

Intimate Life Together:  
A Decolonial Theology

by  
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Graduate Program in Religion  
Duke University

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Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for the degree of Doctor  
of Philosophy in the Graduate Program in  
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2017

ABSTRACT

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## Abstract

Disease metaphors dominate Christian theological discourses that equate sex with sin. When Christianity is imagined to “cure” sexuality, religious communities push out those members who are perceived to threaten the health of the social body. Progressive policy might give the impression that sexual liberation is best realized when disentangled from religion. Post-apartheid, democratic South Africa serves as a test case because it boasts having implemented some of the most progressive policies on sexuality. However, its groundbreaking laws have not curbed the country’s high rate of hate crimes, which largely target LGBTIQ citizens. In order to account for this dissonance, I elucidate the shortcomings of both progressive policy *and* theology before offering a constructive alternative. This project requires a transnational, interdisciplinary methodology that integrates Christian theology, critical theory, biblical theology, and fieldwork. The first three chapters critique theological and political attempts to “cure” sexuality in exchange for salvation and citizenship. These include the rhetoric of “cure” in hate crimes in present day South Africa, the coerced aversion therapy and sex reassignment surgeries performed to “cure” conscripts during apartheid, and the legalization of same-sex marriage during the transition to democracy. In conclusion, I propose that a decolonial theology based on the notion of Christ as contagion displays the meaning and purpose of baptism for costly discipleship and intimate life together.

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## 1. Introduction: Christianity as “Cure”

I was bound down by this disease of the flesh. Its deadly pleasures were a chain that I dragged along with me, yet I was afraid to be freed from it.

- Saint Augustine, *Confessions*

[Sex is] so hideous and frightful a pleasure that physicians compare it with epilepsy or falling sickness. Thus an actual disease is linked with the very activity of procreation. We are in the state of sin and death; therefore we also undergo this punishment, that we cannot make use of women without the horrible passion of lust, and, so to speak, without epilepsy.

- Martin Luther, *Lectures on Genesis*<sup>1</sup>

I tell them in my church time and time again that this ministry is like a hospital where we accept all the people that are sick, all the sinners must be allowed. Because it is the work of the church to pull people, it is our commission to pull them, out of sin. If you see gay people as sinners they can come, or lesbians, they can come, anybody can come.

- Moshengu Muzi Tshabala<sup>2</sup>

Civil governments are there to protect their citizens. Their role is to provide justice, security and safety, which includes the protection of the family. The old adage that ‘sin kills’ is never as true as when applied to homosexuality. Homosexuality carries with it a myriad of social and health problems that governments are obligated to protect citizens from.

- Christine McCafferty and Peter Hammond<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Martin Luther, “Lectures on Genesis Chapters 1-5,” in *Luther’s Works*, American Edition, Jaroslav Pelikan et al. ed., (Saint Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1958) 119. Peter Brown explains that during early Christianity in the West, “[Sex] bore a dread resemblance to the falling sickness: orgasm was a ‘minor epilepsy.’” *The Body and Society: Men, Women, & Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 18.

<sup>2</sup> Gay and Lesbian Memory in Action (GALA) interviewing Moshengu Muzi Tshabala (Reverend of amaZion church in Gauteng South Africa), May 6, 2015. In this interview Rev. Tshabala likens his inclusion of gay and lesbian Christians to having sangomas, polygamists, and drunks in the church. He maintains non-heterosexuality as a sin, but not a basis for exclusion. Rather, the church should work to “heal” such people who he understands to be sinners.

<sup>3</sup> Christine McCafferty and Peter Hammond, *The Pink Agenda: Sexual Revolution in South Africa and the Ruin of the Family*, (Cape Town: Christian Liberty Books, 2001), 25.

## **1.1 Introduction**

Religion offers a possibility that progressive policy alone cannot: decolonial intimacy. Perpetrators of hate-crimes, gender-based violence, rape, assault, and homicide are not external to our communities. They are not outsiders or “bad apples” to be purged and denied relationship. The inescapable issue at hand is that those who most thoroughly betray our trust and violate our bodies are family members, neighbors, and church people. At times, they’re our pastors and priests, even ourselves. People with limited resources do not have the luxury of moving away from crime or trusting in law enforcement for protection. Theologies of sexuality that presume autonomous individuals act as conscientious stewards of their bodies and sexuality, though common, sideline the majority of people, because only privileged subjects in positions of power understand themselves that way and have the resources to attempt securing this fiction.<sup>4</sup> Most people do not feel free to deny sex to someone with significant power over them; only in rare instances are violations and crimes met with legal recourse and justice; relocating requires significant financial means; ultimately, and most important, none of these options redresses the causes at play. With this in mind I underscore the experiences of impoverished, LGBTIQ South Africans of color, who do not seek or desire a separate gay church. Despite being raped by a family member, beaten by a neighbor, and violated by clergy, they must make a way from within community – precisely where there seems to be no way.

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<sup>4</sup> Glenn Adams frames the decolonial turn this way, “...it is to draw upon experience in marginalized spaces as a privileged epistemological base from which to rethink hegemonic forms of knowledge in mainstream research. The view from this epistemological base not only locates prescriptive forms of growth-oriented relationality within particular cultural ecologies but also situates these cultural ecologies in broader historical context.” “Decolonizing methods: African studies and qualitative research,” *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships* 31.4 (2014): 467-474.

My intervention is two-pronged; I begin with the shortcomings of progressive policy *and* theology before positing a constructive alternative. What I am suggesting is that though activists rightly advocate for these systemic injustices to be redressed, their efforts are enhanced when partnered with religious people. The project of decolonizing intimate life together requires a transnational, interdisciplinary method. Typically segregated, Christian theology, critical theory, and fieldwork are integrated in the chapters that follow.<sup>5</sup> To be certain it is not an assimilating process; the three needle one another on shortcomings, which underscore conflicting commitments. It is precisely within these instances of friction, as will become evident, that something new is forged.

Note that I use LGBTIQ throughout this project in an attempt to include a broad array of people. The very incapacity of this acronym to account for people's identities is part of my argument that identity politics frequently fail us.<sup>6</sup> In academic settings sex, gender, and sexuality are distinct yet related terms and identities. Throughout this project it will become apparent that public discourse in South Africa exhibits a far more integrated notion of the relationship among these categories. Instead of dismissing these as slippages in need of correction, they gesture to the possibility of decolonial life together in which persons are not reduced to identity politics.

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<sup>5</sup> IRB approved in-depth interviews were conducted in 2015 and 2016 in Johannesburg and Cape Town. This approach is distinguished from an ethnographic method of observation and narration. Here the interviewee's words are an embodied epistemology, which is foregrounded as revelation. As Andrea Smith puts it, there is a distinction between seeing Native peoples as "objects to be discovered" and "producers of theory" "Queer Theory and Native Studies: The Heteronormativity of Settler Colonialism," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 16:1-2 (2010): 43.

<sup>6</sup> Qwo-Li Driskill describes a similar dilemma: "I'm not necessarily 'Queer' in Cherokee contexts, because differences are not seen in the same light as they are in Euroamerican contexts. I'm not necessarily 'Transgender' in Cherokee contexts, because I'm simply the gender I am. I'm not necessarily 'Gay,' because that work rests on the concept of men-loving-men, and ignores the complexity of my gender identity. It is only within the rigid gender regimes of white America that I become Trans or Queer." "Stolen from Our Bodies: First Nationals Two-Spirits/Queers and the Journey to a Sovereign Erotic," *Studies in American Indian Literatures*, 16.2 (2004): 52.

Appeals to human rights rhetoric remain unsuccessful because they conflict with Christian commitments to self-sacrifice. I do not utilize the typical approaches that progressive Christians deploy to advocate for LGBTIQ people – which include asserting that all people are made in the *imago dei* (“image of God”) or that the Story of Sodom and Gomorrah is actually about hospitality. While I do recognize the value these promise, what I posit here is a different logic. The former maintains an ontological notion of subjectivity – that all people are made in the image of God – and thus that the work of Christ is to restore this image. The latter, along with attempts to queer the biblical text, require further analysis and constructive contributions. For example, appeals to gender as a continuum, “texts of terror” being metaphorical, aligning God with the disinherited, and eroticizing God’s relationship to humanity are too often posited as conclusive declarations. Even if these assertions are true, they are not helpful when left dangling. What do they affect and why is that significant? These are some challenges I pose to scholars with politics similar to myself. In many ways, my project is driven by my dissatisfaction with what is available in Christian theology and hermeneutics on matters of sexuality. Indubitably I am indebted to these scholars for their insights, and do not set out to make light of them. Rather, I challenge my comrades to push our work further, to refine it, for the sake of us all. Linn Tonstad is one such scholar who adroitly interrogates theologies linking sexual and gender diversity to the doctrine of the Trinity.<sup>7</sup> Her method and form, however, preserve some of the very

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<sup>7</sup> Tonstad identifies this shortcoming as follows: “Allowing God the Father, who is properly father in the trinity and adoptively father in relation to all other human beings, to transcend his patriarchal limitations by including even maternity within his all-encompassing grasp neither destabilizes divine patriarchy nor serves as an overcoming of sexism. After all, divine males get to be the father, son, and mother, thus demonstrating that symbolic divine masculinity includes even maternity in its transcendent perfection. Non-divine females get to be—at best—included in the indeterminate and androgynous spirit and as symbolic adjuncts to the Father’s ecstatic maternal self-realization.” Linn Marie Tonstad, *God and Difference: The Trinity, Sexuality, and the Transformation of Finitude* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 199.

structures she sets out to undermine. To be clear, mine is not a critique of her commitment to doctrine so much as the modes through which she makes herself legible and thus authoritative.

Despite being the means by which atrocities such as apartheid were enacted, religion maintains the capacity to influence and empower subjects. Engaging religion and religious people need not take a manipulative or utilitarian form. There are unique resources within the very identity and commitments that South African society holds most dear that could be applied to LGBTIQ advocacy. Interfaith communities in South Africa that advocate for LGBTIQ people by drawing perpetrators deeper into intimate relationships, rather than segregating them, foster compassion and redirect behavior. They offer an alternative to colonial and post-colonial states in which Christian theology was legislated and derided respectively.<sup>8</sup> This decolonial approach accounts for the religious commitments and communities that perpetrators, victims, and survivors share in order to actualize progressive policies.

My turn to Christian theology challenges respectability politics. I argue that “Christ as contagion,” mediating our relationships, counters church and state discourses that pathologize sexuality. Jesus Christ – the second person of the Trinity who literally embodies the full revelation of God and humanity, and fulfills the law and Gospel in the scriptures – offers us a new temporality and spatiality conducive to decolonial intimacy. Through baptism, Christ reveals the good news that we have been adopted as his co-heirs. This, I maintain, frees humanity from being essentialized or assimilated. The materiality of

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<sup>8</sup> My decolonial theology concurs with Andrea Smith’s assertion that Native peoples in the U.S. are Christian: “My Native peoples today *are* Christian, and yet they become positioned as necessarily inauthentic or ‘assimilated’ even if they are also concurrently involved in struggles for sovereignty and liberation.” “Queer Theory and Native Studies,” 56.

revelation through incarnate bodies necessitates particularity and difference. It is to proclaim an eternal truth without universalizing humanity. Christ comes between us as a contagion rather than partition. We do not find refuge from sinners or the sickly in him. With him we can confront the horror of our sins and embrace the joy that is possible. He brings us together and makes a way out of our cycles of harm. It is imperative to reexamine intimacy from a theological perspective in order to better serve denominational and ecumenical ties because these relations bear witness to the world. Debates on sexuality therefore open up conversations concerning the Gospel itself.

### ***1.2 Pathologizing the Personal & Political***

The project of decolonizing intimate life together requires a transnational, interdisciplinary method. Each chapter will explore the collusion of theology and politics in regulating sexuality. Demonstrating how the two fuel one another and the stakes for people on the ground entails using critical theory to assess the role of religion in perpetuating harm. Listening to the voices of South Africans particularizes these concepts, and also reveals innovative efforts already in place. In-depth interviews contribute to the task of theology an embodied epistemology. To these methods I also integrate biblical texts and theological hermeneutics. To be clear, this is not a biblical studies project. Neither is it an anthropological or sociological endeavor. It is a distinctly theological intervention that heartily confesses religion's culpability in authorizing harm. In addition, I turn to Christ who makes us a new creation and frees us for intimate life together.

Before delving into the theorists, theology, or scriptures, I want to highlight one particular South African whose story unfolds at the intersection of church, state, and sexuality. Ecclesia de Lange grew up in a charismatic church – Apostolic Faith Mission – in



South Africa where she learned that being a lesbian is sinful. Despite her attraction to women, Ecclesia presented herself as heterosexual because she longed to remain in Christian community. After stepping away from her church to explore her sexuality for a time, Ecclesia returned to God's calling.<sup>9</sup> Her devotion prompted Ecclesia to pray that God would heal her:

I started taking part in the support group there for gays and lesbians – recovering gays and lesbians I think it was called. And there I learned that there were some people, somehow, that they were *healed*.

So obviously, I had to be healed of this kind of demon, or I guess like a problem. I mean a big problem. They taught that you *could* be healed.

Whether one calls it the deepest form of denial, I mean for me, it was I had a sense that God was calling me to ministry. I knew that my sexual orientation was a problem to God, according to the church's teaching, and I had to conform.

So I did everything that I could do in order to conform. And this got me to Exodus International because the support group was connected to Exodus International. In fact the leaders [of] that group was called TRAILBlazers...

I think if you simply went to one of those support groups and someone wants to share how they were now healed or how they are dealing with their sexual orientation in becoming heterosexual, someone would say:

“Someone prayed for me and now I'm healed.”

So, it's kind of healing prayer thing as if you had flu and now you don't have flu. Or more like you had cancer and now you don't have cancer because I laid my hands on you.

I went through, you know, you need counseling, you need in depth of study of the Bible. They've got their own way; it's the same way as we've got contextual Bible study saying read it in context. They are reading it so literally.<sup>10</sup>

During this time Ecclesia begged God for the gift of celibacy and abstained from sex for nearly a decade. In fact, it became part of her testimony that God had healed her. However, when she spoke with her pastor about God calling her to plant a church he explained that

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<sup>9</sup> Ecclesia de Lange clarifies: “It's actually strange when I say returned to the church because God has always been with me.... Because even before returning to the church, responding to what I heard as spirit as God's calling me to ministry, I had a relationship with God.” Interviewed by Michelle Wolff, Inclusive and Affirming Ministries Cape Town, July 23, 2015.

<sup>10</sup> Ecclesia de Lange, interviewed by Michelle Wolff, July 23, 2015.

she first needed to marry a man. She understood; marriage and children would present proof of her healing. Although Ecclesia was able to abstain from sex, her same-sex desire persisted. She invokes an apartheid rhetoric in describing this theology of healing:

The healing would be,  
because it's perceived that if you have a thought about  
"Oh, this beautiful woman I"  
– not that you want to sleep with every beautiful woman –  
but that is the sense that you mustn't look at her,  
and if you look it's the devil.  
It's the devil.  
There's a clear sense of the evil. You know, there is no grayness.  
It's black and white. That's it.  
And obviously you are black, you must become white.  
There's no in between spaces.  
So the cross, for instance, would be seen as a healing thing.  
You find healing in the cross.  
So if you have temptations, you must kneel at the cross and maybe  
stay there until your desire for woman or a man goes away, and then  
get back up.  
Then feeling or the sense would be if you exercise it over and over  
you will be healed because you won't have those temptations any  
more.  
It's seen as temptation.<sup>11</sup>

Black and white are distinct categories here, and Christians are to aspire to "become white," which is collapsed with heterosexuality. Same-sex desire, and even admiration, is understood to be the devil's temptation. It is a cross that LGB people must bear, and their holiness is constituted by enduring that suffering.

Prayer did not conform Ecclesia to her church's ideal woman, despite her having prioritized Christian ministry over sexual gratification. Ecclesia felt frustrated that a man of God would tell her that she could not fulfill God's calling outside of a heterosexual marriage and reproduction. She wondered why would God call her to something that she could not undertake. This experience prompted Ecclesia to join the Methodist church because in that

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<sup>11</sup> Ecclesia de Lange, interviewed by Michelle Wolff, July 23, 2015.

denomination ordination is accessible to women. Serving God and the church in this capacity, Ecclesia soon began to question the message of incompatibility between her faith and sexuality. She describes this as healing of a very different sort:

I was like: it's okay to be me and I can relax in that.

*That* was a healing moment - profoundly healing moment.

Of just, ja, of being okay with myself...

I think in my healing that I found, in being myself, is that the reconnection with my body and my spirit – a holistic approach.

And then of course, even with the scriptures, I'm not saying that you bend the scriptures so it fits into what I believe, but genuinely looking at it saying that the scriptures because they are important, so what the hell is going on here? Thinking and being critical.

With Exodus [International], you couldn't be critical about anything; you couldn't question. And so healing came by questioning as well...

It just came to the place where, the kind of living a double life, it felt like I was living a double life, you know? Not that you want to announce that you're lesbian, and that you have a relationship, or that you're in a relationship.

But it felt like I was hiding something continuously. And that went against my ethical value system, in fact, of being truthful and being open. And not feeling afraid of, what if someone finds out.

And that caused a lot of, obviously it caused a lot of pain, anxiety, depression, um, I suppose even disconnectedness because you have to disconnect at times in order to function.

And it just got to a stage where I said I either have to come out, or continue this way, or leave. And I decided to make the announcement that I was going to get married...

But before [Lendiwe came out], I've not heard of one, in the time period I've been a part of the Methodist church, all others fly under the radar.

So that tells you the enormity of the fear, stigmatization, the thing of losing my income, losing my calling, well not losing your call, but losing your job because at the end of the day it comes down to that.

Identity, because I mean that's one of the things that go with it. You need to redefine your identity. When they kicked me out I had to think: what the hell? You know? Who am I now?

I was known as the minister, but who am I now?

My faith, my experience of God, has been deeply enriched. I cannot deny that. I've really become a richer person because of this trials and tribulations. Really. It's been very painful with lots of losses. Devastating at

times. But somehow it has made me stronger and it has rooted me deeper in the sense that I'm not alone. And there's a greater, there's a bigger picture.<sup>12</sup>

In this second healing Ecclesia describes coming to terms with her whole self, body and soul, in relation with others. Remaining in the church conditionally – having to conceal her sexuality – was not authentic community. Ecclesia felt the alienating effects of dishonestly fueled by fear of Christian rejection. The dissonance between deceiving her congregation and serving them and God, proved unbearable. Honesty, though more difficult, enabled her to have integrity and intimacy. The greatest sacrifice was the loss of her position as a minister in the Methodist Church of Southern Africa. Dismissed immediately after announcing her plans to marry a same sex partner on December 6, 2009, Ecclesia unflaggingly pursued a life of ministry. In part, this commitment entailed taking her bishop to constitutional court for discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation.<sup>13</sup> South Africa's 1994 constitution was the first in the world to protect against discrimination on the basis of sexuality. The Methodist Church of Southern Africa, however, purposely uses ambiguous language regarding sexuality as a means of compromise and unity within the denomination. Ecclesia is pressing the church to take an unequivocal position for or against the inclusion of LGBTIQ Christians.

Ecclesia's motivation for looking to the courts for justice – due to grievances with the church – has less to do with attaining a specific outcome than it does engaging an ongoing process of advocacy. When asked what winning the case would mean to her, Ecclesia explained:

For me it will be justice will be served.

