soteriology dependent on ontological and hierarchical difference that requires approximation to its center. In a sense, the West has entered the Middle and the Patriarchal Form has been firmly reestablished.

With the West baptized as Christ, salvation becomes confused with approximation to the West. Are people converting to Christianity or Westernization? According to

⁵³ Ibid., 101.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 101.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 101.

Bonhoeffer's formulation here, this distinction seems to be a moot point. The "formation" in "Ethics as Formation" is Formation into the West and the West is Christ. In this way, Bonhoeffer has established a theological framework that arranges people hierarchically (with Jesus/church/West at the top) and declares those at the top as categorically superior ("true humanity"). On the one hand, this justifies the colonizing efforts of the West by categorizing them as missional or "for their own good". On the other hand, it moralizes the position at the top as something that should be aspired and worked toward. On a macro level, this of course affects how Bonhoeffer believes nations should interact with one another, but on a more individual level it means that a hierarchical order rooted in colonialistic nationalism plays across different individual bodies as well. That is, this colonizer-improvement soteriology casts some bodies as inherently closer to non-human/non-Western (e.g., women, people of color, etc.). Yet Bonhoeffer's theology is particularly tricky here. While Bonhoeffer exhibited a western chauvinism rooted in a patriarchal colonial trajectory, his notion of Christ as fundamentally social was developed by a number of liberationists (e.g., John de Gruchy, Noel Erskine, etc.) who all saw in his framing the possibility of seeing Christ in nonwhite flesh.

Theologians like John De Gruchy found support for liberation theologies in Bonhoeffer's theology. De Gruchy's work focused largely on resisting apartheid and relied on Bonhoeffer as one of his primary interlocutors. De Gruchy interpreted Bonhoeffer's christology emphasized Christ's Jewishness and in so doing demonstrates Christ's liberatory commitments. He argues,

For Christians the fact that Jesus is *Lord* should mean a rejection of all ideologies that dehumanize and destroy any sister or brother of Jesus, whether Jew or Arab, black or white. For Christians the fact that Jesus is Lord must mean that he is also *Liberator*, and this requires commitment to his liberating Word and deed, as well as solidarity

with all those whom he came to “seek and to save,” especially the poor and oppressed.⁵⁶

De Gruchy pairs this with Bonhoeffer’s notion of relationality, asserting that this liberative possibility exists in the Christian church and is its responsibility to enact. Building on Bonhoeffer’s *Sanctorum Communio*, he concludes, “The true unity of the church is thus the contradiction of apartheid or any division on the basis of race, culture, or class, just as these are antithetical to the reconciliation made possible through the cross of Jesus Christ.”⁵⁷ While de Gruchy and many others rightfully identify the liberative potential within Bonhoeffer’s theology, they do not address Bonhoeffer’s missteps with systems of power or the conditions that made that possible. Confronting Bonhoeffer’s engagement with patriarchal and colonialistic commitments demonstrates the pervasiveness of this entanglement and the need to reformulate soteriological foundations.

Bonhoeffer’s soteriology establishes a schematic that demonstrates its dependence upon patriarchal foundations, something he is unable to escape despite his liberatory commitments. When this functions as the theological bedrock for understanding salvation, humans’ relationship with God and one another, and what it means to be faithful, the vision of a saved body takes the shape of a white masculinist desire invested in retaining their own power. Because this power is dependent upon the inferiority of others, it must reinforce its

⁵⁶ Here de Gruchy is working explicitly with the christology outlined in the Barmen Confession that Bonhoeffer signed, but he argues that this same christology is explicitly outlined in Bonhoeffer’s 1933 lectures in Berlin and undergirds Bonhoeffer’s theology as a whole.

John de Gruchy, *Bonhoeffer and South Africa: Theology in Dialogue* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1984), 128 (emphasis in the original).

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 81.

position through acts of salvation and proclamations that these others must continue to work to improve.

Conclusion

Both Balthasar and Bonhoeffer produced soteriologies that incorporated patriarchal frameworks. Balthasar relied on a sex/gender formulation that established women as inherently referential and cited this as the divinely intended order humans needed to aspire toward. Using Mary as the ideal human not only reinforced this framework, but also supported the idea that obedience to God was a feminized position. This worked within Balthasar's overarching theology that had God as the Lord (master/patriarch) who requires obedient submission from *his* subjects and would use punishment if necessary to reestablish this relationship. In this way, Balthasar uses a patriarchal lens to interpret the God-human relationship and then uses this relationship as an analogy for human-human relationships. Not only does this theology substantiate patriarchy's claims, but it also erases the patriarchal framework as a human construction, claiming it as a divinely created reality. Biology becomes theology. Here again, we see the Patriarch Form claiming the universality of his overdetermined existence.

While Bonhoeffer offers some corrective to Balthasar in his understanding of relationality, he ultimately betrayed its liberatory possibilities by repeating a version of Balthasar's mistake and applying the God-human relationship on human relationships. By positing that Christ manifests as the West, Bonhoeffer reestablishes a soteriological framework where salvation means approximation to a particular kind of body (e.g., racially, linguistically, culturally, etc.). Though spiritual salvation might be the explicit stakes of approximation, Bonhoeffer's colonialistic framework extends this to be a matter of life and death: submit and assimilate to the ruling order (if you have a body deemed assimilable) or

be damned (physically, socially and/or spiritually). Within Wynter's formulation, Christ/the West become Man, and everyone falls along this spectrum from Other to Man.

While using the God-human relationship as a model for human relationships is one of the strongest methods through which patriarchy infiltrates soteriology, patriarchy's intrusion also manifests in atonement theories that require abuse for reconciliation (Balthasar), confusing domination with poor rulership (Bonhoeffer), and establishing biology as a theological category that informs behavior (Balthasar). Each of these soteriological iterations reveals an a priori commitment to a patriarchal framework that resources improvement as a mechanism of control.

If both Von Balthasar and Bonhoeffer's soteriology's (re)produce this problematic structure in which women and others are required to improve in order to be saved, what kind of soteriological framework might we turn to? How can we conceive of conversion, change, restoration without evoking these same problematic structures? How should we interpret the crucifixion? This last chapter will explore a few possible ways forward for imagining a soteriology free from self-improvement.