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<sup>12</sup> Ecclesia de Lange, interviewed by Michelle Wolff, July 23, 2015.

<sup>13</sup> This is the highest court in South Africa.

It's a sense of giving us dignity, not that I need them to tell me I've got dignity. I know I've got dignity; I'm worthy.

But for the bigger community, the community at large, I suppose I hope that, that doesn't mean that the journey is over because there is so much more education and empowerment that needs to happen, healing that needs to happen.

It's just another stepping-stone towards transformation.<sup>14</sup>

Even though South Africa has one of the most progressive policies concerning rights and protections for LGBTIQ citizens, Ecclesia's story intimates the ongoing negotiations within LGBTIQ social life. The rub of religious rights against LGBTIQ rights brings to the fore the ongoing tension of competing rights infringing upon one another. Which is why the implications for Ecclesia winning her case reach far beyond personal affirmation; it would establish precedent for state jurisdiction over church polity. For Ecclesia, however, winning is not an end. She feels that her case is part of a larger process of dignifying Christians within the church community – a community requiring ongoing growth and change.

Because marriage sits at the intersection of church and state jurisdiction, Ecclesia's narrative presents the critical themes of this project and the complexity of LGBTIQ theology and citizenship. Ecclesia's dual commitment to God and activism as a white middle-class lesbian in South Africa is particular, and invites exploration into theological anthropologies of race, class, and sexual identity. Instead of reasserting the human subject to be an autonomous individual acting in the distinct spheres of public and private life, where sexuality neatly is contained in the latter, I examine concrete examples of South Africans whose gender and sexuality determine their civil and ecclesial standing for two reasons: first, to unveil Christian theology's culpability in facilitating a racist, sexist, and homophobic régime during apartheid – i.e. confessing our sins. And second, to revisit doctrine &

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<sup>14</sup> Ecclesia de Lange, interviewed by Michelle Wolff, July 23, 2015.

scripture, which offer an effective alternative to the assimilationist and respectability demands within identity politics. In so doing, this project tasks flat iterations of left and right politics and religion. Both options have historically failed complex subjects systematically disenfranchised by the state and condemned by the church.

### ***1.3 Theology & Theory***

Disease metaphors predominate Christian theological discourses that equate sex with sin.<sup>15</sup> Within this framework, sexual desire and pleasure constantly threaten to contaminate and annihilate the Christian. The pursuit of sexual purity and cure preoccupies the Christian imaginary. Dichotomizing sickness and health along the axis of death and life, sin and salvation, incarnates apartheid technologies as a means of sanctification. That is, holiness entails adjudicating between clean and unclean bodies, segregating them geographically and socially, and awarding or withholding resources accordingly.<sup>16</sup>

Driven to preserve the ego as subject entails the cure, if not extermination, of unhealthy bodies – both literal and social. This was played out during apartheid theocracy, and Ecclesia demonstrates the ongoing theo-politics of “curing” homosexuality even in democratic South Africa today. Within this framework, sexuality functions as the site of a soteriological performance designating some bodies as sick and others as healers.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Manuel Villalobos recalls, “Through [the priest’s] injurious speech, immediately I became not just *the other*, but also the sinner, the evil one, the sick one, the pervert, the immoral one, the inverted one, and the transgressor,” which led him to believe that, “a homosexual was a kind of aggressive animal capable of inflicting contagion on humans.” “Bodies *Del Otro Lado* Finding Life and Hope in the Borderland: Gloria Anzaldúa, the Ethiopian Eunuch of Acts 8:26-40, *y Yo*” in *Bible Trouble: Queer Readings at the Boundaries of Biblical Scholarship*, ed. Teresa J. Hornsby and Ken Stone (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2011), 209, 212.

<sup>16</sup> For a historical account of racial segregation in South Africa, ostensibly due to the arrival of plague though not devoid of economic factors, and disease as both biological phenomenon and social metaphor, see Maynard Swanson’s “The Sanitation Syndrome: Bubonic Plague and Urban Native Policy in the Cape Colony, 1900-1909,” *The Journal of African History* 18.3 (1977): 387-410.

<sup>17</sup> Similarly, E. L. Konegay Jr. writes, “The inability of blackness to suppress and control the contagion of sexuality becomes a sign of rejection of the ‘economy of salvation’ afforded within Christianity and the

Recapitulating the fall in this way, the subject grasps at immortality via reducing the body to a site of sovereign control in the name of emulating Christ. Striving after immortality entails condemning others to death, a baptism by downing if you will, and others to narrow terms of bare life,<sup>18</sup> including same-sex marriages that reproduce the heteronormative holiness as synonymous with the hierarchical household.

Here “cure” discourse refers to both individual and social bodies purging in the name of sexual purity and holiness. That is, when LGBTIQ sexuality and persons are pathologized as threats to the purity of bodies – individual, church, and state – they are excised and terminated. Stoler explains how racism shaped contagion metaphors for sexuality in South Africa:

Discourses about sexual contagions, moral contamination and reproductive sterility were not applicable to any and all whites, nor were they free floating, generalized pronouncements that treated all bodies as equally susceptible and the same. These discourses circulated in a racially charged magnetic field in which debates about sexual contamination, sexual abstinence or spermatic depletion produced moral clusters of judgment and distinction that defined the boundaries of middle-class virtue, lower-class immorality and the deprivations of those of colonial birth or of mixed race.<sup>19</sup>

The appearance of HIV and AIDS exacerbates the metaphor of sexuality as disease by reifying these connotations in literal bodies, though treating them as already socially dead. Together with people of color, those impoverished and foreign, the construction of AIDS casts some “to be ill before they are ill; which produces a seemingly innumerable array of symptom-illnesses; for which there are only palliatives; and which brings to many a social

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Calvinistic understanding of divine election brought forward in puritanism.” *A Queering of Black Theology: James Baldwin’s Blues Project and Gospel Prose* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 87.

<sup>18</sup> Some scholars have reframed Giorgio Agamben’s notion of “bare life” in *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), one being Alexander Weheliyi in *Habeas Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black Feminist Theories of the Human* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014).

<sup>19</sup> Ann Laura Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire: Foucault’s History of Sexuality and the Colonial Order of Things* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995), 176-177.

death that precedes the physical one...<sup>20</sup> Thus even an immune deficiency, not illness proper, so thoroughly stigmatizes its carriers that they are rendered dead to society as a precaution. Contracting HIV/AIDS then constitutes one as simultaneously deceased and threatening to the lives of others.<sup>21</sup> This imagined relation between HIV/AIDS, black bodies, Africa, and homosexuality authorizes shunning and even the purging of those infected with HIV and AIDS from the social body. That is, mere vulnerability to sickness is imagined to justify pariah status and even murder.<sup>22</sup> Compounding at every turn, the discursive genealogy of sin, sex, illness, “uncivilized,” blackness and death materialize most evidently in the rendering of people with HIV and AIDS as expendable.<sup>23</sup>

American Literary Theorist Leo Bersani distinguishes the potential for homosexuality initiating the splitting of a subject, as psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan articulates it, from unprotected sex as literally suicidal activity. He laments also the actual eradication of passively allowing those infected with HIV and AIDS to die:

But if the rectum is the grave in which the masculine ideal (an ideal shared—differently—by men *and* women) of proud subjectivity is buried, then it should be celebrated for its very potential for death. Tragically, AIDS has literalized that potential as the certainty of biological death, and has therefore reinforced the heterosexual association of anal sex with a self-annihilation originally and primarily identified with the fantasmatic mystery of an insatiable, unstoppable female

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<sup>20</sup> Susan Sontag, *Illness as Metaphor and AIDS and Its Metaphors* (Picador: New York, 1978), 112.

<sup>21</sup> Peter Delius and Clive Glaser explain that, “the description of AIDS as an incurable disease is ‘tantamount to saying that the person is already dead and thus to raise questions about the dangers of pollution that person may present to others with whom they come into contact.’ “Sex, disease and stigma in South Africa: historical perspectives,” *African Journal of AIDS Research* 4.1 (2005): 33.

<sup>22</sup> Delius and Glaser, “Sex, disease and stigma in South Africa: historical perspectives,” 29.

<sup>23</sup> Like syphilis, moralizing discourse attributes the origins of HIV/AIDS to individual, sexual depravity. Didier Fassin writes, “This history of epidemics is thus an integral part of the history of racial segregation in South Africa.” He argues, “The risk of contagion has often been the most effective argument to justify the implementation of legal and physical measures initiating or reinforcing the separation of groups that would have been more difficult politically to justify by strictly biological criteria.” *When Bodies Remember: Experiences and Politics of AIDS in South Africa*, trans. Amy Jacobs and Gabrielle Varro (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 132.



sexuality. It may, finally, be in the gay man's rectum that he demolishes his own perhaps otherwise uncontrollable identification with a murderous judgment against him.<sup>24</sup>

Attuned to the problematic purging of those infected with HIV and AIDS, whether self-inflicted or imposed, Bersani articulates the sublime possibility of sexuality burying the masculine ideal – an ideal to which we might add whiteness and prosperity. The stakes of allowing people with HIV and AIDS to perish is to eclipse one of sexuality's greatest capacities; pronouncing those who break from cultural ideals as already dead is to disallow the severing subjectivity from racism, heteronormativity, misogyny, and classism.<sup>25</sup>

What is lost here is not only a challenge to modernity's Western problem of the self, but also the embodiment of Christian baptism. Death in baptism, like the splitting of the subject in Lacanian psychoanalysis, must not be confused with the finality of pronouncing someone dead. Instead, the two posit a kind of death that initiates a new mode of existence marked by a displaced self. Unlike the literal death caused by HIV or AIDS, baptism inaugurates something new. There is potential for new life after baptism utterly unlike the one before. It is a resurrection not of the ego or the self, but rather of one displaced in Christ and in service to both God and neighbor.

In a sense, this project is an extended meditation on baptism. Chapter one considers “curative” rape as an insidious baptism by drowning, which tries to purge black lesbians and trans men through violence and homicide. Fixating on killing in the name of life is to embrace the crucifixion without the transfiguration. Chapter two returns to this diptych, the

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<sup>24</sup> Leo Bersani. “Is the Rectum a Grave?” *AIDS: Cultural Analysis/Cultural Activism* 43 (Winter, 1987): 198, 220. Bersani also mourns the loss of play in hierarchical sex, 222.

<sup>25</sup> “Male homosexuality advertises the risk of the sexual itself as the risk of self-dismissal, of *losing sight* of the self, and in so doing it proposes and dangerously represents *jouissance* as a mode of asceticism.” Bersani, “Is the Rectum a Grave?” MIT Press: *October*, Vol. 43. *AIDS: Cultural Analysis/Cultural Activism* (Winter, 1987): 198, 222. See also Antonio Viegas, *Dead Subjects* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007).

crucifixion preceded by transfiguration, to suggest that hate crimes against LGBTIQ South Africans cannot be understood without first an eye to what they reveal – which is that in baptism we have been adopted as co-heirs with Christ. Without that revelation, the resurrection following death in baptism takes distorted forms such as aversion therapy and coerced sex reassignment therapy. Chapter three returns to the revelation of being adopted co-heirs with Christ found in baptism after exploring the meaning and purpose of marriage. Unlike baptism, in Protestant theology marriage is not a sacrament. Chapter four describes the effects of baptism for discipleship and community centered on Christ as contagion. Finally, chapter five examines examples of present day South Africans who embody costly discipleship and intimate life together as mediated by Christ as contagion. In sum, this is a baptismal, decolonial Christian theology of intimacy.

Sexuality and Christianity complicate the distinction between sickness and health, life and death, for they posit death as a function rather than destination. Instead of announcing the end, sickness and death open one to freedom and newness. Nuancing these categories addresses the concerns womanist theologian Delores Williams and literary theorist Abdul JanMohamed raise concerning the relationship between blackness and death. The former understands the crucifixion narrative to be a text of terror. Williams illuminates this by turning to Genesis 16 and arguing that Hagar typifies African American female experience as slave and surrogate. Williams provocatively suggests that black women find redemption in Jesus' life rather than the cross. She also explains how sacralizing surrogate suffering further enslaves black women. Similarly, through analyzing Richard Wright's oeuvre, JanMohamed

unveils the formation of African American men as death-bound.<sup>26</sup> Unlike Williams, however, JanMohamed counter-intuitively argues that death-bound-subjects might find liberation from the threat of death by utilizing it as political resistance.<sup>27</sup> By pulling literary theorists, womanist theologians, and biblical hermeneutics into conversation with Ecclesia's life experience, I elucidate the features and stakes of the problem at hand.

#### **1.4 Methods**

In this project I challenge the binary framing that religion poses the most significant obstacle to sexual intimacy, and that progressive policy is the most effective method of liberation. Instead, I examine the shortcomings and possibilities of *both* progressive theology and politics in advocating for LGBTIQ people. My scholarship ensues precisely because many other disciplines have contributed to alleviating the injustice and violence in South Africa, and Christian theology should be no exception. To interrogate disease-cure discourses and articulate an alternative theology of decolonial intimacy, I integrate a variety of methods including queer theory, critical race theory, womanist theology, ethics, fieldwork, archival research, and biblical theology. In pulling these approaches together I intend to point readers to Christ as co-heir who mediates intimacy for community.

Centering LGBTIQ South African experiences might broadly be described as a decolonial method, though wrapped up inside of it this project is, by necessity, a thoroughly interdisciplinary approach. The lives of Africans are "richly hyphenated." African theologian Emmanuel Katongole explains:

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<sup>26</sup> Abdul JanMohamed utilizes "bound" in two senses – as both confinement and destination in *The Death-Bound-Subject: Richard Wright's Archeology of Death* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005).

<sup>27</sup> Glen Coulthard understands politics of recognition as trapping colonizers with colonized in a death dance; see "Indigenous Peoples and the 'Politics of Recognition' in Colonial Contexts," Cultural Studies Now Conference, London: University of East London, July 2007.

To be an African is to find oneself richly hyphenated; that is to say, located within a multiplicity of marginalizing and marginalized narratives... a positive model of what African scholarship should be about [is] , namely, trying to make sense of these complex narratives that constitute our multiple social locations in a postcolonial Africa. We do not bring “scholarly interests” into the academy, we bring the hyphenated biographies of Africa. In order to preserve its inner integrity and relevance, African scholarship cannot but be deeply socially engaged.<sup>28</sup>

Likewise, Madipoane J. Masenya writes, “African women, facing such multiple, life-denying forces as sexism in the broader South African society, inherited from the legacies of colonialism and apartheid, sexism in the African culture, post-apartheid racism, classism, HIV/AIDS, and xenophobia are made the main hermeneutical focus.”<sup>29</sup> Biblical scholar Alice Y. Yafeh-Deigh asserts the import of decolonial method for Afro-feminist-womanist hermeneutics. Though a number of scholars use decolonial and postcolonial interchangeably, I take from Walter Mignolo’s work that the former sets out to “de-link from the tyranny of abstract universal.”<sup>30</sup> However, Mignolo treats colonialism, modernity, and Christianity as synonymous. The effect of this is to obscure the ongoing coloniality within the post-colonial context, and, moreover, to reinforce the misappropriation of Christianity that takes place when it is configured into the image and property of European whiteness and masculinity. In other words, Christianity became a tool of colonization after itself being colonized; it is not rightfully the colonizers’ possession and is freely available to colonized people. In fact, the turning of Christianity back on colonizers is a resistance

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<sup>28</sup> Emmanuel Katongole, “Embodied and Embodying Hermeneutics of Life in the Academy: Musa W. Dube’s HIV/AIDS Work” in *Postcolonial Perspectives in African Biblical Interpretations*, ed. Musa W. Dube, Andrew M. Mbuvi, and Dora Mbuwayesango, (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2012), 408-409.

<sup>29</sup> Madipoane J. Masenya, “An African Methodology for South African Biblical Studies: Revisiting the *Bosadi* (Womanhood) Approach” in *I Found God in Me: A Womanist Biblical Hermeneutics Reader*, ed. Mitzi J. Smith (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2015).

<sup>30</sup> Walter Mignolo, *Cultural Studies* 21.2-3, 159 (2007): 44-45.

strategy of the colonized. To reduce the use of religion to an ineluctably oppressive regime is to reassert a modern value of secular, empirical knowledge. Granted, Mignolo is not an historian of the church, and so perhaps we can overlook his mischaracterization of how Christianity became embedded within political powers, nation-states, classism, and ethnic boundaries.<sup>31</sup> What he overlooks are the ways in which contemporary nation states' efforts are committed to secularization as a sign of civilization and progress over and against religious (sometimes characterized as “superstitious”) indigenous peoples. If modernity asserted Christianity as reason, post-modernity has exercised secularism as its cure. Conversely, decoloniality must more rigorously make way for the complex integration of Sangomas with Priests in the lives of black South Africans, for example. The flat rejection of religion, then, reinstates colonial epistemology because it presumes this knowledge is what it says it is. “De-linking” from that cannot require a collective jettisoning of religious “sensing and feeling,” to use Mignolo’s terms; to do so would be to preserve colonial epistemology within the postcolonial turn rather than undoing coloniality.

This project engages in decolonial thinking at the border of the disciplines and for transformation, as Mignolo prescribes, though I integrate critical theory into this process instead of rejecting it as an irredeemably intellectual, bourgeoisie technology.

My work aligns with what he outlines as the two-fold function of decoloniality: first, to expose and delegitimize colonial epistemologies, hermeneutics, politics, and ethics; and

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<sup>31</sup> For example, Mignolo’s allegation that Thomas Aquinas utilized Greek rationality to place Islam as an exteriority is historically inaccurate. Aquinas regularly cites Muslims as interpreters of Greek rationality in the works of Aristotle, which were transmitted to the west by way of Muslim philosophers in Spain. Specifically, Aquinas looks to Avicenna (Ibn Sina) and Averroes (Ibn Rushd). See Aquinas’ *Commentary on the Sentences* (II, d.1 q.1 a.5), *Comm. magnum De caelo* III.29, *Comm. magnum Phys.* VIII.8, 9, 11, 15) *On the Eternity of the World*, and *Metaphysics* IX.1. For secondary sources, see David Burrell, *Knowing the Unknowable God: Ibn-Sina, Maimonides, Aquinas* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1986) and Rémi Brague, *On the God of the Christians: (and on one or two others)* (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine Press, 2013).

second, to construct an alternative utopian vision. For this reason I heed his exhortation to “de-link” from the political left, right, and even liberation theology. Perhaps the first two have been more obvious than the latter in my critiques of progressive policy and Christianity as “cure.” The third, however, is more subtly embedded within my use of theology to reject reducing Christ to principles, opting instead for a turn to Christ as a person who freely calls us to what is contextually necessary.

Instead of accounting for the present day in relation to colonial history and aftermath, as postcolonial work might, decoloniality sets out to break from that history to initiate something new.<sup>32</sup> As with biblical scholar Jeremy Punt, I understand decoloniality to be especially vital for the present South African context.<sup>33</sup> As will become apparent in the first chapter, a return to African tradition as a correction to colonization proves equally problematic because, like postcolonialism, it preserves an essentialized notion of subjectivity and reasserts patriarchy. Decoloniality allows for the exercise of African traditions with Christian theology to effect new modes of sociality that affirm and serve the interests of LGBTIQ people.

Black feminism and womanism, being the work of diasporic and postcolonial people, presents a transnational framework that is vital for this project. Womanist theologians and ethicists are attuned to how the Christian faith and sacred texts align with intersectional

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<sup>32</sup> Alicia Cox, who offers a queer Indigenous decolonial analysis, asserts that, “*decolonization* denotes the undoing of colonialism...Decolonization involves ongoing processes of removing or transforming the pernicious cultural effects of colonization—for example, the myth of the assimilated Indian.” “Remembering Polingaysi: A Queer Recovery of *No Turning Back* as a Decolonial Text,” *Studies in American Indian Literatures* 26.1 (2014): 54-80.

<sup>33</sup> Jeremy Punt, *Postcolonial Biblical Interpretation: Reframing Paul* (Boston: Brill, 2015), 46. Cox goes on to explain her method: “Queer Indigenous studies methodologies help us to focus on the ways that Indigenous peoples survive colonial assimilation projects that are particularly sexist and homophobic, not only racist and imperialist,” 57.

activism.<sup>34</sup> Though I utilize womanist methods, my work can be distinguished from womanists in a few significant regards. First, I am not a woman of color; I am white, was born in South Africa, and raised in the United States. Having lived in South Africa during apartheid, I am invested in addressing the problem of racism, though importantly I occupy a position of power. Secondly, my work focuses on South Africans rather than African Americans, which have distinct histories of slavery. Third, I attend more pointedly to sexuality. Certainly Alice Walker's seminal definition of womanism includes reference to same-sex intimacy. Practitioners of womanist methodology predominantly focus on gender for women of color; sex, gender and sexuality are engaged to various degrees depending on the scholar.<sup>35</sup> We are indebted to feminists and womanists for their scholarship on sex difference. As someone who does not comfortably identify with my sex or gender assigned at birth, I seek to contribute to womanist scholarship a theology compatible with fluid populations who might not identify as women or mothers, though they experience discrimination on the basis of their perceived sex and kinship relations.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> M. Jacqui Alexander argues, "Ultimately, then, I argue that a transnational feminism needs these pedagogies of the Sacred not only because of the dangerous diffusion of religious fundamentalisms, and not only because structural transformations have thrown up religion as one of the primary sites of contestation, but more importantly because it remains the case that the majority of people in the world—that is, the majority of women in the world—cannot make sense of themselves without it," *Pedagogies of Crossing: Meditations on Feminism, Sexual Politics, Memory, and the Sacred*, (Durham, NC: Duke University: 2005), 15. I use the word "intersectional" in this project, which might be more accurately understood as "standpoint theory." See Patricia Hill Collins, "Learning from the Outsider Within: The Sociological Significance of Black Feminist Thought," *Social Problems* 33.6 (1986): S14-S34, and Alison Wylie, "Why Standpoint Matters," in *Science and Other Cultures: Issues in Philosophies of Science and Technology*, eds. Robert Figueroa and Sandra G. Harding, (New York: Routledge, 2003), 26-48.

<sup>35</sup> Pamela R. Lightsey's *Our Lives Matter: A Womanist Queer Theology* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2015) provides an introduction to the recent expansion of attention to sexuality within womanist theology. In *Queer God* Marcella Althaus-Reid importantly foregrounds sexuality, though from a liberationist Catholic and not African womanist perspective.

<sup>36</sup> Contrast this with the important, though differently aimed, text for African American mothers and Christians: Stephanie Buckhanon Crowder, *When Momma Speaks: The Bible and Motherhood from a Womanist Perspective* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press), 2016.

Despite these differences, I am indebted to womanist methodology and preserve its tradition of foregrounding women of color's experiences of interconnected forms of oppression.<sup>37</sup> Likewise, I bring that experience up against "texts of terror" with the intent to uncover a life-oriented and liberating interpretation.<sup>38</sup> Renita Weems and Clarice Martin are two biblical scholars considered to have pioneered womanist hermeneutics in Hebrew Bible and New Testament respectively. A number of womanist biblical scholars have followed, including Raquel A. St. Claire. As a theologian, though, Delores Williams' analysis of Hagar's surrogacy as analogous to the African American woman's experience during slavery most significantly influences my hermeneutic.<sup>39</sup> Like Renita Weems, I believe that womanist hermeneutics facilitate changes in the reader's outlook and also social interactions.<sup>40</sup> Readers include both victims and perpetrators of sexual, domestic, and homicidal violence. I share with Madipoane J. Masenya special attention to the "...multiple, life-denying forces as sexism in the broader South African society, inherited from the legacies of colonialism and apartheid, sexism in the African culture, post-apartheid racism, classism, HIV/AIDS, and xenophobia," and that "We must fundamentally denounce any attempts to use the Bible in ways that terrorize others, such as women or gay and lesbian persons."<sup>41</sup> This attention to accounting for the harm that scripture enables is echoed by Stephanie Buckhanon Crowder, who posits that womanist biblical interpretation is necessarily confrontational because it antagonizes and agitates unjust societies and unethical activities.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Nyasha Junior, *An Introduction to Womanist Biblical Interpretation* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2015), 60, 101.

<sup>38</sup> Phyllis Trible, *Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984).

<sup>39</sup> Delores Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness* (New York: Orbis Books, 2013).

<sup>40</sup> Renita J. Weems, "Re-Reading for Liberation African American Woman and the Bible" in *I Found God in Me: A Womanist Biblical Hermeneutics Reader*, ed. Mitzi J. Smith (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2015), 48-49.

<sup>41</sup> Masenya, "An African Methodology for South African Biblical Studies" 75, 86.

<sup>42</sup> Crowder, *When Momma Speaks*, 37.



My attention to scripture is motivated precisely by its misuse in harming LGBTIQ people. It is essential that the very tools used against LGBTIQ people in church and society be reexamined to make a way out. Like Schneider, I find that, “For queer theory, the primary focus is not inversionist readings of biblical prohibitions against homoeroticism but interrogation of the power dynamics that such texts reveal as well as attempts to explain the perceived need for such texts.”<sup>43</sup> What I have found in returning to the biblical text is that it implicates religious and political leaders pursuing sexual propriety, because such attempts frequently entail harming others. When identity is understood not in terms of sexuality or nationality, but rather as adopted co-heirs with Christ, intimate life together entails turning from sexual and homicidal violence. Mine is a recuperative effort to reexamine the biblical texts as affirming intimate life together, rather than “cure” rhetoric, in Christian theology and state governments. It is not an exegetical exercise in Biblical Studies. This project utilizes resources from within the Christian faith to shape the conditions for a theology of intimate life together.

South African scholar Sarojini Nadar advocates for a “*hermeneutic of transformation*” in which biblical scholarship and faith communities interpret the Bible in order to transform society. Nadar provides an incisive critique of Beverly Haddad and Gerald West’s scholarship from her social position as both “other” and “scholar.”<sup>44</sup> Nadar self-identifies as a South African Indian Christian woman scholar, and persuasively argues that she and other “subaltern” scholars engage communities from within and facilitate transformative activism.

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<sup>43</sup> Laurel Schneider, “Queer Theory,” in *Handbook of Postmodern Biblical Interpretation*, ed. A.K. M. Adam, (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2000), 208.

<sup>44</sup> Sarojini Nadar, “Hermeneutics of Transformation? A Critical Exploration of the Model for Social Engagement between Biblical Scholars and Faith Communities,” in *Postcolonial Perspectives in African Biblical Interpretations*, ed. Musa W. Dube, Andrew M. Mbuvi, and Dora Mbuwayesango (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2012), 400.

In so doing she privileges the bio-politics of the disenfranchised, which advances decolonial rather than postcolonial methods described above. Nadar's argument implies that having been born in South Africa does not equip me to speak as a subaltern. In fact, her analysis importantly calls into question my scholarship. Rather than smooth this over I will return to this limitation of mine in the conclusion.

Theologian Emmanuel Katongole shares my discontent with the limitations of secular progressive policy, and advocates for the use of Christian theology and scripture to advance these efforts beyond immediate needs. He argues that HIV and AIDS present us with a *kairos*, meaning opportune moment, to broaden our notions of kinship, intimacy, and corporeality. The Bible, Katongole reminds us, though a tool for harm, can also be redeployed to authorize a better future. He writes:

As *kairos*, HIV/AIDS reveals the limits of our conceptions of the body, sexuality, and gender relations, as well as the social, political, and economic imbalances of our world. If HIV/AIDS exposes these limits of our established canons, then responding to the HIV/AIDS *kairos* calls for nothing short of dreaming radically new visions of human flourishing. Such a call finds ready resonance in Scripture, for dreaming of a radically new creation is what is at stake in the Bible. But this is what might easily be missed by an activist paradigm that tends to view the bible as simply another formidable weapon in the struggle towards liberation and healing...To put it more succinctly, the biblical and theological challenge, even as it involves advocacy, has to do more with the recovery of dreams and visions.<sup>45</sup>

Katongole rightly underscores religion as a resource within nations comprised predominantly of self-professed Christians; theology and sacred texts can validate dissatisfaction with the

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<sup>45</sup> Emmanuel Katongole, "Embodied and Embodying Hermeneutics of Life in the Academy: Musa W. Dube's HIV/AIDS Work" in *Postcolonial Perspectives in African Biblical Interpretations*, ed. Musa W. Dube, Andrew M. Mbuvi, and Dora Mbuwayesango (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2012) 411-412.

present and longing for a different future. His turn to creation and eschatology, however, are here enriched with the Christological account presented.

The reader might feel discomfort with my use of long interview quotations. Instead of block quotes, which might be tempting to skip over, I have reformatted these as an invitation to immerse oneself in the words, thoughts, emotions, and theology of South Africans. Certainly I could have paraphrased their insights and assembled choice sentences. Those are conventions in anthropology and interdisciplinary ethnographic work. Part of my decolonial ethic, however, compels me to foreground interviewees to the extent that it might very well, and perhaps should, displace my own writing. Like Didier Fassin, I find that, “To understand why and how social agents act and interact as they do and, for example, why violence has crept into the very heart of gender relations in the townships or how sexuality is negotiated between desire and commerce, we must explore the everyday life-world and the history by which it is informed.”<sup>46</sup> He argues that “Beyond the experience of the disease as suffering,” interviewees living with and dying from HIV/AIDS convey experiences of grotesque historical, social, and gendered violence as ordinary. In depth interviews, therefore, do not stand as isolated or individual accounts, but rather offer embodied glimpses into larger systemic injustices shaped by collective histories.

The method and form presented in this project deliberately depart from some of the most well-known and respected contemporary theologians. Gene Rogers and Linn Tonstad offer two such examples. First, and foremost, let me be clear that I do not take issue with their commitments to Christian theology or tradition. As a Christian theologian and ethicist I concur with and delight in their steadfast orthodoxy. What I do find problematic is the form

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<sup>46</sup> Fassin, *When Bodies Remember*.

of their writing and their research methods. There is a politic and ethic performed in the shape and logic of Rogers and Tonstad's theology. The two preserve a privileged canon of theologians and adhere to classic rhetorical modes even in their expansive attention to sexuality. Rogers locates his theology of sexuality firmly within a narrow set of voices, such as Saint Augustine and Rowan Williams. Tonstad has an interesting twist on Rogers' work. Both assert credibility by utilizing recognizable voices and forms. However, Tonstad claims to demonstrate the failure of analytic philosophical method in Christian theology by seeing it through.<sup>47</sup> My decolonial approach risks dismissal and misrecognition because rather than performing my mastery of knowledge in the discipline of Christian theology, I explore its limitations and alternatives. It entails integrating diverse scholarship with South African in-depth interviews, alongside the Christian scriptures. These are intentional and necessary strategies for the work of intimate life together, which has been dominated by few voices and logics.

No one theologian or school of thought determines the parameters of this work. Rather, spectrums of voices are refracted through one another. If there is one theological method that most closely aligns with what I present here, it is Marcella Althaus-Reid's in *Queer God*. In this text Althaus-Reid describes a "Totalitarian theology" as marked by heterosexuality and global capitalism. She argues that colonists who went to South America violated the integrity of the Gospel by imposing their own image and social structures onto God and Christianity. Althaus-Reid advocates for de-colonization, rebellion and subversiveness as modes of holiness with the use of provocative images that restore the scandal of the Gospel. My integration of theory, theology, and contextualization parallels

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<sup>47</sup> Author Meets Critics session on Tonstad's *God and Difference: The Trinity, Sexuality, and the Transformation of Finitude*, AAR annual conference San Antonio, TX (2016).

Althaus-Reid approach in *Queer God*. The context and form here are certainly different – South Africa and Protestantism respectively. Karl Barth and Charlotte von Kirschbaum greatly influence my theology, though with little reference to their publications. This project embodies the spirit of their theological commitments without a crass reproduction of their arguments. A sustained engagement with Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Martin Luther in chapter five is necessary for illuminating the problem of whiteness, masculinity, homosociality, and heteronormativity in Christian theology. Chapter six focuses on the theology of a South African woman of color and activist, Elizabeth Petersen, as a counter example. She articulates a constructive theology that embodies a decolonial theology for intimate life together.

What if the task of the scholar was not to erect a typology of various approaches to sexuality, showcasing both the collection and regulation of knowledge and analysis of people? What if the task of the theologian was, at least in part, to undo that? By pointing to Christ as contagion who mediates the complexity of intimacy, I refuse to act as a guardian of the faith because I do not understand role as such. Instead, I turn to Christ daily not knowing to what discipleship I will be called. As a theologian I encourage others to do the same – both individually and corporately. What I present in the chapters that follow is a vision for costly discipleship and intimate life together that faces the difficult reality of our love for and proximity with harmful people, and, perhaps most disquieting, that we ourselves are often those harmful people.

Theologian Willie Jennings argues that colonization dislocated people from their land, people, and identity – meaning that part of the problem is spatial. Attempts to return to a nostalgic past that never existed, as if there is a pure culture prior to encounter that is

recoverable, misunderstands the present moment. Christ offers to us a new spatial relationship with one another, God, and ourselves. With him and in him our particular bodies and textured contexts are sites of intimacy, though marked by trauma. The decolonial approach I offer acknowledges the misuse of Christian theology in colonization. However, instead of making a post-colonial turn, it unhinges coloniality from within. Thus the form, method, and content privilege a different canon and authority that is not to be confused with jettisoning doctrine or orthodoxy. Rather, it is to embrace these from a different vantage point, where Christ acts as contagion, reconfiguring our relationships.

The integration of multiple disciplines is itself a decolonial method. Queer theory unveils the compulsory heterosexuality tied to nationalism, while advocating for non-identitarian politics. Critical race theory contributes to this analysis the disenfranchisement of people of color. Womanism links together sexuality, race, gender, Christian theology and biblical hermeneutics, enabling me to examine scripture for a) indictments of sexual and homicidal violence and b) the revelation of God in Christ as also revealing our status as adopted co-heirs. As Qwo-Li Driskill has pointed out, using a “doubleweave” facilitates decolonization. By doubleweave Driskill means the metaphorical weaving of queer, Indigenous, and decolonial methods. His use of “Two-Spirit” – the intertribal term used in English representing numerous tribal traditions and social categories for gender and sexuality over and against colonial binaries – as critique enables Driskill to identify heterosexism and gender oppression within Native communities, and also to participate in decolonization. He

asserts that Two-Spirit critiques demonstrate the erotic as a tool for healing historical trauma.<sup>48</sup> To this he adds, religion:

While radical white-dominated queer movements often attempt to reject religion because of institutionalized homophobia and heterosexism or—on the other hand—create spiritual movements and communities that often appropriate Native practices, Native Two-Spirit/GLBTQ people insist that we already have a place within traditional religious and spiritual life. This is not a way to desexualize our identities in order to be acceptable to non-Two-Spirit/GLBTQ people, as non-Native radical queer movements might argue.<sup>49</sup>

Though writing from North America as an Indigenous person, and therefore a very different social location than my own, Driskill sets a precedent for a decolonial method that values and utilizes religion despite its embroilment with harm. The integration of these methods, in fact, disrupts the academic segregation to the extent that it performs and takes the form of decolonial politics.

My theological approach offers a Christology in which Jesus Christ is the reality that comes between ideological formations and human life. Without Christ we hold fast to customs instead of God, seeking security rather than intimacy. The question of whether homosexuality or homophobia is a Western import, discussed in chapter one, distracts us from the issue at hand: how does Christ transform our intimacy? While not sufficient in and of itself, decoloniality abets human beings in turning to Christ as mediator. Decolonial concepts prime us for the surprising and enigmatic life to which Christ calls us. It is not a stable formula for success or safekeeping. Decoloniality is a disposition that accounts for the horrific sins we have committed against one another as well as the possibility for something

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<sup>48</sup> Qwo-Li Driskill, "Stolen from Our Bodies: First Nationals Two-Spirits/Queers and the Journey to a Sovereign Erotic," *Studies in American Indian Literatures*, 16.2 (2004): 50-64.

<sup>49</sup> Qwo-Li Driskill, "Doubleweaving Two-Spirit Critiques: Building Alliances between Native and Queer Studies," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 16.1-2 (2010): 86.

new. Theorist Samira Kawash argues, "... it is the loss of the *false* security of home, ancestry, and origin and the recognition of the price by which such false securities are purchased."<sup>50</sup> It makes room in our imaginations for Christ to redirect our efforts. Decoloniality seeks freedom found in Christ – the freedom to be *for* others.

### ***1.5 Outline of Dissertation***

The first three chapters critique theological and political attempts to “cure” South African sexuality in exchange for salvation and citizenship. Examples include: first, interrogating “cure” rhetoric in disciplining black lesbians and trans men in present day South Africa; second, the aversion therapy and sex reassignment surgeries performed on gay and lesbian conscripts during apartheid; and third, the legalization of same-sex marriage during the transition to democracy, which sits at the intersection of church and state regulating sexuality and gender roles. Finally, I construct a decolonial theology of intimate life together in which those who commit gender-based violence and homicide are not simply incarcerated – which returns to apartheid logic – but because they are unchosen neighbors and church goers (even clergy) there is a need to redress harmful behavior from within religious and political relationships.

Chapter one accounts for the current limitations of progressive policy within secular democracy that imposes literal and social death upon queer subjects. The so-called “corrective” or “curative” rape of impoverished black lesbians and trans men overtly demonstrates the dissonance between protective laws and lethal violence against LGBTIQ citizens. Geographically and socially marginalized within South Africa, lesbians and trans

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<sup>50</sup> Samira Kawash, *Dislocating the Color Line: Identity, Hybridity, and Singularity in African-American Literature* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 192.



men suffer fatal discipline under the auspices of being restored to perform proper femininity. Therefore, even within the new democracy, the law stops short of curbing or inhibiting gender-based violence against citizens who challenge gender conventions – especially people of color and of strained finances. This chapter explores the relationship between Christian theology and the so-called “curative” violence against LGBTIQ folk as a wrongful baptism by drowning. It turns to womanist theology for an alternative based in scripture and the Christian tradition.

Chapter two recounts a short history of aversion therapy and coerced sex reassignment surgery as a distorted resurrection. These surgeries intended to remake white gay and lesbian conscripts into the image of apartheid’s ideal heterosexual citizen. Here, transitioning was presumed to properly order sexual identity. Within the context of apartheid, citizens often sought sex reassignment surgery as a corrective for homosexuality rather than the synchronization of gender identity with physical sex. Resurrection took the form of disciplining the body and refashioning people into heterosexuals to strengthen the social body. Alternatively, I posit a constructive trans Christology based on Jesus’ transfiguration as revelation. He reveals us to be his adopted co-heirs.