Conclusion

Moving Out of Patriarchal Soteriology

If both Von Balthasar and Bonhoeffer's soteriology's (re)produce this problematic structure in which women and others are required to improve in order to be saved, what kind of soteriological framework might we turn to? How can we conceive of conversion, change, restoration without evoking these same problematic structures? Imagining a soteriology that doesn't require self-improvement requires a framework outside of Man. As Man defines salvation as approximation to itself, we must first separate the human (what it means to be human and ways of being human) from Man's construction of it. Professor of African American studies Alexander Weheliye works closely with Sylvia Wynter's project to develop an idea of the human not contained by Man. Weheliye develops the notion of *habeas viscus*, which indexes sites of the human that exceed Man's domain. Though he does not develop his argument toward a religious agenda, *habeas viscus* gestures toward a pre-existing and fuller reality revealed in Christ that exceeds Man's containment. In so doing, Weheliye's work provides an alternative understanding of human existence that will provide a starting point for imagining a vision of soteriology not tied to Man's control. Using *habeas viscus* as a framework, I will work closely with Delores Williams' work to offer a few constructive possibilities for interpreting Jesus' life, death and resurrection as the starting point for creating a soteriology liberative for all bodies and not dependent upon the mechanics of improvement. I will then offer a brief exploration of a few possible ways forward with soteriology via my notion of antipatriarchal christology, fugitive theology and interrelational soteriology.

Habeas Viscus:

In his book *Habeas Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics and Black Feminist Theories of the Human*, Alexander Weheliye provides an analysis of how cultural definitions of “human” have participated within racist structures. Working closely with Sylvia Wynter, Weheliye concurs that “Man represents the western configuration of the human as synonymous with the heteromasculine, white, propertied, and liberal subject that renders all those who do not conform to these characteristics as exploitable nonhumans, literal legal no-bodies.”¹ Beyond this, Man “not only misconstrues how profoundly race and racism shape the modern idea of the human, it also overlooks or perfunctorily writes off theorizations of race, subjection, and humanity found in black and ethnic studies.”² As a counter to this, Weheliye argues that we need an entirely new genre of humanity.

As a counter to this formulation, Weheliye offers *habeas viscus* as an alternative understanding of being that challenges Man’s overdetermined claim to the human. He defines *habeas viscus* as a “technological assemblage of humanity” that

insists on the importance of miniscule movements, glimmers of hope, scraps of food, the interrupted dreams of freedom found in those spaces deemed devoid of human life (Guantanamo Bay, internment camps, maximum security prisons, Indian reservations, concentration camps, slave plantations, or colonial outposts, for instance).³

Weheliye turns to these places to look for life and ways of being that are outside the scope of Man’s domain. He contends that this otherwise way of being exists not in response to Man but exists *a priori* Man as the life that cannot be completely assimilated or annihilated.

Weheliye’s turn to places largely constituted by suffering should not be confused with an exaltation of it. *Habeas viscus* is not the product of suffering but the powerlessness of

¹ Alexander Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), 135.

² *Ibid.*, 4.

³ *Ibi.*, 12.

suffering and violence to eviscerate this kind of life completely, to make it as if it never existed. To be clear, this does not mean that suffering and violence are powerless (to say this would be dismissive of the very real suffering people have experienced from the enormous power violence wields). Rather, it points to the truth that violence's power is not absolute; Man's power is not absolute. This fact elicits Man's fixation to destroy it completely even more keenly.⁴ This elusiveness and inability to be fully assimilated indexes alternative possibilities for existing outside of Man's domain.

Weheliye suggests that *habeas viscus* demonstrates this possibility in a potentiality not determined by or in reference to Man's control. Using Spiller's term "flesh" to describe how *habeas viscus* emerges, Weheliye notes how the "ether of flesh represents both a perpetual potentiality and actuality in Man's kingdom."⁵ Thus, potentiality exists as an endless wellspring of possibility, and this idea is not theoretical but has the possibility of being actualized. Explaining how this possibility is different from the potentiality Man resources to elicit self-improvement and approximation, Weheliya quotes Girogio Agamben's articulation of this other form of potentiality, "there is truly potentiality only where the *potentiality to not-be* does not lag behind the actuality but passes fully into it."⁶ The potentiality to not-be is not the threat of death but rather the possibility that is not extinguished by death and therefore is not determined by it. Weheliye expounds, "For

⁴ This dynamic is what Spillers describes in the relationship between body (the production of regulation) and flesh (here *habeas viscus*), "[the whip] is used with such dexterity and severity as not only to lacerate the skin, but to tear out small portions of the flesh at almost every stake." The point here is not simply violence but to extract and/or destroy the potentiality for life that it (Man/the body) cannot get at. "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book," *Black White and in Color: Essays on American Literature and Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 207.

⁵ Weheliye, 130.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 130 (quoting *Potentialities*, 183), emphasis mine.

habeas viscus does not obey the logic of legal possession and remains even after the body's demise; it refuses to pass on but is, nonetheless, passed down as the remainder of the hieroglyphics of the flesh."⁷ In this sense, habeas viscus signals the excess beyond the world of Man. This excess offers the space for imagining new genres of the human, new modes of relating and being.

Part of the difficulty Weheliye negotiates when describing the specific content of habeas viscus is that it is exactly that which resists incorporation. Specific definitions become endpoints that are vulnerable to being assimilated into Man's regime. Weheliye describes this as habeas viscus "defy[ing] domestication."⁸ In a way, habeas viscus is better described as a verb or an orientation; it has specific content, but it never completely settles in one place. To get at this, Weheliye describes habeas viscus (which he also terms "flesh") in a variety of terms: as the "individual-in-the-mass and the mass-in-the-individual,"⁹ a "new ontology, one which supersedes the ontological distinction between the animate and the inanimate, between the animal and the human,"¹⁰ and as "situated at the crossing of the first creation of what was and the ultimate arrest of what is."¹¹ Expanding upon this last idea, Weheliye posits, "As such the flesh provides the ground, the loophole of retreat, the liminal space, and the archipelago for those revolutions that will have occurred but remain largely imperceptible within Man's political and critical idioms."¹² In these liminal, in-between spaces, places Man declares devoid of life, habeas viscus "points to the terrain of humanity

⁷ Ibid., 132.

⁸ Ibid., 136.

⁹ Ibid., 44 (quoting Hortense Spillers).

¹⁰ Ibid., 44 (quoting Elizabeth Grosz).

¹¹ Ibid., 135.

¹² Ibid., 135.

as a *relational assemblage*.¹³ Not isolated in the individual, yet also residing in the individual, *habeas viscus* invites imagining humanity as analogous to a larger organism or microbiome where separation exists but absolute separation does not. This is a departure from Man's framework that depends on absolute separation in order to define itself. Thus, *habeas viscus* offers a different way for thinking about what it means to be human, one that connects possibility with the freedom to be (or not), one that affirms connectedness with its environment, and one that cannot be contained by any system. In short, *habeas viscus* indexes life as a principle and orientation (i.e., creative possibility and the movement toward it, physical life but not reducible to it). In this way, *habeas viscus* echoes the reality revealed in Christ.