Chapter three challenges the turn to same-sex marriage as a means to salvation and authentic citizenship within the church and state respectively. While certainly a helpful accessory, same-sex marriage also has the potential to capture LGBTIQ Christians within a *quid pro quo*. Here “life” remains conditional, pinned narrowly within the reproduction of a hierarchical, heteronormative household. The right to same-sex marriage can potentially increase sexual regulation by circumscribing the conditions for enacting freedom. This chapter presses the question of whether Christian marriage can be queered, or rather if it is

inherently queer in sanctioning camp gender roles and sexuality. Protestant theology recognizes baptism, not marriage, as a sacrament. Revisited, Christian marriage, family, and community reframe intimate relationships as dependent wholly on Christ for salvation and sanctification.

Chapter four posits a constructive theological alternative to sexual healing, marked by discipleship and community centered on Christ. Within the nexus of ecclesial and political bodies, both individual and social, disease-cure metaphors stigmatize sexuality and valorize regulation. This project does not set out to uncover a historical model or Biblical exegesis for sexual ethics. Instead, it reorients theological discourse on sexuality by considering Christ as contagion. Christ as contagion upsets the ideology of “cure” and nuances the interplay between life and death. It challenges privileging bodies that invoke Christ as the healer of sexuality as disease. Within this framework, Christ mediates all relations and offers sexuality as gift. His body challenges apartheid time and space by integrating the sacred and profane, and upsetting a linear progressive notion of time.

Chapter five focuses on Elizabeth Petersen and others for on-the-ground examples of discipleship and community mediated by Christ as contagion. In this chapter posit a “decolonial” Christian theology of intimacy that challenges neoliberalism. This cannot simply take the form of deferring to church leaders from colonized lands when discerning church polity.<sup>51</sup> Instead, our life together is more textured than that. A highly divisive topic within churches today, sexuality is a theological inquiry in need of revisiting because it cuts to the heart of the Christian Gospel, how we relate to one another, and what it means to be

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<sup>51</sup> Andrea Smith puts the temporal tension this way, “Rather than disavow traditions and futures, it may be more politically efficacious to engage them critically.” Smith, “Queer Theory and Native Studies,” 49.

human. An estimated 80% of South Africans consider themselves Christians. Faith persists in secular democracy, but what it means to be faithful remains elusive.

### ***1.6 Author's Social Location***

I did not grow up in the church. My Dad was an atheist and my Mom might best be described as new age. When I was growing up, most of their friends were Reformed Jewish South Africans. My parents encouraged my brother and me to find our own way when it came to spirituality, though they readily pointed out their Christian friends to be some of the most hypocritical and unethical people they knew. I share this because while for some theologians and ethicists their commitment to Christianity feels more like a return to home and culture, for me it has always been a foreign land through which I journey. Though I've been in the church and studied doctrine for some time, it will always be a venture into the unknown. I am not the guardian of its borders, but rather on a continual expedition marked by discovery, joy, and horror. Horror presents itself as the historical misuses of Christianity to harm, perhaps most overtly by colonization. Joy comes in the recognition of Christianity as itself an effective challenge to that horror. And discovery is the process by which we confront the horror and maintain joy. In this project I begin with the horror. Christianity has been mishandled as a "cure" for sexuality. And yet there is joy. Within Christian theology and scriptures we find resources that condemn the horror and advocate for LGBTIQ people. The journey to this joy – the realization that we are God's children, co-heirs with Christ, and free to love one another – cannot sidestep the horror. We must confront the misuse of Christianity in order to grasp Christ as contagion in our intimate life together.

My father's experience as a white male conscript in apartheid South Africa in the mid-1970s shaped his notions of gender, race, class, and sexuality. Having grown up

impoverished within a socialist system of government marked him as embodying apartheid's great anxiety – the poor white.<sup>52</sup> Poor whites undermined the apartheid logic that whites were naturally superior to blacks. From this shame-laden social position he was drafted into the military. He described his experience of homosocial bonding to my brother and me, asserting that when two soldiers snuggled it was for warmth and not erotic. When my brother “came out” my dad expressed profound concerns about how my brother would suffer discrimination and longed for him to embrace any heterosexual urges he might feel. My conversion to Christianity added to my dad's unease, in part, because I was not engaging in sex. My brother and I found ourselves on the periphery of acceptable sexuality. My abstinence proved *as* disconcerting, if not more, than my brother's same-sex partnering.

I was born in South Africa during apartheid and came to the U.S. in 1989. Coming from a country that legislated racism predisposed my father to question social norms. He encouraged me to articulate my position on matters that we differed. Our debates typically centered on religion, politics, and sexuality, which certainly accounts for my research interests. Being able to love and accept one another fully in the midst of conflict was the ruddy sort of relationship I could trust. His mode of engagement communicated to me that sameness is not a prerequisite for intimacy. In fact, our parent-child bond expanded and strengthened in the midst of our disagreement because the goal was community, not cure. Certainly we attempted to persuade one another, though we were most delighted with the

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<sup>52</sup> For further reading on this see Sandra Swart's “A Boer and His Gun and His Wife Are Three Things Always Together: Republican Masculinity and the 1914 Rebellion” *Journal of Southern African Studies* 24.4 (1998): 742; Andrew Crampton, “The Voortrekker Monument, the birth of apartheid, and beyond,” *Political Geography* 20 (2001): 224; and Robert Morrell ed. *White But Poor: Essays on the History of Poor Whites in Southern Africa* (Pretoria: University of South Africa, 1992).

engagement dialogue offered. Instead of fearing contamination or purging our household of the other, we would come together in love.

### **1.7 Conclusion**

With the church, the apartheid state seeks to choreograph the terms of life and death – which people are worthy of living and under what conditions – thereby necessitating dishonesty and isolation. Members of the body who are unwilling to conform are threatened with being excised and terminated. “Like a cancer,” homosexuality supposedly threatens to reproduce improper citizens *ad infinitum* and to the detriment of society.<sup>53</sup> Perhaps it is not the “unnatural” failure to reproduce, but rather that queer multiplication and refusal to die that confronts the social body with its frailty. Retaliation against itself, a distorted chemotherapy, unfurls the eroticism of violence as queers are disciplined and purged in the name of the greater good.

In a time when even “ex-gay” ministries such as Exodus International increasingly jettison “cure” rhetoric and same-sex marriages occur legally within churches and states, the problem of sexual regulation might appear passé. However, high rates of gender-based violence and homicide against LGBTIQ folk suggest that secularization and privatization have failed to disabuse us from associating sexuality with illness. A Foucauldian analysis suggests that human rights advances actually coax the subject into vigilantly self-policing sexuality in the name of freedom. In addition, it is not that LGBTIQ people are minorities any more than black South Africans. In fact, cisgender, white, heterosexuals who ascribe to polarized gender roles are quite rare and thus queer. This is not a theology for a minority,

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<sup>53</sup> Here I expand upon Ecclesia’s de Lange’s simile.

therefore, but rather encompasses the broad majority that traditional theology has egregiously left out.

Though I borrow methods from various disciplines, I do not propose a Womanist, Queer, or African theology *per se*. My argument centers on the refusal to ascribe to identity politics, though importantly it also critiques universals for assimilating and regulating people. By offering a decolonial theology of intimate life together, I aim to articulate the need for Christ to mediate our relationships – freeing us to love God and others. It is a distinctly theological project in this regard, because Christ imparts our identity to us as adopted co-heirs with him. This does not efface our particularity, the texture of our histories, or the pain of our social contexts. Like Christ’s incarnation, our adoption takes place precisely within our marked bodies and community relationships. God reveals to us the eternal truth of Christ’s Sonship and our adoption as co-heirs, which emboldens us to confess sin and pursue repentance. Sexual and homicidal violence has increased with the implementation of progressive policy in South Africa, signaling the need for a theological contribution. I have personally suffered sexual assault by a family friend while in South Africa. What resources are there within the Christian tradition and sacred texts for intimate life together at the limit of state justice, where perpetrator and victim share a neighborhood, church, and family?

I offer a constructive alternative theology that, unlike apartheid, seeks to engage the senses of hearing and seeing God’s revelation through Christ as contagion. As contagion, Christ rightly mediates all relationships, drawing us fully into our humanity and corporeality. It is not an eschatological hope, but rather the second person of the Trinity is the necessary point of connection that frees us to truly love God and each other. Religious separatism and identity politics cannot embrace us as dynamic and contingent creatures like Christ does.

Instead, they impose compartmentalization on individuals and groups in the name of health. What if God's intervention into our sinful structures is one of contagion – meaning connection, unpredictability, and vulnerability? With Christ we are able to confront the risk inherent in intimacy and overcome the reflex to cling to exploiting and possessing others.

Positing Christ as contagion not only deconstructs the trappings of “cure” rhetoric regulating sexuality; it also facilitates a theological basis for receiving apartheid's foes – the interracial child, HIV/AIDS, and queers – as gifts. These bodies announce truth by prefiguring the one and only true human figure, Christ. Like him they inhabit mortality as inevitability without resigning to death as *telos*. The interracial, diseased, and queer expose what has always been there – the fiction of purity. An interruption, these gifts from God act like Christ as contagion, infiltrating the social and political body. They do not promise the impossible – to be like God and to live forever – for that is the serpent's cry that echoes throughout apartheid policy. Here, humanity is marked by frailty, mortality, and comingling. It is humanity against the apartheid man, which is self-sufficient, heterosexual, and obedient. Simultaneously, each gestures to what is to come, the new creation. They broaden our assumptions concerning what is possible with Christ. Embracing the risk unique to Christian theology and sexuality, then, entails accepting Christ as contagion.

## 2. Chapter One: Baptism by Drowning: “Curative” Rape for the Queer Threat

“Always respect a man, no matter what he does. God is a man, and that means a man should be revered as a God.”

- Beverly Palesa Distsie<sup>1</sup>

### 2.1 Introduction

In this project I account for the ways in which Christianity has been wrongly touted as a “cure” for sexuality at various points in South African politics. I point to three examples: first, the current problem of “curative” rape in democratic South Africa; second, the historic aversion therapy and sex-reassignment surgeries performed during apartheid; and third, the respectability politics shrouding rights to same-sex marriage during the transition to democracy. This order a) underscores the current limitations of progressive policy in securing life and liberty for LGBTIQ people, b) is purposefully non-linear as a means of challenging the progressive narrative of post-colonialism, and c) establishes the need for a decolonial theology of sexuality.

Rather than looking to the global North or West for insight, I present South Africa’s struggle as a caution to other nations, such as the United States, that their recent legalization of same-sex marriage does not mark a grand conclusion to LGBTIQ activism. Without social buy-in, policy has a limited reach, especially for citizens who are impoverished, people of color, and LGBTIQ. In societies such as South Africa and the United States, where a majority of the population professes to be Christian, attention to this specific religion is

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<sup>1</sup> Beverly Palesa Distsie quoting her grandmother in *The Country We Want to Live In: Hate Crimes and Homophobia in the Lives of Black Lesbian South Africans*, Nonhlanhla Mkhize, Jane Bennett, Vasu Reddy, and Relebohile Molestane (Cape Town: HSRC Press, 2010), vi.



necessary. Advancements in public policy necessitate that religious leaders, theologians, and faith communities review sacred texts and seek intimacy with LGBTIQ people. In the chapters that follow I offer a theological reading of Christian scriptures in order to recuperate LGBTIQ people's position and to question the traditional narrative of the religious as inherently righteous. It is a challenge to "cure" rhetoric within political *and* religious communities. My final chapter proposes an alternative theology of sexuality and intimate life together as mediated by Christ as contagion.

This chapter nuances the role of religion as it relates to the so-called "curative" rape of black lesbians and trans men in present day democratic South Africa. It is analogous to scholarship that identifies the role of Christian theology in both advancing and undoing apartheid policy, though with an eye specifically to sexuality. Like many theologians, South African Christian minister Peter Storey disclosed that he had presumed sexuality to be a soft issue within the discipline of Christian theology; he had preferred to direct his efforts to the struggle against apartheid.<sup>2</sup> It was his son Alan Storey – equally devoted to the church and pursuit of social justice – who aided Peter in understanding the import of sexuality. Although topics such as the doctrine of God appear more overtly theological in nature, notions of sexuality are currently defrocking religious leaders, splitting churches, condemning church members, and fueling violence against LGBTIQ people. Sexuality is *the* global issue in the church today. Touchstone texts in Christian theology and ethics remain embedded in a post/colonial perspective and require renewed engagement. This project uniquely integrates Christian theology with queer theory, womanism, decoloniality,

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<sup>2</sup> Peter Storey, interviewed by Michelle Wolff, September 2, 2016.

fieldwork, and scripture in order to demonstrate the pernicious use of religion in collusion with state to regulate sexuality.

In 1994, South Africa shifted from a theocratic apartheid government to democracy. Recovering from the isolation of trade embargoes that accompanied the apartheid era entailed presenting the nation as globally relevant. Judge Edwin Cameron saw this moment as an opportunity for political change and lobbied the African National Congress (ANC) to broaden the scope of the new constitution to include policies protecting LGBTIQ citizens.<sup>3</sup> South Africa boasts being the first country in the world to make discrimination on the basis of sexuality unconstitutional. Eight years later, it granted gays and lesbians the right to adopt; and in 2006, South Africa became the fifth country in the world to legalize same-sex marriage.<sup>4</sup> Collectively, these groundbreaking laws benefiting LGBTIQ citizens might give the impression of sexual liberty free from the entanglements of religion. However, a Human Rights Watch report describes South Africa as the “rape capital of the world.” The victims of these crimes are overwhelmingly black lesbians and trans men who report being told, “We’ll show you you’re a woman” as they are sexually assaulted.<sup>5</sup> These hate crimes are termed “curative” or “corrective” rape, and are perpetrated in order to discipline the survivor into conforming to traditional femininity. It is a notion of femininity that aspires to conflicting requirements for women – that they make their bodies available for heterosexual

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<sup>3</sup> However, De Vos and Barnard explain, “It is the opinion of many analysts that had the parliamentarians been allowed to vote according to their conscience, the [Civil Union] Bill would not have been passed.” Referenced in Mkhize, Bennett, Reddy and Molestane, *The Country We Want to Live In*, 10.

<sup>4</sup> See Eric C. Christiansen, *Ending the Apartheid of the Closet: Sexual Orientation in the South African Constitution Process*, *New York University Journal of International Law and Politics* 32.997 (2000).

<sup>5</sup> Public health professors Rachel Jewkes and Naeema Abrahams research sexual violence in South Africa despite the difficulties of establishing statistics for such crimes. See “The epidemiology of rape and sexual coercion in South Africa: an overview,” *Social Science & Medicine* 55.7 (2002): 1231-1244.

intercourse but not rape.<sup>6</sup> Assaults target people whose gender or sexuality does not conform to a narrow definition of womanhood, hence the curious coupling of lesbians and trans men in this discourse.<sup>7</sup> High rates of HIV and AIDS in this region exacerbate the threat of death, though rapes often end in homicide.<sup>8</sup> In light of these atrocities I explore how can a country with such progressive policies fails to curb such extreme gender-based and homicidal violence.

While a variety of sources cite religion as the motivation for hate crimes against LGBTIQ people, this correlation has not been corroborated. What has been evidenced is the invocation of religious rhetoric in public discourse on sexuality and the influence of churches in shaping social attitudes.<sup>9</sup> In my 2015 and 2016 fieldwork I observed activist groups' attention moving away from blaming religious ideology for gender-based violence. Instead, they focused on partnering with religious leaders to foster a more just and hospitable society. Activists report that during these collaborations the majority of their efforts go into educating religious leaders on sex, gender, sexuality, and identity. They express

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<sup>6</sup> Pumla Dineo Gqola explains the contradiction this way: "while 'curative'/'corrective' rape is about 'punishing' women to lie within the sexual eligibility window for heterosexual male consumption, but they 'dare' not be available – hence the belief that they deliberately choose to make themselves 'unavailable' to male sexual gratification, and can therefore be punished and/or violently recovered." *Rape: A South African Nightmare* (Auckland Park: MFBooks Joburg, 2015), 9.

<sup>7</sup> For Gqola, "Rape is an exercise of patriarchal violent power against those who are safe to violate: mostly women, girls and boys but also adult men and trans-people deemed safe to violate." *Rape: A South African Nightmare*, 14.

<sup>8</sup> According to Helen Moffett, "Thus, in post-apartheid, democratic South Africa, sexual violence has become a socially endorsed punitive project for maintaining patriarchal order... Sexual violence in particular has spiraled, with survey after survey suggesting that South Africa has higher levels of rape of women and children than anywhere else in the world not at war or embroiled in civil conflict." "These Women, They Force Us to Rape Them," *Journal of South African Studies* 32.1 (2006): 129.

<sup>9</sup> Louise Vincent and Simon Howell, "'Unnatural', 'Un-African' and 'Ungodly': Homophobic discourse in democratic South Africa," *Sexualities* 17.4 (2014): 476.

dissatisfaction, however, with religious leaders' contributions lacking theological or biblical resources for the advancement of LGBTIQ rights.<sup>10</sup>

Below I provide information specific to the South African context, which poses a number of challenges at the intersection of religion, cultural traditionalism, and politics. Rather than focusing on the infamous Sodom and Gomorrah passage in the book of Genesis, which is frequently leveled against same-sex intimacy, I analyze the story of the unnamed concubine in Judges.<sup>11</sup> The latter text exposes religious insiders raping and killing in the name of sexual propriety, which is confused with holiness.<sup>12</sup> This approach contextualizes the Sodom and Gomorrah story by reproaching the faithful for harming women's bodies, which I will elaborate on in more detail. Like the unnamed concubine's mistreatment in life and death – she was gang raped, dismembered, and utilized as an allegory – so also black lesbians and trans men in South Africa suffer a wrongful baptism by drowning. They are condemned and purged from society rather than recognized as adopted co-heirs with Christ.

## ***2.2 The South African Context***

In ninety-nine when I was in Lange, there was a tavern that was not far. For me at that time, I was a little bit crazy. So I do whatever I feel like – kissing in the tavern. And I think those guys they were just watching me. When I left, this girl that worked there was saying that there were people that were following us. I didn't bother. Then she panicked and said, 'They are coming to us.' And then I looked back and they were so there! They stabbed me like there was no tomorrow. I think when they left they were sure that I was dead.... Then in [2005] I was walking from the World AIDS day. I went to my friends and it was late, and then I have to run home. So I was crossing the empty field. There were these boys that were coming, and when I tried to

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<sup>10</sup> There were regional differences at play. Activists in Johannesburg were less aware of religious resources than in Cape Town, which is where more religious LGBTIQ advocates and allies collaborate.

<sup>11</sup> See Genesis 18:16-19:29 and Judges 19-21.