Weheliye's notion of *habeas viscus* provides a socio-theoretical response to Man that is analogous to the theological reality revealed in Christ. When put in conversation with one another, Christ expands and deepens *habeas viscus*. Like *habeas viscus*, Christ reveals life via the resurrection where the State declares death. Similar to how *habeas viscus* resists domestication, Christ's life demonstrates a theological orientation that changes and resists religious domestication, thereby performing a kind of fugitive theology that is always moving. Jesus' interaction with the Syrophoenician woman demonstrates this change as she teaches him that his ministry extends beyond the Jews, and Jesus' frequent denunciation of the Pharisees and Sadducees illustrates his resistance to dogma.¹⁴ While *habeas viscus* clearly parallels Christ in its orientation and resistance to power structures, it does not capture the

¹³ Ibid., 136, emphasis mine.

¹⁴ Jennings interprets this pericope in Matthew 15:21-28 as a moment where Jesus actually learns. This reading demonstrates a savior who embodies the human experience of growth and the divine acknowledgement that theology evolves and requires others. "Doctrine of Creation and Theological Anthropology," lecture, 2011.

full vision of the liberative possibilities Christ generates. Thus, while *habeas viscus* provides a helpful lens for interpreting Christ's socio-political significance (explored further below), grasping this broader liberative vision requires a theological intervention. Delores Williams provides a helping starting point for this task.

In her book *Sisters in the Wilderness*, Williams lays out an analysis of the problems of substitutionary atonement theories for African American women and proposes a new biblical hermeneutic called "womanist survivalist/quality-of-life" that provides new insights for previously troubling texts. Williams argues that Jesus "represents the ultimate surrogate figure" when soteriologies assert that "sinful humankind has been redeemed because Jesus died on the cross in the place of humans, thereby taking human sin upon himself."¹⁵ If Williams is correct, then the trouble here is that God's use of surrogacy as a means of redemption justifies human surrogacy. When this soteriology combines with the broader and infinitely more complicated interactions of gender, race, nationalism and the overarching impulse toward self-improvement, this soteriology is troubling indeed. Williams questions, "It is therefore fitting and proper for black women to ask whether the image of a surrogate-God has salvific power for black women or whether this image supports and reinforces the exploitation that has accompanied their experience with surrogacy."¹⁶ How then can the cross be redemptive? Williams contends that it cannot. Another way to understand Williams' critique is that substitutionary atonement theories justify the system in which Man uses violence to evoke "salvation" in others. Underlying this soteriology is the belief that something (someone?) must be violently eviscerated in order for their own existence to be

¹⁵ Delores Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1970), 143.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 143.

coherent (i.e., sin must be corporeally punished in order to achieve a holy body in others), which smacks of Man's need to destroy the other in order to claim universality.

Applying the womanist survivalist lens to the gospels, Williams argues that Jesus's *ministerial life* is redemptive, not Jesus' crucifixion. Interpreting the text with this lens reveals that "salvation is assured by Jesus' life of resistance and by the survival strategies he used to help people survive the death of identity caused by their exchange of inherited cultural meanings for a new identity shaped by the gospel ethics and world view."¹⁷ Williams goes on to point out that the synoptic gospels emphasize Jesus' relationship with humans and healing, not a vindictive God who extinguishes God's wrath on Jesus' innocent body.

Describing this ministerial interpretation at length, Williams explains,

God's gift to humans, through Jesus, was to invite them to participate in this *ministerial* vision ("whosoever will, let them come") of righting relations. The response to this invitation by human principalities and powers was the horrible deed the cross represents--the evil of humankind trying to kill the *ministerial* vision of life in relation that Jesus brought to humanity. The resurrection does not depend upon the cross for life, for the cross only represents historical evil trying to defeat good. The resurrection of Jesus and the flourishing of God's spirit in the world as the result of resurrection represents the life of the *ministerial* vision gaining victory over the evil attempt to kill it.¹⁸

Thus, for Williams it is Jesus' *life* that is redemptive, Jesus' response to evil and harm in the world and Jesus' overarching commitment to care and healing. Describing God's plan as a "metaphor of hope," Williams concludes, "the kingdom of God theme in the *ministerial* vision of Jesus does not point to death; it is not something one has to die to reach."

Williams' soteriology helps elucidate the problems within substitutionary atonement theories and offers constructive moves for interpreting Jesus' life and ministry as salvific and

¹⁷ Ibid., 145.

¹⁸ Ibid., 146.

interprets the resurrection as proof of God's life-power in Jesus' ministerial vision. Jesus' death and resurrection are two aspects of christology that are mutually informing and inseparable; to read Jesus' life/ministry without the resurrection ignores God's absolute rejection of violence and its claim to power. This aspect of christology is critical for deconstructing patriarchal soteriology. Interpreting the crucifixion and resurrection within the socio-political framework of Man and habeas viscus highlights the possibilities already present in Christ's work for constructing a soteriology not bound to the self-improvement inherent within patriarchal soteriology.

Throughout the crucifixion narrative, Jesus rejects systems of power that promise his own salvation from crucifixion. All four gospels describe one of the disciples drawing a sword in the Garden of Gethsemane to defend Jesus against the soldiers who came to arrest Jesus.¹⁹ Jesus responds to this by diffusing the situation, telling the disciple to put down his sword and healing the wounded soldier. In rejecting this solution, Jesus also rejects violence as a source of power capable of salvation. Violence may help Jesus escape, may even help Jesus evade crucifixion, but Christ's rejection of it proves it is an option against the telos of Christ's life and ministry.

Jesus rejects another system of power during the trial before the crucifixion. Here Pilate asks Jesus to offer a defense, to answer questions about Jesus' identity. Curiously, Jesus offers little to no defense, not an explanation or a justification. In this rejection, Christ rejects both the solution of intellectualism and religiosity. Neither reason nor dogma can offer salvation. This should not be misconstrued as Jesus' acquiescence or desire for crucifixion, but rather the absolute rejection that these two systems of power can commute

¹⁹ Matthew 26:51; Mark 14:47; Luke 22:51; and John 18:10–11

salvation. These two encounters can be interpreted as the demand for Jesus to participate in the systems of power by approximating himself to them (either via violence or oral defense). By not participating, Jesus denies their claim to universality and their claims to have the power to liberate him.

Violence, intellectualism and religiosity all operate here as invitations to an alternative system of salvation whereby Christ's acquiescence to any one of them would have implemented a structure similar to Man. Those best able to enact violence, those most inclined to intellectualism, or those most disciplined and pious would most closely approximate the Savior. Self-improvement comes back online when salvation is tied to approximation. Christ's rejection of the salvific power within any of these solutions (and therefore his rejection of the entire system of power itself) leads to a swift and lethal response. Much like how the other's existence threatens Man's claim to universality, Christ's rejection of the powers threatens their claim to the efficacy of said power. Christ must be destroyed. In this way, Christ prefigures all those who come to figure as the other within Man's framework, but the full arc of Christ's mission also infuses this position with possibility. Using habeas viscus as a lens highlights the specific ways Jesus interacted with the systems of power around him.