<sup>12</sup> Though it is noteworthy that following the Sodom and Gomorrah story Lot's daughters get him intoxicated and sleep with him in the name of propagating God's chosen people.

pass they then grabbed me. I started to fight a little bit. Then they take a knife. But you see a knife it's a gambling thing. You see I was stabbed before, so I was not so much scared. I knew that if they were going to stab me maybe it's not going to be so fatal, maybe I could still run. They just now take up the gun, then I couldn't take a chance. I said, 'Guys please, whatever you do.' Ja, and then, they raped me. It was so strange the way my body reacted. It just became numb. I can't even tell anyone what it looked like. The one thing that made my life upside down was the rape. I think from then, I ask myself that something was not okay. Then I can't just keep quiet.  
- Funeka Soldaat, 2013<sup>13</sup>

I include Soldaat's narrative with great reservation. The reader might wonder why I have not personally interviewed survivors of rape or included Zanele Muholi's photojournalism documenting the lives of queer South Africans.<sup>14</sup> My reticence stems from what Saidiya Hartman identifies in *Scenes of Subjection* when she cautions against proliferating images of tortured black bodies because, "Rather than inciting indignation, too often they inure us to pain by virtue of their familiarity—the oft-repeated or restored character of these accounts and our distance from them are signaled by the theatrical language usually resorted to in describing these instances—and especially because they reinforce the spectacular character of black suffering."<sup>15</sup> Though Hartman speaks specifically of African American slaves, she points to the insidious motives for documenting and retelling violence against black people. I return to this concern in my reading of the unnamed concubine in *Judges*, who is brutally raped and murdered. In this project, the ethics of representation are caught between acknowledging horrific violence without pronotropeing. To use Harman's terminology, it is an attempt to witness while conscious of the risk of re-enacting violence through consumption.

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<sup>13</sup> Funeka Soldaat, ep. 2, *I Am A Woman: Leap of Faith*, dir. Lauren Groenewald, Miki Redelinghuys, 2013.

<sup>14</sup> To be clear, this is not to question the import of Muholi's work. See Michelle Wolff, "Inaccessible Excess: Photographer Zanele Muholi Comes to Duke," *Duke Gender, Sexuality, & Feminist Studies*, Spring 2017.

<sup>15</sup> Saidiya V. Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 3.

Soldaat's account of having been brutalized for her gender expression and sexual identity illustrates the severity of violence directed against black lesbians daily in South Africa. First I review activist's efforts to alleviate such violence before interrogating the problematic features of human rights rhetoric. In light of the disjuncture between progressive policy and high rates of hate crimes against black lesbians, the Human Sciences Research Council hosted a roundtable seminar at 16 Days of Activism in December of 2006.<sup>16</sup> Titled, "Gender-based Violence, Black Lesbians, Hate Speech and Homophobia," the seminar considered the meaning of citizenship in South Africa. Participants interrogated the meaning of citizenship and attempted to account for the South African context, which is marked by its history of colonialism and apartheid – "a history of exclusions of many people through racial categorization."<sup>17</sup> Although 16 Days of Activism began as a campaign to increase awareness about violence against women and children, the group recognized that violence against LGBTIQ people has not been adequately addressed. While official policies protect citizens, rights are realized disparately among South African citizens. Laws written specifically for LGBTIQ identifying people are infrequently actualized among black and low-income citizens.<sup>18</sup>

In addition to the 16 Days of Activism, activists also sought to address the problem of violence by forming the Hate Crimes Working Group (HCWG). The HCWG attempts to categorize an array of criminal acts as hate crimes, not just crimes related to sexuality. Its first

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<sup>16</sup> Today the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence Campaign is a global and annual event.

<sup>17</sup> Mkhize, Bennett, Reddy and Molestane, *The Country We Want to Live In*, 7.

<sup>18</sup> Citizenship takes a variety of forms: "A serious challenge arises, however, in the imperative to take black lesbians' experiences of violation to the heart of questions about citizenship and rights. Given that black people, women and lesbians remain 'second-class citizens' in terms of actual access to resources, security and stats, creating knowledge about black lesbians' experiences and theorisations of violence against them risks moving 'black lesbians' from a discursive terrain of visibility and marginalisation to one in which 'they' are recognised only as 'special victims.'" Mkhize, Bennett, Reddy and Molestane, *The Country We Want to Live In*, 15.

accomplishment was creating a hate and bias crime-monitoring document for police reports. The intent was that documentation could monitor the frequency of such crimes, increase government awareness, improve future policy, and ultimately ensure inclusivity. It bears noting that only the religion of the survivors is recorded in the demographic information, the majority of which identify as Christian, though the offenders' religion is not specified. As in all countries, South Africa's rape statistics lack precision due to underreporting, an absence of legal demarcation in reports, and narrow notions of rape. Concerning the latter, if a person or population narrowly defines rape as a violent attack from a stranger, that obscures many forms of rape. Rape between partners, incest, rape involving drugs and/or alcohol, assaults in which objects are used for penetration, rape in which the victim is male, and attacks on sex workers are unaccounted for. In other words, the vast majority of rape inflicted on broad swaths of the population is not imagined to qualify. Instead of prosecuting perpetrators, victims are pressured to vigilantly ward off the supposedly hapless urges of rapists. Coupling "sexual purity" with Christian theology exacerbates the trope, "that women can escape rape if they assume appropriate femininity."<sup>19</sup>

In 2011 the South African Minister of Justice and Constitutional Development mandated the establishment of a National Task Team focused specifically on "corrective" rape. Three years later, it published a strategy to mitigate gender and sexual orientation-based violence perpetrated on LGBTI persons. The name change from "corrective" rape to hate crime signals the broadened scope of the project. It addresses the dissonance between rights and the lived experience of discrimination that LGBTIQ citizens suffer. "The efficacy of the communication campaign will benefit immensely," the report asserts, "from obtaining buy in

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<sup>19</sup> Pumla Dineo Gqola, *Rape: A South African Nightmare* (Auckland Park: MFBooks Joburg, 2015), 111.

through leaders in South African society i.e. traditional leadership structure, church leadership and political leadership.”<sup>20</sup> Designated messengers include Dr. Rev. Wesley Mabuza of the Commission for the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Cultural, Religious and Linguistic Communities. The primary target audience includes faith-based organizations, LGBTI crimes “hotspots,” traditional leadership, civil society organizations, organizations serving victims, the victims, and perpetrators of these LGBTI crimes. Interestingly, the “South African Public” and international community are listed as the secondary target audiences. The strategic objective for faith-based organizations is to promote “tolerance/acceptance” of LGBTI persons; whereas the objective for other target audiences is to increase awareness, highlight crime-fighting efforts, educate officials of their duties to protect the rights of LGBTI persons, and demonstrate that leaders care.

The basis for these differing strategies is not explained. Furthermore, the proposed activities for faith-based organizations remain ambiguous; they are to develop further initiatives and re-establish connection with the South African Council of Churches to organize community dialogues. This divided strategy is curious because the provisional community outreach calendar lists religious stakeholders in each phase. While religion is acknowledged to play a significant role in perpetuating and mitigating gender and sexual orientation-based violence against LGBTI persons, strategies for facilitating the latter remain limited and obscure.

### ***2.3 The Limitations of Human Rights Rhetoric***

The reason LGBTIQ citizens continue to face stigma, sexual violence, and homicide perplexes scholars and activists alike. Why is it that South Africa’s post-apartheid democracy

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<sup>20</sup> Mkhize, Bennett, Reddy and Molestane, *The Country We Want to Live In*, 5.



so dramatically fails black lesbians and trans men? Rather than positioning these realities as at odds with one another, I argue that it is within the framework of human rights rhetoric and progressive secular politics that black lesbians and trans men are particularly victimized. Appeals to traditional African gender roles and religion share with human rights rhetoric an investment in universalizing humanity. Here it is germane that political theorists, feminist, queer theorists, and many others question human rights rhetoric for presuming an autonomous individual and serving neoliberalism.

In *The Birth of Biopolitics* Michel Foucault explains the direct relationship between freedom and coercion in government, “Liberalism must produce freedom, but the very act entails the establishment of limitations, controls, forms of coercion, and obligations relying on threats etc.”<sup>21</sup> According to his logic, freedom is directly rather than inversely proportional to its regulation. Foucault describes the manufacture of freedom as such: “Freedom is something which is constantly produced. Liberalism is not the acceptance of freedom; it proposes the manufacture of it constantly, to arouse it and produce it, with, of course, [the system] of constraints and the problems of cost raised by this production.”<sup>22</sup> Implicitly, Foucault critiques neo-liberal investments in individual human rights and naturally free subjects. In addition, he illuminates the troubling increase of regulation entailed in upholding rights. Freedom, then, is not a stable station, but rather an ongoing process requiring restrictions. Sexual liberation counter-intuitively entails adhering to increased regulation. The arduous process of securing liberation obligates citizens to adhere to identity politics in exchange for LGBTIQ rights.

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<sup>21</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978-1979* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 64.

<sup>22</sup> Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 65.

Expanding the reach of the law to include more persons reinforces subjugation.

While pragmatic and necessary for temporary survival, working within unjust systems must always be understood as an initial effort of advocacy for disadvantaged groups, because the long-term benefits remain conditional upon a privileged notion of subjectivity:

The problem is therefore not simply a question of inclusion in the democratic process and the distribution of resources, but rather a question of the fundamental principles of democratic practice and subjectivity. In other words, does the South African situation allow us to presume the existence of citizen-subjects along the lines of the classical Western model of the individual rights-bearing citizen that is deemed necessary for democratic governance, and what is at stake in all this for wide social theory?<sup>23</sup>

In other words, democratic government presumes that citizens inhabit subjectivity typically associated with Western, European men; the autonomous individual contributes to state stability and receives services in kind. However, the subjects explored here do not operate in this manner and attempts to condition them to do so can be harmful. South African independent researcher Mikki van Zyl puts the conundrum this way: “Citizenship has rightly been viewed with scepticism by feminist and other groups who criticise its inability to deliver the social and economic needs of women and other socially marginalised groups. Being centred on the rights of an individual citizen subject has the outcome of maintaining hegemonic discourses which uphold hierarchies of human value.”<sup>24</sup> If the system itself is oppressive, then including more subjects fails to redress inequality.

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<sup>23</sup> Steven L. Robins, ed., *Limits to Liberation after Apartheid: Citizenship, Governance & Culture* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2005), 8

<sup>24</sup> Mikki van Zyl, “Beyond the constitution: from sexual rights to belonging,” in *The Price and the Prize*, ed. Melissa Steyn and Mikki van Zyl (Cape Town: HSRC Press, 2009), 366. Similarly, Lillian Arts argues that the law is inherently androcentric: “Feminist jurisprudence exposes the state and the criminal justice system as systems which not only address men’s needs but also contribute to and uphold the power of men. The feminist jurisprudence model also provides an analysis of how law and legal scholarship regulate women and silence feminist discourse,” “The weather watchers: gender, violence and social control,” in *The Price and the Prize*, ed. Melissa Steyn and Mikki van Zyl (Cape Town: HSRC Press, 2009), 171.

In addition to absorbing a broader spectrum of citizens, human rights rhetoric sometimes assimilates subjects. Because citizenship today is bound inside of neoliberalism, it burdens LGBTIQ people with respectability politics in exchange for rights. Jasbir Puar asserts:

Part of the increased recourse to domestication and privatization of neoliberal economies and within queer communities, homonationalism is fundamentally a deep critique of lesbian and gay liberal rights discourses and how those rights discourses produce narratives of progress and modernity that continue to accord some populations access to citizenship—cultural and legal—at the expense of the delimitation and expulsion of other populations. The narrative of progress for gay rights is thus built on the back of racialized others, for whom such progress was once achieved, but now is backsliding or has yet to arrive.<sup>25</sup>

The desired outcome of equity comes at a steep price; LGBTIQ inclusion entails conforming to heteronormative kinship relations, especially the institution of marriage and the adoption or reproduction of children. Instead of reframing notions of personhood and society, progressive policy tends to subsume LGBTIQ people into its regulating framework. The increased gender-based violence in democratic South Africa suggests that progressive policy alone is not sufficient to secure life or prosperity for LGBTIQ citizens due to required adherence to a universal notion of citizenship.

The transition to a democratic state itself underscores the gap between policy and lived experience. Anthropologist Amanda Swarr describes a violent backlash to progressive policy as part of South Africa's dramatic shift in state.<sup>26</sup> Taken together, this scholarship indicates that black lesbians and trans men facing violence and murder in South Africa need

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<sup>25</sup> Jasbir K. Puar, "Rethinking Homonationalism," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 45 (2013): 337.

<sup>26</sup> Amanda Swarr argues, "Rather than seeing the contemporary violence facing South African gender and sexual liminality in the transition as anomalous, we might conceptualize this violence as inherent to the transitional state and the contradictions of rights claims." *Sex in Transition: Remaking Gender and Race in South Africa* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2012), 75.

not signal paradox. These crimes result from the dissonance between ideal visions for the nation and lack of social buy-in. Before envisaging effective modes of advocacy beyond progressive policy, we will examine the entanglements of identity politics in conflict – i.e. the friction between national and sexual identities.

#### ***2.4 Essentializing Africans: Smith, Mbeki, & Pereira***

Discourse on the “curative” rape of black lesbians and trans men in South Africa provides a case study that demonstrates the limitation of human rights rhetoric. Dissonance between the law and one’s lived reality is a common occurrence; social buy-in takes time.<sup>27</sup> In this section I critique the rhetoric of white female journalist Charlene Smith, and former black president Thabo M. Mbeki on the topic of “curative” rape in South Africa. Their identity politics betray their privilege over and against the country’s common victims – black, lesbian women and trans men. This is not to reduce them to an ontological notion of identity. On the contrary, it is to demonstrate their essentializing views of authentic African identity. Alternatively, the organization Iranti literally offers victims and survivor’s voices and stories with their multi-media platform.

If white journalist Charlene Smith is correct that, “We won’t end this [AIDS] epidemic until we understand the role of tradition and religion—and of a culture in which rape is endemic and has become a prime means of transmitting disease, to young women as well as children,” then activists advocating for LGBTIQ citizens and concerned about

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<sup>27</sup> Emma Mittelstaedt explains, “The presence of domestic and international laws protecting gay rights is not enough to change a population’s attitudes and actions towards the LGBT community.” “Safeguarding the Rights of Sexual Minorities: The Incremental and Legal Approaches to Enforcing International Human Rights Obligations,” *Chicago Journal of International Law* 9.1 (2008): 355. Steven L Robins puts it starkly, “A particularly sobering aspect of the South African transition to democracy has been the growing recognition that, while South Africa has one of the most progressive constitutions on the planet, the actual realization of these constitutional rights has not lived up to expectations.” *Limits to Liberation after Apartheid*, 2.

gender-based violence should seek out the root issue – religious ideology.<sup>28</sup> At the time Smith published this, then president Thabo M. Mbeki retorted that she perpetuates the myth of black African men as rapists. He writes:

In simple language she was saying that Africa traditions, indigenous religions and culture prescribe and institutionalise rape. The ‘internationally recognised expert’ was saying that our cultures, traditions and religions as African inherently make every African man a potential rapist. Given this view, which defines the African people as barbaric savages...we are an African country, and therefore have the men conditioned by African culture, tradition and religion to commit rape.<sup>29</sup>

Mbeki’s presidency is most infamous for his politics concerning the problem of HIV and AIDS in South Africa. According to journalist Chris McGreal: “Mbeki blocked the distribution of anti-retrovirals (ARV) in public hospitals because he believed pharmaceutical companies were overstating the link between HIV and Aids to sell drugs, and underplaying the toxic side effects of ARVs which dissidents said killed more people than the disease.”<sup>30</sup> Mark Gevisser’s biography of Mbeki’s politics on HIV and AIDS argues that it was “shaped by an obsession with race, the legacy of colonialism and ‘sexual shame.’”<sup>31</sup> His book charges Mbeki with failing to extend hundreds of thousands of lives by delaying the distribution of medicine. Mbeki’s accusations against Smith were met with censure from a number of journalists. Perhaps Mbeki prioritized the success of the nation’s public image to the extent

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<sup>28</sup> Charlene Smith, *The Washington Post*, 2000-2004.

<sup>29</sup> Thabo M. Mbeki, *Letter from the President: When is Good News Bad News?* ANC Today 4.39, October 2004.

<sup>30</sup> Chris McGreal, “Mbeki admits he is still Aids dissident six years on,” *The Guardian*, November 6, 2007. In the same article he writes, “Mr. Gevisser also describes how the president’s view of the disease was shaped by an obsession with race, the legacy of colonialism and ‘sexual shame.’ The book will reinforce the view of Mr. Mbeki’s critics who say his unorthodox opinions have cost hundreds of thousands of lives by delaying the distribution of medicines...Mr. Mbeki blocked the distribution of anti-retroviral drugs (ARV) in public hospitals because he believed pharmaceutical companies were overstating the link between HIV and Aids to sell drugs, and underplaying the toxic side effects of ARVs which dissidents said killed more people than the disease.”

<sup>31</sup> McGreal, “Mbeki admits he is still Aids dissident six years on,” *The Guardian*, November 2007.

that he failed to redress the prevalence of rape and HIV/AIDS in South Africa.<sup>32</sup>

Consequently Mbeki's legacy remains controversial and is generally punctured by critiques of his denying HIV/AIDS. Anthropologist Didier Fassin locates Mbeki's "unorthodox" dissidence among a handful of reputable scholars and as primarily informed by historical racism. He understands Mbeki's interpretive lens as an economy of resentment and suspicion.<sup>33</sup>

Interestingly, the majority of journalists agree that Smith inaccurately cites statistics though they bristle at Mbeki's suggestion that race might be a significant factor in data collection or analysis. Mbeki's assessment is readily dismissed as merely bad science. For Smith, a white woman, the problem of rape in South Africa is a gender issue. For Mbeki, a black African man, the problem at hand is a racist slant on depictions of African men as rapists.<sup>34</sup> And yet, for "curatively" raped black lesbians and trans men, one's race, gender, sexuality and nationality are inseparable. Impoverished black lesbian women and trans men in South Africa profoundly challenge heterosexual, patriarchal ideals ordering society. The violence acted upon non-conforming women is multifaceted. I say women here not to

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<sup>32</sup> "President Thabo Mbeki and African National Congress (ANC) political leaders have reacted defensively to these headlines. Mbeki believes that the media descriptions of rape are unhelpful and unpatriotic, threatening the success of the new democracy as a whole... In 2000, the government even put a moratorium on the release of reported crime statistics, causing the public and the press to erupt with claims that the government was covering up the reality of escalating crime in South Africa." Kristina Scurry Baehr, "Mandatory Minimums Making Minimal Difference: Ten Years of Sentencing Sex Offenders in South Africa," *Yale Journal of Law and Feminism* 20 (2008): 214.

<sup>33</sup> Didier Fassin, *When Bodies Remember: Experiences and Politics of AIDS in South Africa*, trans. Amy Jacobs and Gabrielle Varro (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007).

<sup>34</sup> A few years prior, in his speech at Fort Hare University, Mbeki asserted: 'Convinced that we are natural-born, promiscuous carriers of germs, unique in the world, they proclaim that our continent is doomed to an inevitable mortal end because of our unconquerable devotion to the sin of lust.' Drew Forrest and Barry Streek, "Mbeki in bizarre Aids outburst," *Mail and Guardian*, October 26, 2001. However, he is not alone in suggesting that: "In the case of South Africa, more than a century of racial segregation, then overt apartheid, has produced the roots of the disease through huge economic inequities, high levels of social violence and large-scale dislocation of households and communities." Helen Schneider and Didier Fassin, "Denial and defiance: a socio-political analysis of AIDS in South Africa," *AIDS* 16 (2002): 45-51.

suggest that trans men are in fact women, so much as to highlight the disciplinary violence acted upon bodies conceived to be deviating from prescribed roles. The logic of disciplinary rape has been described as follows:

...men are [supposedly] ‘forced’ to rape women because the latter dare to practice freedom of movement, adopt a confident posture or gait, make eye contact, speak out for themselves: in other words, when women visibly demonstrate a degree of autonomy or self-worth that men find unacceptable, they are perceived as sufficiently subversive and threatening as to compel men to ‘discipline’ them through sexual violence. What is more, if rape is believed to be deserved – if a woman is simply being ‘corrected’, or ‘taught a lesson’, it is somehow not considered to be a criminal activity.<sup>35</sup>

On the surface progressive policy promises to mitigate sexual assault and human rights rhetoric appears to escape all the pitfalls of religious conservatism. However, what proves challenging is the task of implementing progressive policy that resists capturing all bodies into a universal humanity. Within this framework marginalized groups are coerced into conforming to norms in exchange for rights and services.<sup>36</sup> Neither Smith nor Mbeki realize their participation and culpability in this framework. Their attempts to depart from apartheid’s blatant inequity functionally silences and disenfranchises impoverished black lesbians and trans men, because each assumes a universal and essentialized notion of what it means to be a woman or African respectively. Jacklyn Cock asserts:

There are two forms of essentialism involved in contemporary sexual politics. A biological essentialism that asserts homosexuality as an intrinsic condition is not the only problematic form this takes. There is also a form of political essentialism which asserts that the homosexual identity ‘trumps’ all other identities and claims that homosexuality necessarily implies a [sic] intrinsic commitment to a revolutionary and transformative agenda. This is clearly not the case. The complicated terrain of sexual politics in South Africa demonstrates the competing force of multiple identities and that gay

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<sup>35</sup> Moffett, “These Women, They Force us to Rape Them,” 138.

<sup>36</sup> For more on this see Rey Chow, *The Protestant Ethic & the Spirit of Capitalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002).

and lesbian people can be deeply conservative, exploitative, and racist.<sup>37</sup>

Policy more often challenges and regulates identity rather than liberating or empowering individuals because it demands that citizens ascribe to stable and coherent identity politics.

Notably, activists have recently moved away from “corrective” and “curative” rape in describing this particular violence. This is because the phrase has lent itself to circular debates on whether homosexuality or homophobia is inherently “unAfrican.” Both positions problematically adhere to an essentialized notion of what it means to be African. Activist Jabu Pereira rejects the phrase “corrective” rape because it posits these hate crimes as result of uninformed African culture, which ultimately forestalls prosecution:

In any other system, say North America, there’s no way that you find a corrective word for terrorism other than terrorism.

Terrorism is defined as terrorism.

And yet when we focus on Africa, I don’t know who creates these crazy things, but there’s this embodiment of a thought that things become traditional, cultural, or whatever, it becomes confusing, when you think about crimes.

Crime is crime.

There’s no other way to explain the holocaust than the holocaust. It was a heinous crime committed against 6 million people and this is how we understand it. There’s no gray area, right? So when hate and violence is perpetuated against somebody because of their sexual orientation and gender, why do we need to have gray areas of defining these things?

This is the problem, because if you say that this is a hate crime and it’s based on the following factors:

and the following factors are that this person was raped,  
they were strangled,  
their genitals was cut out, etc.

the aggravation of the violence leans towards the definition of the assault being a hate crime.

That for me makes sense.

Now if somebody in America infects somebody with HIV, or somebody believes that raping a child or a virgin in America will cure

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<sup>37</sup> Jacklyn Cock, “Engendering Gay and Lesbian Rights: the Equality Clause in the South African Constitution,” *Women’s Studies International Forum* 26.1 (2003): 42.



them of HIV, now that person would be sent to a psychiatric hospital and they would be probably on death row.

Now when we come to our context,  
that person is “culturally” misunderstanding HIV,  
and then somebody needs to make a million pamphlets to explain what HIV is.

Because we are not as harsh about crimes as we should be, and that’s the reality.

When there was the issue about if you rape a virgin you will be cured of HIV, everybody thought there needed to be a mass education to help some lunatic who thought that this was a cure.

So now suddenly all African men think that raping virgins will cure them.

Even practitioners fall into this role  
of reinforcing their own stereotypes about the continent,  
about the country, about black men, about African men.  
So the same thing happened. Some crazy person use the word  
“corrective” rape, or some journalist used it, and now it’s like yeah  
this is the term that is used when a man thinks that raping a lesbian  
would cure them from their homosexuality.

All of this pathologized actions about understanding crime is just  
ridiculous.

If somebody raped a lesbian in the subway in New York City they would be arrested and they would be thrown in jail, and they would be charged. Right?

And there would be no discussion about whether this New Yorker thought that this was a corrective action.

There would be a mass production of information for men in New York. It doesn’t happen, right?

So why does it happen here?

That is the issue that makes this word very problematic and purely reinforced a negative behavior versus a positive action against change.

It says nothing when you use the word corrective rape versus rape.

To me rape means rape and that’s a crime.

And crimes are punishable and investigative.

Now when you say corrective, what does that mean in legal frameworks?

What does it mean in policy change?

It only happens here in like “crazy” Africa.

So why do these things happen here?

It’s just some of the problematics about the use of this word. And we [at Iranti] don’t use it at all.

We use the language of hate crimes.

In all of our media reporting material we don't use it. Because it just makes something completely insane and abnormal sane. That's the problem of the word and the language of it.<sup>38</sup>

Trans man of color, Pereira has personal stakes in these questions. Pereira articulates the subtle denigration of Africans in the media's phrase "corrective rape." He, perhaps optimistically, imagines hate crimes are prosecuted effectively in the U.S. context. Regardless, Pereira's comparison demonstrates a patronizing double standard for Africans who are imagined to require better sex education rather than prosecution. Exculpating perpetrators of these hate crimes on the basis of African culture being misinformed further disenfranchises black lesbian women and trans men in South Africa. Within this flawed framework, rapists and murderers justify and valorize their actions by appealing to African authenticity: "Human rights discourse in contemporary South Africa, rather than challenging intolerance, has been deployed to legitimise homophobic views when the latter are cast in the terms we have described here. Homophobia emerges as the protection of the right to culture, to religious freedom and to morality."<sup>39</sup> Mikki van Zyl echoes this analysis: "As part of postcolonial national building, African (heteropatriarchal) sexual identities have been 'reclaimed' from imagined tradition, while actually reinscribing (heteropatriarchal) colonial histories and social institutions."<sup>40</sup> Similar to religious conviction, tribal traditions operate as a post-colonial challenge to LGBTIQ rights.

Here we find complex friction among rights – that of the right to protection against discrimination and also a post-colonial sensitivity to African tradition. Progressive policy is caught within this tension. On the one hand it must serve LGBTIQ citizens, and on the

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<sup>38</sup> Jabuleni Perreire, interviewed by Michelle Wolff, Iranti, Johannesburg, July 13, 2015.

<sup>39</sup> Vincent and Howell, "'Unnatural', 'Un-African' and 'Ungodly,'" 480.

<sup>40</sup> Mikki van Zyl, *The Price and the Prize*, 369.

other it cannot strong-arm citizens into surrendering cultural ideals. The nexus of religion, traditional culture, and progressive rights strain one another.<sup>41</sup> Continually expanding the variety of citizens has yet to counteract democracy's normalizing pressure.<sup>42</sup> In fact, it is precisely under the auspices of attending to difference that secular democracy requires one to conform to a universal notion of humanity. Pereira embodies intersectionality – or assemblages – and refuses essentialization while remaining immersed in politics.<sup>43</sup> His insight into the various aspects exacerbating oppression is one familiar to womanist theologians.

## ***2.5 The Role of Religion***

If Smith is correct that religion motivates gender-based violence, both sexual and homicidal, in South Africa, the concrete evidence for this correlation remains elusive. What is demonstrable, however, is that activists are currently partnering with religious leaders in order to advance progressive policy.<sup>44</sup> Their reasoning is that due to the large statistical number of Christians in South Africa today, engaging Christian theologies of gender and sexuality might accelerate social buy-in. A Human Rights Watch Report states:

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<sup>41</sup> Mikki van Zyl concurs: “However, powerful as the human rights framework is as a tool for delivering social justice through legislative change, its focus on individual subjects fails to provide an adequate framework for contextualising one set of rights against another,” *The Price and the Prize*, 366.

<sup>42</sup> Jacklyn Cock remains within this framework when she asserts, “The assertion of rights involves expanding conceptions of humanity and citizenship.” “Engendering Gay and Lesbian Rights,” 44. She suggests instead, “At the end of the day, the challenge is for the gay rights movement to move beyond a socially conservative and surface homogenization to promote a revolutionary agenda. To do so means fighting for equality while resisting the notion that equality equals sameness, as well as connecting the justice of rights to the justice of redistribution,” 44.

<sup>43</sup> Jennifer Nash critiques black feminism theory's over reliance on Kimberlé Crenshaw's notion of intersectionality and prefers Jasbir Puar's term assemblages, “if intersectionality can be a technology of liberalism invested in inclusion and diversity, assemblage is invested in movement, futurity, and affect.” “Practicing Love: Black Feminism, Love-Politics, and Post-Intersectionality,” *Meridians* 2.2 (2013): 13.

<sup>44</sup> Masiwa Ragies Gunda claims, “In fact, almost all LGBTI groups in southern Africa are either faith-based or have an office that promotes dialogue with religious communities. Activists know that religion plays a critical role in the rejection or acceptance of LGBTI persons in southern Africa and that there is a need to engage the churches,” “Silent No Longer!: Narratives of Engagement Between LGBTI Groups and the Churches in Southern Africa,” *The Other Foundation*, 2017. <http://theotherfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/Silent-No-Longer.pdf> (accessed April 10, 2017).

The church is central to the lives of many South Africans, and the majority, approximately 80 percent, identify as Christian. In the context of largely impoverished townships, the church becomes a central feature of community life, providing spiritual and, often, material succor to the populace. Pastors and other church leaders wield immense influence on moral and social matters, influence that can directly impact lesbian and transgender members of the congregation, often in a negative way...many individual church leaders continue to use the pulpit to demonize lesbians and transgender men. This significantly contributes to a climate of intolerance, which in turn fuels a climate of discrimination and violence.<sup>45</sup>

Some opine that if religion has the power to fuel gender-based violence, perhaps its influence in shaping social attitudes towards gender and sexuality could be redirected to fostering a more tolerant and equitable society. While underscoring the negative impact of churches and religious leaders in exacerbating hate crimes, this Human Rights Watch Report does not include recommendations for positive change. If this report is correct, Christian theology could most significantly facilitate actualizing LGBTIQ access to rights and the experience of citizenship. However, I wonder whether this strategy might too readily operate within a neoliberal framework instead of more radically challenging it.

With this question in mind, consider the situation of sexual and homicidal violence against black lesbians and trans men occurring *within* South Africa's progressive democratic state. Funeka Soldaat, a lesbian rights activist and woman of color in South Africa, quoted above, described surviving sexual and homicidal violence in a matter-of-fact tone. She understands her refusal to conform to heteronormative femininity as inciting rape and attempted murder on multiple occasions. Soldaat intimates her complex negotiations venturing home at night. Drinking, openly expressing affection for a woman, and moving

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<sup>45</sup> Human Rights Watch Report, "We'll Show You You're a Woman: Violence and Discrimination against Black Lesbians and Transgender Men in South Africa," (2011): 22.

alone after dusk supposedly invite the crimes committed against her. Even activists espouse these victim-blaming motifs. Although activists and religious leaders are partnering in order to accelerate social buy-in and mitigate the horrific violence that women like Soldaat suffer, I would like to ask once again if religion could also be a resource for radical resistance? In other words, although theology has been used to legitimate both apartheid and democracy in South Africa, could it also challenge the feedback loop whereby sexual freedom increases regulation?

## ***2.6 Limitations of the Legal System***

### **2.6.1 Mandatory Minimums**

Contributing to the complexity of prosecuting perpetrators is not only substandard policing, but, perhaps surprisingly, mandatory minimums.<sup>46</sup> Mandatory minimums came about in response to the perception that the African National Congress (ANC) was soft on rape. After negative press on the rate of rape in South Africa, President Thabo Mbeki and the ANC put a moratorium on the release of crime statistics. Understandably, such action heightened distrust and critique of the government. Seeking to restore its public image, the ANC then instituted harsh minimum penalties for sex-related crimes including life sentences. Kristina Scurry Baehr analyzes the counter-intuitive results of this tactic – judges subsequently use their discretion to grant greater leniency: “...the victim was not a virgin, that a father of a ten-year-old girl was ‘gentle’ when he molested her several times, or that a

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<sup>46</sup> Artz outlines the problem of police having a slow response time, failing to take reports, victim shaming, and not following up with investigations (183). She argues: “[The chapter] will examine the role of the family, civil society, law and the criminal justice system in constructing women’s sexuality through the use of social controls. These controls include the use, or the threat of use, of some form of physical or sexual violence, sexual intimidation as well as systematic methods to palliate the experiences of victims of gender-based violence.” “The Weather Watchers: Gender Violence and Social Control,” in *The Price and the Prize*, ed. Melissa Steyn and Mikki van Zyl (Cape Town: HSRC Press, 2009), 170-171.

husband was culturally chauvinistic and thus was less culpable for kidnapping and brutally raping his wife.”<sup>47</sup> Baehr argues that mandatory minimum sentencing fails to account for the root causes of “the rape crisis” in South Africa. Law professor Dee Smythe investigates police intransigence and victim recalcitrance in order to assess rape case attrition and improve justice in South Africa.<sup>48</sup> While the root causes might prove elusive, one contextual feature cannot be excised from the high rates of rape – South Africa’s sitting president Jacob Zuma.

### 2.6.2 Jacob Zuma’s Acquittal

In 2005 Jacob Zuma was accused of raping “Khwezi”<sup>49</sup> – an HIV positive AIDS activist and life-long ANC member. The majority of reports do not mention her sexual identity as lesbian or bisexual. Judge Willem van der Merwe did, however, allow the defense to cross-examine Khwezi on her sexual history for the purpose of discrediting her testimony.<sup>50</sup> Outside the courthouse supporters from both sides gathered. Feminist activists dressed in kangas showed their alliance with Khwezi, who was wearing a kanga on the night in question. While the accused describes this as immodest, others contend that kangas are traditional clothing.<sup>51</sup> In contrast, Zuma’s supporters dressed in traditional Zulu clothing, held signs saying “100% Zuluboy,” and “burn the bitch” next to an effigy of Khwezi. Shireen Hassim interprets Zuma’s supporters as favoring a more patriarchal masculinity over and against the sitting president Thabo Mbeki. She argues, “In very real ways, then, women’s

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<sup>47</sup> Kristina Scurry Baehr “Mandatory Minimums Making Minimal Difference: Ten Years of Sentencing Sex Offenders in South Africa,” *Yale Journal of Law and Feminism* 20 (2008): 216.

<sup>48</sup> See Dee Smythe, *Rape Unresolved: Policing Sexual Offences in South Africa* (Cape Town: University of Cape Town Press, 2015).

<sup>49</sup> “Khwezi” is the pseudonym given to Fezeka Ntsukela Kuzwayo, who under South African law should not have been named publicly due to potential repercussions. She sought asylum in Amsterdam after Zuma was acquitted and her house was burned down. Kuzwayo died October 9, 2016.

<sup>50</sup> See *S v Zuma* supra at 198f.

<sup>51</sup> Steven Robins, “Sexual Politics and the Zuma Rape Trial,” *Journal of Southern African Studies* 34.2 (2008): 415.

bodies came to constitute the borders between different groups of men engaged in struggles for power.”<sup>52</sup> Such contestation entailed casting Zuma’s masculinity as a universal for Zulu men:

Zuma’s behavior was, after all, how Zulu men are meant to act, so this patriarchal argument went. This particular understanding of Zulu masculinity was self-consciously fashioned and situationally deployed by Zuma in the Johannesburg High Court as a sign of Zulu authenticity and virility. It contrasted starkly with the image of President Mbeki as the (Xhosa) modernist architect of South Africa’s rights-based constitutional democracy that is widely perceived to challenge ‘African culture’ by undermining traditional leadership and promoting gender equality.<sup>53</sup>

Of course, some people challenged Zuma’s representation of Zulu culture and masculinity, demonstrating the complexity of appealing to cultural tradition to justify one’s actions in court.<sup>54</sup> Khwezi reports having previously related to Zuma as a father figure, adding doubt to his suggestion that her dress invited intercourse.<sup>55</sup> Certainly dress is not an expression of sexual consent. The use of traditional African culture in both the prosecution and defense demonstrates the complexity of post-apartheid democracy.

In addition to appeals to his Zulu culture for justification, Zuma shocked the nation with his erroneous understanding of HIV transmission. He testified in court that although he did not use a condom, he did shower after having sex with Khwezi in order to “cut the

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<sup>52</sup> Shireen Hassim, “Democracy’s Shadows: Sexual Rights and Gender Politics in the Rape Trial of Jacob Zuma” *African Studies* 68 (April 2009): 65. Hassim contrasts president Mbeki and Zuma this way: “Consequently, Zuma’s court-room performance of ‘Zulu-traditionalism’ can be clearly distinguished from the liberal modernism of President Mbeki, a man who was seen to be promoting gender equity and same-sex marriage for gay and lesbian couples,” 423.

<sup>53</sup> Robins, “Sexual Politics and the Zuma Rape Trial,” 422.

<sup>54</sup> For an analysis of the masculinities at play during Zuma’s trial, see Johannes Philipp Backhaus, “Masculinity on Trial in South Africa? – The Zuma Rape Trial, Rape, HIV and AIDS and Masculinities,” Master’s Thesis for the Graduate Program Political Science, Philosophy & Protestant Theology at the Carl von Ossietzky University of Oldenburg, April 2008.

<sup>55</sup> She testified: “I saw him as a father, treated him as a father and he treated me like a daughter.” Transcript, *The State of South Africa v. Jacob Zuma*, SS321/05, High Court of South Africa, vol 1, March 6 2006. 14. Her biological father, Judson Kuzwayo, spent 10 years on Robben Island as a prisoner alongside his friend and ANC comrade Jacob Zuma.

risk of contracting HIV.” South Africans castigated Zuma’s misinformation on such a pressing issue within the country. Indignant, Zuma attempted to sue well-known political cartoonist Jonathan Zapiro, thereby demonstrating his curious political position on rights.