Following Weheliye's suggestion that habeas viscus is most visible in those places deemed devoid of life, Jesus' crucified body can be understood as a full manifestation of the vision habeas viscus articulates. Just as habeas viscus in no way justified the violence that made it visible, so too salvation does not baptize the violence of the crucifixion (Jesus has already rejected the power of violence). Similarly, Jesus indexes all that the system wants to deny and put to death by putting Christ to death. It proclaims a way of being in the world

that is not beholden to oppressive systems of power. Yet Jesus provides a more expansive confrontation and resolution with Man than *habeas viscus* provides.

Jesus expands *habeas viscus* by not only challenging the systems of power but also overcoming them in the resurrection. In so doing, Jesus undermines their claim to universality and confirms the possibility of life oriented toward something other than these structures. Jesus' message denies the necessity of approximation and instead points to the life-giving power of relationality (demonstrated in Jesus' life and ministry). It signals care for the body (Jesus' acts of healing and attention to his own need for rest), delight of celebration (turning water into wine), relational possibility (friendships with morally questionable people), and environmental intuition (walking on water). In the crucifixion, Man attempts to put to death the possibility and generative telos of this entire ministry, the actual possibility of its existence, and Jesus' claim that Man does not have absolute power. This is why the resurrection matters.

In the resurrection, the divine legitimizes the wild possibilities of humans oriented toward life, possibility and freedom. If Jesus' life is itself the redemptive act (as Williams asserts), then the crucifixion demonstrates both the voraciousness of evil's appetite and God's presence with humans amidst suffering. Furthermore, if the *is-ness* (as opposed to accomplishing a specific task, like crucifixion) of Jesus' life is redemption for humans, then there is no impulse toward improvement or justification of "natural" hierarchies. Humans are not saved by emulating Christ's obedience unto death, Christ's acceptance of abuse or self-emptying. Rather, humans are redeemed by God's restoration of relationship with humanity via Jesus' life, and this restoration brings with it an invitation to the kind of relationality Jesus demonstrated. If the solution to sin is restoration between God and humans rather than sacrifice, obedience and punishment, then there is an invitation toward

community and relationship rather than the expectation for obedience and improvement. Like Weheliye argued, this is the freedom to not-be, not as a rejection of life but as a rejection of approximation as requirement. Self-improvement, the need to become, the justification of a hierarchically oppressive system was crucified with Christ and not resurrected. This is salvation. In this sense, Christ's words on the cross ring a bit differently, "It is finished" is now an invitation into new possibilities and free relations. When William's and Wehliye's insights are brought together with an exegesis that interprets Christ as responding to systemic sin, a christology emerges that is anti-patriarchal. This anti-patriarchal christology provides important resources for resisting Man's tactics for producing patriarchal soteriology. The content of the new possibilities within anti-patriarchal christology remain widely open.

By this point, it is clear that Christianity contains resources within it for resisting patriarchy and its entanglements. Anti-patriarchal christology is one of at least three theological strategies that help fortify soteriology against patriarchal captivity: 1) anti-patriarchal christology 2) fugitive theology and 3) interrelationality. A brief overview of each of these theological moves demonstrates the potential within Christian theology to resist incorporation into systems of oppression.

Anti-patriarchal christology

Anti-patriarchal christology interprets Christ and salvation in relation to systemic oppression, thereby attending to the ways christology can recapitulate harm rather than liberating from it. Following the work of theologians like Rosemary Radford Ruether and Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, anti-patriarchal christology attends to the experience of women and other groups affected by christologies that collapse Jesus' maleness with Jesus' salvific action. When Jesus' maleness is aligned too closely with his salvific efficacy, it

provides the foundational logic for theologically justifying a gender hierarchy. That is, if Jesus's maleness was necessary for salvation, then there is something inherently salvific about maleness that is lacking in femaleness. By this logic, men can claim that they are inherently better suited to leadership, that only men can be priests, and so on. In so doing, anti-patriarchal christology demonstrates that collapsing Jesus' maleness with salvation inevitably reproduces the patriarchal arrangement. Thus, in order for salvation to be liberative from systems of oppression and sin (patriarchy is both), Jesus' maleness and the efficacy of salvation must be kept firmly separate. Furthermore, anti-patriarchal christology acknowledges the necessity of incorporating new, changing and wide-ranging perspectives in order to preclude one viewpoint from becoming normative and establishing yet another system of oppression. Jesus' own life abounds with examples of him denouncing and directly contradicting the systems of oppression present within his time.

By connecting people's lived experience with theology, anti-patriarchal christology also undercuts patriarchal soteriology's dogmatic claims to universality. As universality claims that there is only one kind of subject and therefore only one way of being in the world (currently this looks like whiteness oriented to heteromascularity), theology that attends to a wide array of people and experiences challenges this presumption. That is, it understands that theology always emerges in connection with a subject and because of this there is no neutral or natural theology. This means that theology must remain open and dynamic so it can engage and adjust with the shifting terrain of people's different lived experiences. Delores Williams demonstrates this kind of approach when she critiques the valorization of Christ's suffering as problematic for people who experience suffering or violence from systemic oppression. Bringing theology together with subjectivity allows Williams to make this critique and reveals the problematic foundations within patriarchal christology.

Furthermore, Williams' work challenges the universality underwriting patriarchal soteriology by pointing out that it is not in fact liberative for all people. Anti-patriarchal christology also challenges patriarchal soteriology's claims to universality by reinterpreting Jesus' relationship to his own maleness. A brief analysis of Jesus' relationship with his own subject position as a man demonstrates the fallacy of over-determining Jesus' maleness and the significance of it.

In both his life and his teachings, Jesus fails to conform to typical gender patterns and fundamentally challenges the male responsibility to the household. Rather than marrying and accepting his role as patriarch, Jesus remains single and travels about the country with twelve young men. Much as he had disrupted his own father's household, Jesus disrupted the supreme rule of the patriarchal household by cracking it open in ways that formed new modes of relating and family structures. Not only did he leave his own household without reproducing another, but he also transferred the logic of household into a spiritual register. This is the kind of work Jesus accomplishes when he says, "Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?" and then transfers the familial relation to his disciples saying, "Here are my mother and my brothers. For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother."²⁰ This destabilizing of gender and its performances extends to Jesus' own body as well.

One of the most provocative stories in which Jesus' body misaligns with the concurrent understandings of gender is the account of the woman with perpetual bleeding in Mark 5. A brief account of perceptions of gender will elucidate the gendered elements within

²⁰ Matthew 12:48-50. Jesus also disrupts the patriarchal ordering of relations when he responds to the Sadducees regarding the woman who had been married to seven brothers. His answer that "in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage" rejects the current power of relations in which women are "given" in marriage. A new mode of sociability is being instantiated through the body and teachings of Christ.

this passage. Within first century medical theory, the body's vulnerability to disease was proportional to its porosity. New Testament scholar Candida Moss elaborates this theory, "Boundaries must be regulated and checked and invaders must be fended off. Sickly bodies were those that failed in this effort to remain impermeable. They were porous, and it was this porosity that permitted a *daimon* or other agent to enter and contaminate the body."²¹ This porosity mapped directly onto gender. Following medical scholar Galen's theories of gender, women were perceived as "colder...moist, squishy, and porous."²² Scholar of late antiquity Peter Brown explains further, "Women, by contrast, were failed males. The precious vital heat had not come to them in sufficient quantities in the womb. Their lack of heat made them more soft, more liquid, clammy-cold, altogether more formless than were men. Periodic menstruation showed that their bodies could not burn up the heavy surpluses that coagulated within them."²³ Though men were considered inherently warmer and more formed, they were not "safe" from becoming "womanish." Indeed, their "flickering heat was an uncertain force."²⁴ In response to this ever-present threat, men performed and cultivated hardness and control in all their actions. Again, Brown elaborates, "It was never enough to be male: a man had to strive to remain 'virile.' He had to learn to exclude from his character and from the poise and temper of his body all telltale traces of 'softness' that might betray, in him, the half-formed state of a woman."²⁵ It is only the feminine or effeminate body that is leaky and violate-able. Porosity then, or any indication of it, indexed a distinctly female

²¹ Candida Moss, "Man with the Flow of Power," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 129, no 3 (2010): 513.

²² *Ibid.*, 513.

²³ Brown, 10.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 11.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 11.

characteristic. This provides critical background for understanding the implications of Jesus' interaction with the bleeding woman.

Within this context, the woman's condition indicates an overly porous and therefore weak and womanish body. Moss observes, "The very nature of the woman's illness is that her body lacks the appropriate boundaries and unnaturally leaks its contents into the world. The image of the prolonged and abnormal twelve-year flow of blood suggests both the sodden malleability of the suffering body and her hyperhydrated feminine identity."²⁶ It is not only the woman, however, that reveals her porosity. Jesus also experiences an unexpected and unwarranted flow within the story as the woman touches him. He begins leaking just as she ceases. Moss describes this flow as not simply a spiritual movement, but a physiological one,

Like the woman, Jesus is unable to control the flow that emanates from his body. Like the flow of blood, the flow of power is something embodied and physical; just as the woman feels the flow of blood dry up, so Jesus feels—physically—the flow of power leave his body. Both the diseased woman with the flow of blood and the divine protagonist of Mark are porous, leaky creatures.²⁷

Thus, Jesus once again disturbs typical gender norms. The gospel of Mark depicts a Savior who is "weak and sickly...unable to control, regulate or harden his porous body."²⁸

Moreover, it is a *female* who exerts power over his body, extracting healing power out of him.

Maud Gleason describes the implications of this leaky and violatable body,

What Jesus clearly did not control was the boundaries of his own body...The *only* thing the Gospel narrative tells us about Jesus' body is that it was thus violated. This

²⁶ Moss, 514.

²⁷ Ibid., 516.

²⁸ Ibid., 516.

issue is explored by both Glancy and Frillingos, who writes: “The breached body, male or female, was ‘feminine’ or ‘effeminate.’”²⁹

Despite his physical anatomy, Jesus demonstrates repeatedly a gendered fluidity in his body that troubles the waters of patriarchal understandings of gender. It is not Jesus’ maleness that provides the source or opportunity for healing in this narrative. Quite the contrary, Jesus’ gender fluidity in this moment undermines the possibility of universally equating maleness with salvific action. Thus, Jesus queers “proper” masculinity demonstrating that salvation is not tied to masculinity or its corresponding power structures. Furthermore, Jesus’ fluidity around maleness challenges patriarchy’s claims about a fixed universal subject position. If Christianity’s salvific figure distorts the notion of the patriarch, then patriarchy loses the theological foundation for patriarchal soteriology. The loss of this foundation is further exemplified in another aspect of anti-patriarchal christology: the divine rejection of systemic oppression.

Anti-patriarchal christology interprets evil as a systemic reality and understands Jesus’ death narrative in this light. Jesus’ rejection of systemic oppression in his life and ministry (Williams) and his refusal to participate in them in the events leading up to his crucifixion reveal the connection between salvation and the rejection of these systems. As noted above, Jesus rejects violence, intellectualism, and religiosity in the moments leading up to his crucifixion. It is not the crucifixion that is significant here, but rather the resurrection. If we stop at the crucifixion, then Williams’ critique of theology resourcing violence as a solution to sin and oppression remains quite poignant. If, however, theology attends to the

²⁹ Maud Gleason, “By Whose Gender Standards (If Anybody’s) Was Jesus A Real Man?” in *New Testament Masculinities*, edited by Stephen D. Moore and Janice Capel Anderson, no 45 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature), 326.

significance of the resurrection, then it understands the violence of the crucifixion as part of systemic oppression itself. In this instance, violence is systemic oppression's response to the divine "no". Consequently, Christ's resurrection means that systemic oppression and its powers did not succeed in negating the possibility of life and relationality outside their domain. They did not have the final word. Christ's resurrection proclaims and legitimizes an otherwise way of being as a definitive possibility. Put differently, part of salvation is the rejection of these systems and liberation from them. The divine rejection of systemic oppression condemns them as sinful and denies their claim to universal power. Not only does systemic oppression not align with divine visions for salvation, but they also do not have the power to effect it. Jesus' resurrection confirms the finality of the divine No to these systems and signals the possibility for life outside of them.

This anti-patriarchal christology presents Christ as the full expression of *habeas viscus*--the possibility of life against and outside of these systems. This means that Christ also rejects the work these systems claimed was required for salvation; this means self-improvement as requirement has no place within soteriology. This understanding of christology intervenes at the junction between people and these systems that seek to oppress them. By understanding Christ in relation to the socio-political systems around him, anti-patriarchal christology acknowledges the way systems of power attempt to co-opt theology and instead understands Christ as directly opposing this. To use Wynter's framework, anti-patriarchal christology rejects Man, Man's claim to universality, and undermines Man's attempt to colonize soteriology into its own system. Fugitive theology also provides tools for resisting Man's colonizing grasp.