Figure 1: Jonathan Zapiro Political Cartoon of Jacob Zuma

Heléne Combrinck suggests that Zuma’s acquittal challenges the efficacy of the Sexual Offences Amendment Bill: “The question that needs to be considered throughout, therefore, is the extent to which these rights translate in practice into specific rights for sexual assault victims.”<sup>56</sup> That the sitting president of South Africa successfully appealed to his African heritage as a defense in his rape trial sets the tone for citizens on matters of gender relations, sexuality, and the criminal justice system. Donald Trump’s presidency in the U.S. bears a striking number of similarities to Jacob Zuma, placing Americans in a similarly disillusioned democratic state; both have been accused of sexual assault, both attempt to quiet the media’s

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<sup>56</sup> Heléne Combrinck, *Should we Consent?: Rape Law Reform in South Africa* (Cape Town: Juta & Co. Ltd, 2008), 265.



critical portrayal of them, both enjoy great wealth, and both are successors to presidents who were cultural icons of democratic government – Barak Obama and Nelson Mandela.<sup>57</sup>

Khwezi's prior experiences of rape by ANC members were used against her during trial as evidence of her alleged promiscuity. The pastor she accused of rape testified, "she is not well, she is sick and she needs urgent attention otherwise many families will be destroyed."<sup>58</sup> In so doing, Khwezi's religious leader publically declares her ill and threatening to families. According to his logic, her speaking out and accusing these men defies feminine propriety, which in turn threatens the well being of the nation. The equation of sexuality with disease is a trope that fuels the idea that there is a cure. Helen Moffett explains the conflation this way:

The association with homosexuality as a plague, and by deduction a 'disease', is closely connected to the view that the gay subject is a person who has the potential to 'transmit' his sexuality, if not 'infect' the public, with both disease and sexual orientation. The corollary of this view, to be deduced from the homophobic discourse, is that if the gay subject is pathologised, it is therefore possible to find a 'cure' for the problem. The language of the discourse also suggests that homosexuality as abnormal sexual behavior could be corrected in order for the gay subject to re-enter the heterosexual world as a patriotic, moral and obedient citizen.<sup>59</sup>

Reducing men to intractable sexual animals also disenfranchises women, and the stakes are high. Shireen Hassim explains, "The pathologising of masculinity feeds into conservative notions of sex; for most women it does not enable sexual liberation so much as rule it

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<sup>57</sup> Of course Thabo Mbeki served between Mandela and Zuma. The dissipating hope in democracy as securing a just society is the parallel that I am drawing here.

<sup>58</sup> Khanyisile Nkosi, "She is Sick – Pastor. Churchman Denies Molesting Zuma Rape Accuser in 1995," *Sowetan*, April 2006, 3. Nkosi published over 25 articles on the case, including "I'm Like Christ – Zuma," *Sowetan*, March 2006 12-13. Zuma denied likening himself to Christ, but asserted that the media's portrayal of his trial intended to crucify him like Christ. Protesters outside of the court had banners reading, "Zuma is Jesus," and "Why are you crucifying Zuma?" Jenni Evans, "Banners Liken Zuma to Christ," *IOL*, March 2006, <http://www.iol.co.za/news/south-africa/banners-liken-zuma-to-christ-270873> (accessed 01/24/2016).

<sup>59</sup> Moffett, "These Women, They Force us to Rape Them," 172.

dangerously a matter of life and death.”<sup>60</sup> The lack of reporters’ attention to Khwezi’s sexual identity as lesbian or bisexual obscures this relationship between traditional gender roles and investments in the health of the national body. In naming the sexual advances of ANC members as coercive, Khwezi upsets male claims to female bodies as well as the stability of a patriarchal South Africa.

Zuma’s rape trial foregrounds the relationship between sexuality and citizenship. A majority of the public sided with Zuma, in part because he embodied and conformed to Zulu ideals of masculinity and sexuality.<sup>61</sup> Journalists and scholars are therefore remiss for failing to flag Khwezi’s sexuality, because her queerness posed a threat to the assumptions that men desire women, men initiate intercourse, and women submissively fulfill men’s sexual appetites.<sup>62</sup> Although also a member of the ANC, Khwezi’s activism as a lesbian was considered to be disruptive citizenship, whereas Zuma’s sexual assertion proved fitting for his future presidency. If Shireen Hassim is correct that, “although women have extensive citizenship rights, they have to conform impeccably to narrow stereotypes of femininity to claim them,” then upright lesbian citizenship might not be possible in contemporary South

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<sup>60</sup> Hassim, “Democracy’s Shadows,” 69.

<sup>61</sup> For example, “Zuma gave evidence in formal Zulu despite his fluency in English, a choice seen by many commentators as a discursive weapon that was part of his styling as an authentic Zulu man. The idiom he used was deeply patriarchal, referring for example to Khwezi’s private parts as ‘her father’s kraal.’” Hassim, “Democracy’s Shadows,” 71.

“Because of Zuma’s status as the former deputy president, his positioning as a symbol of African masculinity bore a great deal of weight.” Mikki van Zyl, *The Price and the Prize*, 372.

<sup>62</sup> “This rebellion is dangerous business in patriarchy. Men at all levels of privilege, of all classes and colors have the potential to act out legalistically, moralistically, and violently when they cannot colonize women, when they cannot circumscribe our sexual, productive, reproductive, creative prerogatives and energies... The lesbian has decolonized her body.” Cheryl Clarke, “Lesbianism: an Act of Resistance,” in *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*, ed. Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzálúa (Watertown: Persphone Press, 1981), 128.

Africa.<sup>63</sup> Rights contingent upon gender conformity remains illusive for the majority of female, lesbian, trans and intersex citizens.

Zuma delivered the keynote address on Women’s Day in August 2016. The event marked the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the women’s march to Union Buildings to protest pass laws, which restricted the movement of black South Africans during apartheid. Four female activists – Naledi Chirwa, Simamkele Dlakavu, Tinyiko Shikwambane and Amanda Mavuso – stood silently in front of his stage with posters reading: “I am one in 3,” “Remember Khwesi,” “Khanga,” and “10 years later.” The signs pointed to the statistics of sexual assault in South Africa, the pseudonym for the woman who accused Zuma of rape, the traditional garment she wore at the time, and the time passed since the trial. When Zuma exited the stage, state security forcibly removed the women. The irony of being manhandled was not lost on Chirwa who stated, “Both men and women grabbed us, shoved us and used the most foul language to us... Tomorrow they will be singing wathint’ abafazi wathint’ imbokodo (you strike the woman, you strike the rock), yet they touched and violated us in front of everyone.”<sup>64</sup> Outside a banner read: “10 years later Zuma is president where is the justice?”

This event underscores the ongoing challenge to mitigate and prosecute sexual violence today. Despite having one of the most progressive constitutions in the world, including same-sex marriage, South Africa struggles to thwart gender-based violence. Women of color and LGBTIQ persons are at the greatest statistical risk for suffering abuse and even murder. I argue that a decolonial theology of sexuality is necessary for addressing appeals to traditional African culture and Christian religion that reassert patriarchy and

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<sup>63</sup> Hassim, “Democracy’s Shadows,” 70.

<sup>64</sup> Ntando Makhubu, “Woman in Zuma #Khwesi protest speaks out,” *IOL*, August 8, 2016 (accessed August 30, 2016). Videos of the events are available on numerous websites.

homophobia. Tanya Charles of Sonke Gender Justice specifically implores religious leaders to contribute to mitigating gender-based violence with theological and Biblical reasoning: “Faith communities are massive. Most people believe in God. Most people rely on religion to get through life. So our goal is to make space for us to have conversations about what that means. Hard conversations... There is also a lot of theological work, a reexamination of theological texts that has to happen. We are not experts in that.”<sup>65</sup> Recognizing the influence Christianity has in South African society, Charles facilitates workshops on gender-based violence with pastors. At these workshops, Sonke educates religious leaders about gender, sexuality, and the laws in South Africa. However, Charles expresses the need for Christians to contribute to the conversation from their area of expertise – with Christian theology and scripture that promote justice. The burden rests upon Christians to undermine homophobia, sexism, and sexual coercion on the basis of faith. In the next section I offer a theological analysis of scripture as a response to Charles’ call.

### ***2.7 Baptism by Drowning: The Sins of Propriety Committed Against the Unnamed Concubine in the Book of Judges***

While they were enjoying themselves, some of the wicked men of the city surrounded the house. Pounding on the door, they shouted to the old man who owned the house, “Bring out the man who came to your house so we can have sex with him.” The owner of the house went outside and said to them, “No, my friends, don’t be so vile. Since this man is my guest, don’t do this outrageous thing. Look, here is my virgin daughter and his concubine. I will bring them out to you now, and you can use them and do to them whatever you wish. But as for this man, don’t do such an outrageous thing.” But the men would not listen to him. So the man took his concubine and sent her outside to them, and they raped her and abused her throughout the night, and at dawn they let her go. At daybreak the woman went back to the house where her master was staying, fell down at the door and lay there until daylight. When her master got up in the morning and opened the door of the house and stepped out to continue on his way, there lay his concubine, fallen

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<sup>65</sup> Tanya Charles of Sonke Gender Justice, Johannesburg, interviewed by Michelle Wolff, July 15, 2015.

in the doorway of the house, with her hands on the threshold. He said to her, “Get up; let’s go.” But there was no answer. Then the man put her on his donkey and set out for home. When he reached home, he took a knife and cut up his concubine, limb by limb, into twelve parts and sent them into all the areas of Israel.

Judges 19:22-29 (NIV)

The biblical book of Judges presents a gruesome account of sexual and homicidal violence resulting from the pursuit of sexual holiness. It poses a foil for the more frequently cited story of Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis. Two angels come to Sodom and a righteous man named Lot persuades them to spend the night at his house rather than in the city square. The men of the city surround the house and demand that Lot turn over the angels, who appear to be men, for sex. Lot offers his virgin daughters instead, suggesting it would be more proper. Ultimately, the angels provide safe passage for Lot and his family when the city is punitively destroyed. However, in the book of Judges quoted above, the hospitable host and the Levite push the unnamed concubine out to the mob, and so offer her up for sexual exploitation.<sup>66</sup> There is no divine intervention, as there was with Lot. The unnamed concubine’s abuse and death are used to further incite expansive retributive violence and rape.<sup>67</sup>

Attempting to make sense of this tragic account, biblical scholars typically suggest that the unnamed concubine is symbolic of Israel’s discord. Alice Keefe explains: “...these stories of rape are not intended primarily as stories of personal tragedies, but of disruptions of community life in Israel. In these stories the rape provides the symbolic and interpretive

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<sup>66</sup> The story of Sodom and Gomorrah is frequently leveled as a biblical basis for asserting compulsory heterosexuality. Christian LGBTIQ advocates offer commentaries stressing the problem of hospitality rather than same-sex sexuality as being the sins of these cities. For more on this see Soul Force’s “Breaking Open: Sodom and Gomorrah,” 2016.

<sup>67</sup> See the chapters that follow the quoted section.

key for reading the accounts of warfare between and within communities...”<sup>68</sup> While it is true that this story of rape demonstrates a problem within the religious community, Keefe mistakenly reduces the concubine to a metonym. In so doing, Keefe obscures that sexual violence is a political act due to its personal nature; rape is not merely a rhetorical device that preserves male action as defining social events. Rather, rape literally embodies the regulation of hierarchy within society – and perhaps most frightfully when it is religiously sanctioned.

Even the metaphorical use of women’s bodies being grotesquely battered does not necessarily satisfy this reader’s concerns.<sup>69</sup> In fact, the act of storytelling and reading is itself ethically laden. J’Annine Jobling’s account of the “double jeopardy” for Biblical women suggests that one might unwittingly perpetuate the problem:

Firstly, [women] are assigned the role of victim; they figure as the objects of rape and of violent abuse. Secondly, even their rapes are not their own; it would seem that even the rape of women is not really about women, it is about men – power-struggles between individual men and, on a broader scale, in the socio-political ordering.<sup>70</sup>

Such double jeopardy unfolds within the text and also in contemporary readings of it. First, within the story the Levite deceptively retells the unnamed concubine’s story as his own; he claims that the men intended to kill him, but in fact they sought intercourse with him.<sup>71</sup> What the Levite feared might have happened to him the concubine actually suffered – rape and

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<sup>68</sup> According to Alice Keefe, “these stories of rape are not intended primarily as stories of personal tragedies, but of disruptions of community life in Israel. In these stories the rape provides the symbolic and interpretive key for reading the accounts of warfare between and within communities...” “Rapes of Women/Wars of Men,” in *Women, War and Metaphor: Language and Society in the Study of the Hebrew Bible*, ed. Claudia Camp and Carole Fountaine (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1993), 79.

<sup>69</sup> See Janet Martin Soskice, *Metaphor and Religious Language* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985).

<sup>70</sup> J’Annine Jobling, *Feminist Biblical Interpretation in Theological Context* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2002), 94.

<sup>71</sup> Phillips P. Elliot, “The Book of Judges Exposition: ‘Trying to Buy God’s Favor,’ in *Interpreter’s Bible*, ed. George A. Buttrick, vol. 2 (New York: Abingdon, 1953), 884.

murder.<sup>72</sup> Because these events took place within an honor system, her injuries were not her own. As the Levite's property, the unnamed concubine's abuse threatened his social identity.<sup>73</sup> Her sexuality was never framed within the modern concepts of an autonomous individual. From the onset her body and sexuality were the possession of her father, who is featured earlier in the story, and then the Levite. Consequently, when the mob first appeared demanding the Levite, his host suggested his own daughter and the concubine as more befitting. Here humiliation and homicidal rape are presumed to be rightly redirected to female bodies. In part, this is because heterosexual rape preserves the possibility of reproduction. Additionally, the role of godly womanhood as daughter or concubine is one of servitude and obedience – especially sexually. Within this framework, the host acted righteously.

The Levite's indignant response suggests that the exchange was not to his liking, and his account of the Benjamites' wrongdoing lacks detail. Whether it was their inhospitality to him, the rape of the concubine, or the murder of the concubine that offended him remains ambiguous. What is certain is that the Levite mishandled her body by dismembering and disseminating it. In this way the Levite prolongs her pornotroping – a term Hortense Spillers uses to describe slaves being subjected to dehumanizing sexual violence.<sup>74</sup> Spillers speaks specifically to the African American experience of medical objectification: “This profitable

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<sup>72</sup> Elliot, “The Book of Judges Exposition,” 884.

<sup>73</sup> Which is why J. Clinton McCann writes: “The Levite has no more concern for his murdered wife than he did while she was being raped and killed...he feels that *he* has been insulted.” *Judges Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), 133.

<sup>74</sup> Anne McClintock explains “porno-tropics” as, “Africa and the Americas had become what can be called a porno-tropics for the European imagination – a fantastic magic lanterns of the mind onto which Europe projected its forbidden sexual desires and fears.” *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Context* (New York: Routledge, 1995). Theologian J. Kameron Carter and African Americanist Alexander Weheliye expand upon Hortense Spillers' notion of pornotroping that she describes in *Black, White, and in Color: Essays on American Culture and Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 206.

‘atomizing’ of the captive body provides another angle on the divided flesh: we lose any hint of suggestion of a dimension of ethics, of relatedness between human personality and its anatomical features, between one human personality and another, between human personality and cultural institutions. To that extent, the procedures adopted for the captive flesh demarcate a total objectification as the entire captive community becomes a living laboratory.”<sup>75</sup>

The unnamed concubine’s multifaceted jeopardy is marked by utilitarian consumption. She serves the lusts of the mob and the political interests of the Levite. After the concubine has been penetrated to unconsciousness, the Levite tears her corpse apart – a devilment that reduces her to a missive that provokes the people of God to rape and murder in excess. Her body is the site upon which religion operates as cure for improper sexuality. The Levite galvanizes the tribes of Israel to act as one body to punish the Benjamites, and later to forcibly take the young women of Shiloh. Spilling her blood signifies wrongdoing in the community, which commentators frame as being an offense to God and Israel. The account also exposes the lengths to which religious communities will go in the name of sexual propriety, which is confused with holiness. The story of the unnamed concubine demonstrates how sexuality is mutually constituted with the political and personal. Neglecting the personhood of the unnamed concubine is to miss the critique of religious communities regulating sexuality. Such efforts to preserve the boundaries of insiders and outsiders, the laws of hospitality to the stranger, and righteousness unto God actually

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<sup>75</sup> Hortense Spillers, *Black, White, and in Color: Essays on American Culture and Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 208.



mislead Israel. Consequently, the book of Judges concludes with the refrain that everyone did as they saw right in their own eyes.<sup>76</sup>

In addition to framing her story as symbolic of Israel's political body, many assert God's goodness in an attempt to redeem this gory tale: "Yet in the midst of Israel's unraveling and near-death experiences, glimpses of hope emerge...The tribe of Benjamin was pulled back from the brink of extinction and death (Judges 20:46-21:24). God remained present and active even in the midst of sinful and tragic circumstances (Judges 20:18, 21, 28, 35)."<sup>77</sup> Unlike the Benjamites, the unnamed concubine did not nearly miss death or extinction; she *was* raped, murdered, and dismembered. Even commentaries marketed to women stress that although, "[t]he fate of those women is tragic: they are given over to the people their male relatives had refused to fight... Yet here and there we have seen God graciously at work in the patient, repetitive teaching of the same lessons and giving assurance far beyond the boundaries of normal expectation."<sup>78</sup> Presuming a chivalrous response might have been less tragic, Kroeger and Evans neglect interrogating the patriarchal structuring of sexuality within the text. In contrast, Moffett critiques the South African Anglican Archbishop for heading a Men's March in which a protest sign read: 'Hands off our women' to protest the "rape crisis." She asserts: "Apart from the entirely unproblematised identification of women as property, this kind of discourse reflects that South African men are still posed mostly patriarchal solutions to the problem of their own violence: if they are not to be predators, they are urged to be protectors"<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> See Judges 21:25.

<sup>77</sup> Elliot, "The Book of Judges Exposition," 726.

<sup>78</sup> Catherine Clark Kroeger and Mary J. Evans, *The IVP Women's Bible Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 206.

<sup>79</sup> Moffett, "These Women, They Force Us to Rape Them," 143-144.

Womanist theology calls attention to the intersectional and precarious existence of black women by refusing the capture of universals and prioritizing contextualization. One of the matriarchs of this discipline, Delores Williams, offers insight into an alternative to the problem described. In her groundbreaking text *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk*, Williams unpacks the story of Hagar in the Bible as analogous to the experiences of African American women who were impoverished, enslaved, exiled, and sexually exploited surrogates. Williams argues that black women require two things: defiance and life. Contrary to demands for obedience under the threat of death, Williams' text offers a different vision for Christian theology. Her womanist theology, like Foucault's activism, recognizes entangling webs of power that do not determine the subject but rather suggest the potential for agency. Williams points out that God does not liberate Hagar, but rather Hagar liberates herself when she runs away. Certainly, Williams' text is not without controversy; among other things, it does not promise freedom. But perhaps this provocatively models a radical theological alternative to neoliberalism.

Moreover, Williams asserts that black women are not called to surrogacy or suffering like Jesus on the cross, but rather to challenge evil.<sup>80</sup> In this way Williams' womanist theology might be more radical than that of Christian leaders and organizations in South Africa that appeal to the universal image of God in order to integrate LGBTIQ folk into South Africa's democratic state.<sup>81</sup> Today activists seek out Christians to articulate and contribute faith-based indictments of sexual coercion and homicidal violence, as well as affirmations of sexual and gender diversity. However, this project envisions a more radical politic than anti-violence or

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<sup>80</sup> Note that womanist theologian Joanne Marie Terrell disagrees with Delores Williams, and womanist ethicist Emily Townes asserts the need to challenge social evils with solidarity.

<sup>81</sup> See Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham on respectability politics in *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994).

anti-discrimination, because utilizing Christian theology to facilitate actualizing LGBTIQ access to rights perhaps too readily adheres to a neoliberal framework.