Fugitive Theology

Following Weheliye's description of habeas viscus, fugitive theology resists incorporation into Man because of its dynamic nature. Fugitive theology is open to evolving and is not dogmatic. Similar to habeas viscus, it functions more like a verb than a noun, continually open to reevaluation and adjustment as it accounts for the changing terrain of human existence. This is particularly necessary given the way Man continually reinvents and readjusts itself. If theology hopes to have the ability to dismantle oppression and continue teaching liberative ways of being, it must have resources that resist Man's colonizing techniques. Fugitive theology is just such a response.

Much like liberation theology, fugitive theology operates on the assumption that God rejects systemic oppression and affiliates God's self with those disempowered by it. Beyond this, fugitive theology understands evil as a kind of kidnapping that attempts to arrest creation by incorporating it into these structures of systemic oppression.³⁰ This capture rejects the creative life force first released by God in the Genesis accounts. In this sense, it is an act of *anti-creation*. Fugitive theology offers one option for resisting this patriarchal capture.

Fugitive theology offers a theological grounding and interpretation of Man and functions as a lens for exposing and dismantling Man's presence in texts. Though this methodology extends to texts that are not specifically theological, its motivations and foundations are specifically theological, making fugitive theology a distinctly theological task. To this end, fugitive theology denotes a methodological approach for analyzing texts that

³⁰ Hortense Spillers first describes this process as the work of transforming human "flesh" (life, movement, creativity) into a "body" (regulated, still, categorized). *Black, White and in Color: Essays on American Literature and Culture* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003), 203-229.

resists settling completely in any ideological territory and traces how power moves within broader structures of oppression. It accomplishes this by continuously interrogating how power has shifted within any proposition, using questions as a “ping” that checks for Man’s infiltration, and attending to the author.

When formulating any proposition, fugitive theology assumes that the proposition will not be the final solution; Man continuously shifts power. Fugitive theology recognizes that the problem it addresses is not reducible to the manifestations of patriarchy but extends to the mechanism behind it. This mechanism looks like patriarchy extending its boundaries and shifting its definitions while retaining the same power structures. This is demonstrated in things like tokenism where it can point to the presence of discriminated groups as proof that discrimination is not at play. Another example (albeit also complicated) is in the United States’ legalization of gay marriage.

While gaining the legal right to marry was a significant landmark in gaining equality for the LGBTQ+ community, Man’s functioning amidst this issue was deft and subtle. This is most easily identifiable in the definition of marriage within the United States. Though the legal definition changed to allow for people to marry regardless of biological sex, the cultural definition of marriage did not change. That is, society largely still viewed marriage as legitimate only when recognized by the State. When the Defense of Marriage Act was overturned, the law only expanded to allow another community to participate within the standing structure of governmentally regulated marriage. Of course the presence of gay marriage changes cultural notions of relationality in fundamental ways, but the structure of marriage itself (legal recognition, tax filing, ceremonial practices, marriage industrial complex, healthcare, etc.) changed very little. The enormous legal victory for gay marriage tackled the manifestation of patriarchy but did not address the mechanism behind it. Fugitive theology

directs us to look for where the mechanism is being challenged; where is the LGBTQ+ community defying and exceeding the scope of the system? With this question, our attention shifts from interpreting legalization as the endpoint and instead recognizes that it is in the relational dynamics of the LGBTQ+ community itself that challenges the mechanism behind it. Man struggles to capture or incorporate the notion of chosen family, triad relationships, polyamory, group parenting, and other ways of doing relationality. How can these be capitalized upon, regulated, or documented for taxes, healthcare, etc.? These modes of relationality challenge Man's ability to colonize or incorporate them into its standing structure and thus provide indexes into possibilities of relationality outside of Man's purview.

By attending to how power shifts and where people are resisting it, fugitive theology resists Man's colonizing gestures and instead highlights these alternate possibilities. In so doing, fugitive theology simultaneously undermines Man's claims to universality by showing that there are possible ways of being and relating outside of Man's structures. Fugitive theology also resists Man's structures by using questions angled at interrogating power as a method for undermining Man.

Though the content of the questions themselves may change, fugitive theology uses the practice of consistently probes how power manifests. Fugitive theology asks questions like, "Who benefits from this narrative?" "Who is not represented here?" "What is being made to seem natural or inherent and why?" "How does this argument direct attention and shape vision?" "How do those stories function in the community?" "What are the disparities between 'stories lived and stories told'?" "Who decides what counts as knowledge or what is preserved?" "How is value determined?" "What is considered beautiful, good, or holy?" These all work to uncover how patriarchy is reinventing and perpetuating itself. With this

practice, fugitive theology develops a methodological muscle that continually checks, evolves and adapts as needed. In this way, it responds to Man's habit of expanding and shifting how/where oppressive power operates, and it works to expose this. The practice of continually adjusting questions to investigate oppression also means that fugitive theology can interrogate itself.

One of the more insidious manifestations of oppression happens when oppressed parties internalize the tenets of colonization. As demonstrated in chapter three, this often happens as a mechanism of survival but can simultaneously perpetuate the very oppression it seeks to mitigate (e.g., mothers teaching daughters beauty practices in order to survive patriarchy concurrently instill a patriarchal vision of beauty and the expectation to fulfill it). Internalized colonialism also expresses itself by leveraging the power it does have access to over against the power it does not (e.g., white women claiming they want equality for all women while protecting white power). Fugitive theology's practice of interrogating the access point, motives and movement of oppressive power also expose infiltrations of this power into itself. In this way, fugitive theology is by no means infallible but has strategies for guarding itself against the internalization of oppressive power structures. In addition to interrogating shifts in power, fugitive theology also attends to authors' biography and subject position alongside the texts they write.

One of Man's more effective colonizing tools was the practice of abstracting the author and their socio-political location in order to present materials as universal truths. Fugitive theology resists these universalizing impulses within knowledge transmission by presenting the author in the context of their life, geography, subject position, and time period. Rather than texts presenting themselves as objective fact or truth, fugitive theology incorporates the nuance of the author's life as a kind of text to read along with the written

materials. In this way, fugitive theology is heavily influenced by the work of Edward Said and his notion of traveling theories. For Said, truth is not an objective reality, but something that always *belongs* to people. That is, truth is a subjective claim, one that emerges out of specific contexts, beliefs, needs, etc.³¹ As such, Said advocates the posture of the critic as one who is constantly vigilant, always ready to resist the universalizing of theory beyond its original function.

To this end, fugitive theology incorporates the author's life as a methodological practice that makes explicit the complicated network out of which a text emerges (e.g., historical location, author's bias, family history, audience, authorial intention, language, etc.). Indeed the attention to the biographies of Rosemary Radford Ruether and Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza at the beginning of this work are just such a methodological exercise. This attention to the human behind and within a text reduces the likelihood of readers interpreting it as objective truth. That is, when authors are placed as complex humans alongside their texts, their texts are also contextualized. This severely limits Man's ability to use texts as a colonizing force that naturalizes some authors/ideas as universal or natural. In so doing, fugitive theology challenges one of Man's key tools in establishing universality. That said, fugitive theology recognizes that situating texts to their authorial context is not the endpoint; analyses of knowledge transmission must also account for the relational event in which many kinds of bodies converge (e.g., subject position, families, history, etc.). For this work, we turn to interrelationality.

Interrelationality

³¹ Edward Said, *Representations of the Intellectual* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993), 91.

Interrelationality refers to the interconnectedness of creation, emphasizing how humans are connected to each other and the world around them. While it recognizes individuality, interrelationality expands it to include a notion of boundedness. That is, while I am an individual, I am always already an individual in relationship. Summarizing Chicana queer feminist theorist Gloria Anzaldúa, ethicist Robyn Henderson-Espinoza describes relationality as a “bridge [that] makes the material body central to relating, generating a new form of being and becoming in the world that deeply connects material bodies to one another through their standpoint on the bridge.”³² This relationality is not limited to human-human relationships, but also extends to humans’ relationship to other creatures, plant life, the earth and those things’ relationship with each other. Henderson-Espinoza notes, “there is something more than human and animal beings in this world; and in fact, we humans are radically connected to all things and are imbued with vibrational energies or spirit.”³³ Furthermore, interrelationality asserts that part of an individual’s being is constituted by these relationships (to land, animals, plants, other humans). This notion of interconnectedness proves particularly resourceful for resisting patriarchal soteriology. Interrelationality undermines Man’s notion of sovereignty, challenges the logic of approximating an ideal and elucidates new modes of relating.

Interrelationality challenges the notion of individuality as absolute and suggests that this notion emerges as a key construct within sovereignty structures. Feminist philosopher Elizabeth Grosz takes Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s concept of “flesh” as an “inherent

³² Robyn Henderson-Espinoza, “Gloria Anzaldúa’s *El Mundo Zurdo*: Exploring a Relational Feminist Theology of Interconnectedness,” *Journal for the Study of Religion*, 26 no. 2 (2013): 109.

³³ *Ibid.*, 110.

intertwining of subject and world” as a way of articulating another way of being in the world, one premised on an interrelatedness that makes patriarchal hierarchy impossible.³⁴ If there is not absolute distinction between beings, then otherness cannot be established firmly enough to function as the grounds of patriarchal sovereignty. That is, patriarchal sovereignty is predicated on the idea that certain bio-ontological differences determine the sovereign subject. By binding humans to each other and to their world, interrelationality subverts the notion of the self-determined subject. Not only does this notion of interrelated entanglement extend to humans, but to the universe in its entirety.

In addition to destabilizing the sovereign subject’s rule over other humans, interrelationality also questions the legitimacy of human sovereignty over the rest of creation. Grosz elaborates that interrelationality or “flesh” as she terms it “supersedes the ontological distinction between the animate and the inanimate, between the animal and the human, scientist and object of investigation.”³⁵ Reflecting on this, theologian Naaman Wood concludes, “If all things possess ‘flesh,’ then there is no clear hierarchical relationship between the human, the tree, the dinosaur, the stars, etc. Rather, all things exist in a deep network of interrelationality, which affirms both each being’s integrity and each being’s porous boundaries.”³⁶ Thus, interrelationality emphasizes the common “is-ness” between all things in a way that renders human sovereignty illegitimate. Indigeneous botanist Robin Wall Kimmerer articulates a similar notion of interrelationality in her analysis of how language shapes our relational frameworks.

³⁴ Elizabeth Grosz, “Merleau-Ponty and Irigaray in the Flesh,” *Thesis Eleven* 36 (1993): 54.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 54.

³⁶ Wood, Naaman. “Disputing Henri de Lubac’s Nature and Grace and Job’s Ending: *The Tree of Life* as Theological Discourse.” In *A Critical Companion to Terrence Malick*. Edited by Joshua Sikoria. New York: Lexington Books. *Forthcoming 2020*:

Wall Kimmerer describes how language participates in creating the terms of relationality for humans. In a recent interview, Wall Kimmerer critiqued the English linguistic system that uses “it” as the pronoun for both inanimate objects (e.g., tables, walls, etc.) and non-animal life (e.g., trees, mushrooms, etc.). She expounds,

In the English language, if we want to speak of that sugar maple or that salamander, the only grammar that we have to do so is to call those beings an “it.” And if I called my grandmother or the person sitting across the room from me an “it,” that would be so rude, right? And we wouldn’t tolerate that for members of our own species, but we not only tolerate it, but it’s the only way we have in the English language to speak of other beings, is as “it.” In Potawatomi, the cases that we have are animate and inanimate, and it is impossible in our language to speak of other living beings as “it”s.³⁷

Thus, language both reflects and creates relationality. This understanding of language highlights how human sovereignty is a narrative that has been carefully crafted and curated. Interrelationality challenges these narratives and elbows out space for imagining alternative frameworks for understanding how humans can connect to each other and the world around them. Following a similar line of thought, Wood tracks another indigeneous scholar, Leroy Little Bear who argues that “existence consists of energy. All things are animate, imbued with spirit, and in constant motion. In this realm of energy and spirit, interrelationships between all entities are of paramount importance, and space is more important than time.”³⁸ If all things share movement, share ontology in some capacity, then the notion of a self-determined sovereign subject becomes nonsensical. In addition to challenging sovereignty, interrelationality also dismantles the structures that rationalize approximation to an ideal.

³⁷ Robin Wall Kimmerer, “The Intelligence in All Kinds of Life,” *On Being with Krista Tippett* podcast (Feb. 25, 2016).

³⁸ Leroy Little Bear, “Jagged Worldview Colliding,” in *Reclaiming Indigenous Voice and Vision*, edited by Marie Battiste (Vancouver, BC: University of British Columbia Press), 78.

Interrelationality reinterprets self-improvement into the invitation for growth. If humans exist as more of a networked reality, then the notion of an ideal human that others should approximate becomes nonsensical. There is no such thing as a human who is more or less human than another. This does not mean there is no space for change, growth or improvement. Rather, it means that the impetus for change or self-improvement emerges from a space of freedom and relationship. Within interrelationality, difference does not register as lack and therefore cannot be weaponized to demand change or reinforce inferiority. Conversely, under Man's purview approximation to the ideal indexes humanness and where one fits within hierarchical structures of oppression. As patriarchal soteriology merged the figure of Man (the ideal) with Christ, approximation to the ideal began signaling salvation and holiness. With the incorporation of interrelationality, however humanness cannot be understood as quantifiable or existing on a spectrum from less to more human.³⁹ This means that change, improvement, and growth can be directionally oriented, but the stakes of that change do not implicate one's humanity or salvation. For example, one could work to become more x (e.g., like Jesus, honest, holy, etc.), but their success at this has no connection to their humanity or salvation. Furthermore, their success at this approximation no longer affiliates them with Man and its corresponding structures.

This means that when Christians pursue holiness or attempt to imitate Christ they are not doing so out of lack or requirement, but out of relational care. The orientation and telos of these actions are radically different. Just as human-human relationships require care, compromise and adjustment, so too the God-human relationship invites this same response.

³⁹ This notion is not limited to "humanness" but perhaps more accurately could be called "is-ness". That is, interrelationality also frames humans as connected to and constituted by other living things.

The elimination of the logic of approximation illuminates how change and growth most often happen relationally as a kind of call and response, a growing and building together. Interrelationality creates openings for humans to consider change with curiosity, imagination, and the potential for improvisation. Thus, interrelationality also reframes the way humans relate and illuminates new ways of imagining relationality.

As it does not operate within the confines of patriarchal structures, interrelationality acknowledges and promotes forms of relationality beyond patriarchy's purview. Similar to how Wehiliye's notion of *habeas viscus* indexes life where Man has attempted to eradicate it (cf Guantanamo base, concentration camps, etc.), interrelationality challenges the boundaries of who can relate to each other and how. Recent historical examples of this include the cultural imagination around interracial and same-sex relationships, blended and chosen families, and non-anthropocentric ways of engaging the earth. Feminist theorist Donna Haraway articulates a similar idea when she describes "making kin" as a kind of becoming-with other humans and more importantly non-humans in a way that decenters relationship from anthropocentrism. As an orientation, interrelationality establishes a norm for questioning the given limits for how we imagine relating and challenges the notion that they must be recognized by the system in order to be legitimate.

Interrelationality also emphasizes commonality over against division. Where Man depends on a system composed of absolute differences, interrelationality understands differences as perforated rather than absolute. In so doing, interrelationality maintains the possibility of connection to others even in the midst of conflict or difference. To be clear, this does not imply forced community or the inability to name something as categorically different. For Christians, this distinction is especially important for identifying evil and describing the direction of morality. At these junctures, interrelationality's porous boundaries

Speak more to the potential for change and relationship between extremely different parties.

In this vein, Anzaldúa describes what she calls “connectionist thinking,”

When perpetual conflict erodes a sense of connectedness and wholeness *la neplantlera* [an in/between and threshold being who engages in multiple worlds simultaneously] calls on the “connectionist” faculty to show the deep common ground and the interwoven kinship among all things and people. This faculty, one of less-structured thoughts, less rigid categorizations, and thinner boundaries, allows us to picture--via reverie, dreaming, and artistic creativity--similarities instead of solid divisions.⁴⁰

By keeping the language for individuality and difference while at the same time emphasizing connectedness, interrelationality provides a fruitful foundation for new modes of relationality. This also proves helpful for conceiving of non-patriarchal soteriology.

Soteriology that is rooted in interrelationality begets a deeper sense of reciprocity within human-human relationships and between humans and the earth. This harkens back to Bonhoeffer’s relational understanding of creation and the fracturing of this that occurred with the Fall. Interrelationality perforates notions of absolute individuality (the sovereign self) and instead implies that some sense of self extends to the others and world around one. This is a theo-ontological claim. One’s own self is implied in how one interacts with one’s environment (humans, animals, plants, etc.). Again, Bonhoeffer’s notion of being constituted by the other and receiving a limit in the existence of the other begins to get at this reality. This means that salvation is also a cosmic reality that affects the complicated network of relationships between all of creation. That is, it expands the notion of salvation from an individual experience to a global event expanding through an individual’s human and environmental communities. This highlights the ethical weight of human actions as

⁴⁰ Gloria Anzaldúa, “now let us shift...the path of conocimiento...inner work, public acts,” in *This Bridge We Call Home: Radical Visions for Transformation*, ed. Gloria E. Anzaldúa and AnaLouise Keating (New York: Routledge, 2002), 568.

incredibly networked creatures, but it also emphasizes the immense potential for relational support. It is important to note that while this by no means protects against those who continue to perpetuate violence, it does mean that humans do not experience violence alone (i.e., though their individual experience of it may be unique, they are not isolated).

As it challenges notions of the sovereign self, interrelational soteriology challenges the oppressive hierarchies within Man and instead invites humans to explore the wide range of relational possibilities already in existence around them. Beyond this, soteriology rooted in interrelationality subverts the underlying logic of approximation and replaces it with invitations for rest, improvisation, movement, intimacy and/or independence.

Conclusion:

These three theological responses provide a starting point for imagining soteriology outside the constraints of patriarchy. Anti-patriarchal christology, fugitive theology and interrelationality supply important tools for resisting the colonizing mechanisms and logical foundations within systemic oppression. Taken together, these theological responses teach us that growth and improvement can only ever be understood as emerging from desire and freedom rather than requirement. This means that soteriology freed from patriarchy declares the salvific work already done. For women and other groups caught within systemic oppression, this soteriology is distinctly political in that it contradicts messages that tell them they are inherently inferior and need to improve.

Together with anti-patriarchal christology and fugitive theology, interrelational soteriology provides possible ways forward for imagining soteriologies that do not employ hierarchical systems that provide the theological architecture for self-improvement. When brought together, these form a vision of a restored creation that does not justify violence, has no place for sovereignty, rejects ontological hierarchies of being and asserts the

theological grounds for care for *all* created things. This means that salvation looks like rest, curiosity, exploration of new relationships and possibilities. It means that nothing else needs to be done. There is no further becoming that needs to happen for the human; it is finished. In this sense, the theological message of liberation within this soteriology is truly anti-patriarchal: you are already enough.

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Biography

Julie Morris was born in Seattle, Washington in 1984. She attended Simpson University in Redding, California where she received a Bachelor of Arts in Bible and Theology with an emphasis on the Old Testament. She went on to receive her Masters of Theological Studies from Duke Divinity School in Durham, North Carolina and stayed there to complete her Doctorate of Theological Studies. She has published, “Dressing the Savior: Considering a New Notion of Gender Theory Through the Feminized Body of Christ” in the *Journal of Religion and Culture*. She has also published several book reviews including one on Barbara Reid’s *Wisdom’s Feast: An Invitation to Feminist Interpretation of the Scriptures*, Wesley Hill’s *Spiritual Friendship*, Dale Kuehne’s *Sex and the iWorld*, and Beth Felker Jones’ *Faithful*. Her essay, “Permeable Savior: A Story of Two Leaky Bodies,” (published through *Christian Century*) recently won the Award of Merit through the Associated Church Press. She is a current member of the American Academy of Religion.