Williams' method enables us to attend to the voices of black lesbian women and trans men in South Africa who are suffering gender-based violence, hate crimes, and homicide. J. Clinton McCann posits: "Like the slain Abel, this nameless women, though dead, was still speaking (Heb 11:4) a mighty protest against this wanton crime committed against her and all women."<sup>82</sup> As with the unnamed concubine, the victims and survivors of "curative" rape are not tools for one's self-discovery. That would reduce each to a disposable object upon which identity is formed, thereby reiterating violence and victimization. Instead, I suggest that "curative" rape signals the limitations of neoliberal policies to mount an effective strategy for equitable queer citizenship.<sup>83</sup> In South Africa black lesbian women and trans men continue to be excluded from church communities only to suffer lethal sexual violence. Rights to marriage, adoption, and pensions fail to safeguard against these hate crimes. While the book of Judges demonstrates to readers the very real need for policy – recall that the theme underscores the depths of depravity run amuck when everyone does what is right in their own eyes – it is never enough simply to turn from religion to legislation. In both instances, it is in the name of sexual propriety that sexual and homicidal violence multiplies. The ramifications for misplaced pursuits of holiness appear boundless and inculcating. Human beings misdiagnose illness, using rape and murder as a religious "cure"

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<sup>82</sup> John E. Hamlin, *At Risk in the Promised Land: A Commentary on the Book of Judges* (Grand Rapids, MI: W. B. Eerdmans, 1990), 167.

<sup>83</sup> Scholars such as Lisa Vetten and Keri Day have made similar critiques of neoliberalism, but put forward different alternatives than I do here. See Lisa Vetten, "Unintended complicities: preventing violence against women in South Africa," *Gender & Development* 24.2 (2016): 291-306, and Keri Day, *Religious Resistance to Neoliberalism: Womanist and Black Feminist Perspectives* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2016).

for the queer threat. These attempts to regulate and reorient sexuality echo the misguided pursuit of holy sexuality found in biblical “texts of terror.”

Black lesbian women and trans men are certainly not the only targets of hate crimes in South Africa. Sharon Cox is a white, lesbian activist who has been working at Triangle Project for 18 years. She has a variety of roles as the health and support services manager. She often provides support for survivors of hate crimes, or those murdered, and their families in court. Cox describes her ongoing cases in which she acts as an advocate for LGBTIQ South Africans. Although the media focuses on black lesbians and trans men, Cox’s current cases are on two gay men and a transgender woman. All were brutally murdered in rural areas by young people. They were called a “*moofie*” – even the trans women – which is a homophobic slur typically aimed at effeminate men.

Cox tells me that although there are not gay clubs in these small towns, club owners often host pageants because they draw in crowds from the local community willing to pay an entrance fee. David Olyne was a pageant performer in Ceres. In 2014 David was hogtied, beaten, and set alight while still alive. The next day his body was discovered. Of the 11 people present, only one has been convicted of this crime – Christo Oncke, a man with one year of schooling and severe mental deficits. Cox explains that Oncke can write his first name and only a portion of his surname. She expresses frustration with the poor police work in handling this crime. She attributes this to the remote location, overwhelming caseloads for appointed counsel, and understaffed officers.

Cox also told me about Phoebe Titus, a transgender woman taking care of her neighbor’s baby on December 27, 2015. At the tuck (snack) shop, the baby dropped an ice-lolly (popsicle) on a boy’s foot. He responded to Phoebe with the slur “*vuil moffe*.”

Exacerbated by ongoing harassment from this teen, Phoebe handed the baby off to her friend who lived across the road from the shop. She picked up a plastic crate and gestured to the youth. A man handed the youth a knife, and he plunged it into Phoebe's main neck artery. The investigating officer reported discrepancy over who provided the knife. Some claimed it was a minor, who would be tried differently. David and Phoebe do not fit the media stereotype of hate crime targets, though they are the demographic that organizations like the Triangle Project are currently serving.

Crimes against LGBTIQ South Africans are part of a larger pattern of sexual violence. Anthropologist Janet Maia Wojcicki examines violence against women in townships who practice "survival sex."<sup>84</sup> Wojcicki stresses the distinction between "survival sex" and commercial sex work, in part, to redress ineffective HIV/AIDS prevention methods. The former, she explains, is more ambiguous; it is unclear whether the woman will have a one-night stand with the man buying her beer or if they will enter into a longer term relationship. Also, the exchange of good and services are not fixed as in neighboring brothels. Wojcicki attributes the difficulties women have in negotiating condom usage to these differences and others. She argues that both men and women perpetuate violence against women in taverns because the majority accepts the notion, nearly without exception, that accepting a beer is consent to sex.<sup>85</sup> Beatings and forced intercourse are consequently understood as befitting, rather than as abuse or rape. Beyond immediate trauma, Wojcicki also describes the effects of spreading HIV/AIDS.

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<sup>84</sup> Janet Maia Wojcicki, "She Drank His Money?: Survival Sex and the Problem of Violence in Taverns in Gauteng Province, South Africa," *Medical Anthropology Quarterly* 16.3 (2002): 267-293.

<sup>85</sup> For more on notions of authentic rape, see lawyer Susan Estrich's *Real Rape* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987).

Likewise, Didier Fassin attributes the ordinariness of extreme sexual violence in South Africa's townships to the history by which it was formed and the social relations that sustain it. He acknowledges that his interviewee's story is more than the detached report of horrific experiences, including, "forced incest with a maternal uncle; routine rape by the stepfather; transactional sex for a bed to sleep in, a meal to eat, sometimes only a drink; the brutality of physical power relations with successive boyfriends; AIDS as the result of this long history of violence," but that it demonstrates a collective participation: "In the face of this masculine violence, not only have other women been useless to her, but they have even facilitated it by their silence, their threats, their orders, or their advice: a grandmother who sees everything must say nothing for years; a mother who swears she will kill her if she sleeps with her husband; a cousin who tells her to look for men if she wants to survive; a girlfriend who invites her to a place of prostitution."<sup>86</sup> I share these accounts to contextualize LGBTIQ hate crimes within a broader spectrum of sexual violence that includes all people – gay, straight, male, female, child and adult.<sup>87</sup>

As with Pereira, Cox bemoans the media's misrepresentation of hate crimes committed against LGBTIQ people. In Olyne's case, Cox explains, initial reports cast the 11 witnesses to his torture and murder as unfortunate souls exposed to brutal violence. Regarding her third case, the assault of an effeminate gay man, Cox feared that a homophobic police officer might mishandle or lose the file. "I think we've pussy footed around religion for too long," she declares. The use of scripture and religion to literally and

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<sup>86</sup> Fassin, *When Bodies Remember*.

<sup>87</sup> Rachel Jewkes and Robert Morrell argue, "The women partners of hegemonically masculine men are at risk of HIV because they lack control of circumstances of sex during particularly risky encounters. They often present their acquiescence to their partners' behaviour as a trade off made to secure social or material rewards, for this ideal femininity is upheld, not by violence per se, by a cultural system of sanctions and rewards." "Gender and sexuality: emerging perspectives from the heterosexual epidemic in South Africa and implications for HIV risk and prevention," *Journal of the International AIDS Society* 13.6 (2010).

spiritually kill LGBTIQ people demands attention. Though grounded in the activist sector, Cox refuses to abandon her faith or the church. Activists like Cox set out to engage religious people in a way that not only honors religion, but also convicts Christians to redress this violence on the basis of their scripture and devotion to God.

Baptism is for many Christians initiation into community, and yet that doctrine takes a distorted form when used to harm LGBTIQ people. Indignant that a woman or trans man would have the audacity to refuse sex, perpetrators of “curative” rape attempt to return their victims to what they imagine to be a natural, God ordained submissive state. Sexual and homicidal violence is enacted to drive out the supposed wickedness of non-consent. These are acts intended to drown and kill defiant people. It violates in the name of God. Although more subtle, pushing LGBTIQ people out of church communities similarly renders them repositories for fear and wrath, as with the unnamed concubine. The purging of certain members of the church in this way wields Christianity as a cure for sexuality rather than a call to intimately embracing each other as co-heirs with Christ. In baptism God reveals Christ to be the Son and us to be his adopted co-heirs. It is not a process of killing off. Baptism invites in, makes new, and reorients us. We have intimate life together and are called to costly discipleship, though we are not up to the task even after baptism. Baptism continually turns us to God and our need for Christ to mediate all relationships.

### ***2.8 Conclusion: Sickness and Health, Life and Death***

Whatever the ideology in Genesis is behind the pursuit of coercive incest over and against non-reproductive sex, in the book of Judges it is the man of God who horrifies readers. In this story, the tribes of Israel accept the Levite’s indignation without commenting on his brazen mutilation of her body. His call to arms as a means of restoring justice and

order encloses Israel within an exploitative vision of sexual holiness. The Levite pulls the fractured community together against the supposed sexual sinners because establishing unity among the religious too often entails turning against one of their own and extinguishing them. Doing so authenticates an alliance over and against a constructed outside originating from within. For what greater threat to the body is there than that which grows from within? The scapegoat is actually innocent. Persecuting the “unnatural” use of sexuality takes precedent over the Levite’s infractions when he transformed her cadaver into a letter. The Israelites rampage against the suggestion that a man be subjected to sexual violence. Rape isn’t challenged here, so much as the damage to the Levite’s property and pride. Similarly rapists in South Africa are prosecuted for their offense against the state rather than LGBTIQ people. Victims’ stories are generalized into statistics and their names are effaced like the unnamed concubine. Challenging heterosexual copulation and reproduction, they offend religious sensibilities surrounding sexuality. Those who commit gang rape, murder, and dismemberment of individuals are understood to commit crimes against the social body. The unnamed women and trans men, already in precarious social standing, are routinely targeted because their voices are stifled, ignored, and misrepresented.

We miss the substance of Judges if we reduce it to a cautionary tale about civil war and discord. The Levite does not speak as a prophet against his society, but rather provokes turmoil in the name of upholding law and order. He agitates the tribes with his sensational story by reframing the events around himself and identifying with the group. The tribes of Israel come together charged with self-righteous anger at the lowest point in Israel’s history – not one of holiness but rather multiplying sins and exacerbating harm. As the group turns



ever inward, ferreting out the alleged reprobate, the result is unprecedented evil. The Levite and Israelites seek unmediated relationship with one another, their enemies, and women.

In addition to reducing justice to what was right in their own eyes, we are told that the reason for Israel's degeneration in Judges was tied to their failure to remember their identity in covenant with God. The sequence of judges and events progressively worsen, ending in the depths of human depravity. And yet the text reiterates, "Do not fear." In previous chapters we find Gideon face-to-face with an angel of the Lord, and God reassures him: "Do not fear, you shall not die."<sup>88</sup> This face-to-face intimacy in confronting one's mortality recurs throughout this book, and God instructs the faithful to not be afraid. After realizing he had conversed with an angel of the Lord, Manoah said to his wife, "We shall surely die, because we have seen God!"<sup>89</sup> Seeing and being seen is what we long for, and yet when it happens we sense our limitations and fragility. We mistake a messenger for God, and intimacy for death.

The terms of sickness and cure for the social and individual body, as synonymous with sexuality and Christianity respectively, demonstrate a troubling vision of community based on conditional acceptance. It is driven primarily by fear. From this misguided and ensnaring starting place, sexuality is especially targeted and pathologized.<sup>90</sup> Thus the refrain in LGBTIQ autobiographies is one of being "pushed out" of the church like the unnamed concubine, and then ravished, humbled, and murdered by society without just recourse. The mistreatment of LGBTIQ folk as disposable, unnamed people in Christian communities preserves the fictional boundary between outsider as sinner and insider as righteous. It is

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<sup>88</sup> Judges 6:22-23 (NRSV).

<sup>89</sup> Judges 13:22 (NKJV).

<sup>90</sup> Mikki van Zyl concurs: "Historically, psycho-medical discourses have pathologised queer sexualities as 'sick', while religious ideologies typify them as 'sin.'" *The Price and the Prize*, 368.

through this very process of choreographing bodies spatially in the name of a healthy body that we endlessly amplify sin under the auspices of staving it off.

There are many factors that contribute to the problem of sexual and homicidal violence against impoverished black lesbians and trans men in South Africa. Mbeki and Smith's discourse demonstrates the difficulty and necessity of intersectional and trans/national analysis. LGBTIQ activists of color in South Africa subsequently abandon and censure the phrase "corrective rape" due to its obstruction of justice. Mbeki and Smith espouse a vision of African gender roles and religion analogous to the human rights rhetoric investment in universalizing humanity. Thus, their attempts to depart from apartheid's inequity most adversely affects impoverished, black lesbians and trans men precisely because it retains the colonial objective: to absorb all bodies into a false universality by reifying male and female, African and Western. Persistently revealing the incoherence and crisis of universalizing humanity and normative citizenship, black lesbians and trans men remain the targets of disciplinary violence in South Africa.

The notion of "curative" rape is a baptism by drowning. It tortures and kills in the name of holiness and life. Black lesbians and trans men in South Africa face social and literal death daily.<sup>91</sup> A theology that enables rather than impedes those who consider themselves to be righteous in raping and killing non-gender conforming people echoes the horrors narrated in the book of Judges. Religious leaders and Christian groups are wrong to claim holiness as authorizing acts of sexual violence. Instead of supplicating on behalf of the wicked as Abraham did prior to Sodom's destruction, relying upon God's adjudication, and honoring another's body, the most fervent people of God sometimes commit grave sins

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<sup>91</sup> See Orlando Patterson, Abdul JanMohamed, Pamela Lightsey, etc.

against LGBTIQ people. The purpose of baptism is to proclaim the eternal life available in Christ; it is not to judge, torture, and kill the person. Yet in the name of sexual holiness LGBTIQ South Africans are being mutilated and slain. Indignant perpetrators commit sexual and homicidal violence with the intent to remedying unholy gender and sexuality. This is a baptism that embraces death and, as will be seen in the next chapter, Christianity as “cure” posits a resurrection manufactured by biotechnology. In what follows I examine this distorted resurrection as the loss of a prior revelation, and offer an alternative constructive trans theology.

### 3. Chapter Two: Transfigurations: Sex Reassignment, Gender Alignment or Revelation?

#### 3.1 Introduction: Sally Gross

Sally Gross was born in 1953 to Jewish parents in Cape Town, South Africa. Assigned male at birth, Sally would only be deemed intersex at age forty.<sup>1</sup> Her parents were not particularly religious, and yet Gross became a devout orthodox Jew as an adolescent and underwent intensive rabbinical study at a yeshiva in England. During puberty, Gross came to realize her sex drive was low and thought of herself as “one of nature’s celibates.”<sup>2</sup> She developed the impression that in Orthodox Judaism, “One is expected to produce grandchildren. I did not believe at the time that Orthodox Judaism had religious symbols which could make sense of the way in which I was different, whatever it was.”<sup>3</sup> She also struggled with her community’s complacency in apartheid. Gross could not have predicted that she would later become a Catholic priest and scholar, or that her intersex status would then push her out of ministry against her will, and that as a trans woman she would found and direct Intersex South Africa, leading the charge in intersex activism. How is it that someone so academically gifted, devoted to her faith, and beloved by her monastic community and parishioners would be barred from her calling on the basis of her gender presentation?

The details of Gross’ biography underscore the state and church’s management of sex assignment – the withholding of citizenship and communion from those who depart

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<sup>1</sup> Because Gross identified as female, I will use female pronouns throughout.

<sup>2</sup> Stephen Coan, “The Struggle to be Sally,” *The Natal Witness*, February 21-23, 2000 (published in three parts), <http://www.isna.org/pdf/gross3.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Coan, “The Struggle to be Sally.”

from male or female designation, masculine or feminine gender presentation in alignment with sex, and heterosexuality. Before narrating the South African historical context in relation to these operations – both literal and social on individual and collective bodies – and a theological alternative, I say more about Gross’s biography in this section to stress the stakes of being denied religious and civil community. Much like sex and gender are problematically conflated or isolated, being intersex and/or trans is distinct yet related which is how I understand them in this chapter.

For Gross, Christianity held promise. She hoped that within Christian doctrine and relationships she would be free to love God and her neighbor regardless of her intersex body. She explains her conversion from Judaism to Christianity as politically motivated and, specifically, grounded in her experience as intersex:

The image of the cross seemed to be an icon of all manner of confusion and suffering. The Holocaust was there, the horror of apartheid was there, and my own personal confusion and pain – which I could never publicly admit – was there as well. And in the resurrection was a symbol that this was transcended. And at the back of mind, there would have been an awareness that in Christianity there are strands of tradition in which celibacy is valued and turned to positive use.<sup>4</sup>

Her resistance efforts during apartheid led Gross to seek asylum in Israel in 1977, where she studied at the University of Haifa and became a citizen. Next Gross moved to Oxford, England to join the Dominicans as a novitiate. She was ordained, earned a masters and doctorate, and taught moral theology and ethics at Blackfriars. Gross became a sub-prior at the Cambridge priory, where she was asked to spend six months teaching at St. Joseph’s in her place of birth – South Africa. When she was asked to stay permanently, Gross felt compelled to explore her gender identity.

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<sup>4</sup> Coan, “The Struggle to be Sally.”

Gross believed that counseling would enable her to overcome her inner turmoil and fully engage in priestly service. Counseling turned out to not be the healing she anticipated. The counselor encouraged Gross to get her testosterone levels tested, which indicated she was intersex. The counselor then strongly suggested that Gross begin integrating feminine clothing and expression incrementally – first at home, then in the neighborhood, and finally the world – for discernment and treatment purposes. Living as a man in a monastic community, of course, prohibited such exploration. Gross requested a leave of absence from the Dominicans for a year to do as her counselor advised. Her major religious superior expressed embarrassment that she had been ordained a priest (even unwittingly) as anything other than definitively male, because priesthood is reserved for men in the Catholic Church. With great reservation he granted Gross time away, though under a litany of conditions. She was forbidden from contacting her fellow religious by phone or letter, she could not function as a priest or deliver talks, and she was denied employment references. The worst aspect, Gross recalls, was that, “They effectively made it impossible for me to remain in communion... It seemed to me that it made a mockery of the very notion of fellowship if you couldn’t join in the life of the parish... I did not believe that at a time when I needed friendship and contact more than any other time in my life, these, specifically, were denied me.”<sup>5</sup> Gross was denied ministry in monastic community, to which she felt called.

Gross had difficulty obtaining a South African passport with her name Sally and female designation. During this process Gross realized that she had never been given a birth certificate. She reflects: “Which suggested, by implication, that I could not get confirmation

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<sup>5</sup> Coan, “The Struggle to be Sally.”

that I had been born. I had ceased in law to exist as a person.”<sup>6</sup> Gross’ assertion is technical, not histrionic, because she uncovered that South Africa’s progressive constitutional protection of “persons” only applied to those born unambiguously male or female.<sup>7</sup> Journalist Stephen Coan writes: “The journey from Selwyn to Sally has taken Gross to the outer limits of human identity, both physically and psychologically and incorporated every dimension of her life: political, social, and religious. Her experience has implications for all of us, and our institutions, both secular and religious, because our society insists on the existence of only two sexes, male and female.” Sally’s story narrates both church and state disenfranchising an intersex and trans person from intimate life in community.

It was informally suggested that if Gross were to undergo genital “disambiguation” surgery it would quicken the process of obtaining her identity documents. She rejected the notion that the state would require medical intervention in exchange for rights: “I considered this an immoral suggestion – to undergo dangerous and unnecessary surgery as a condition for having a legal identity. I made it clear I would take legal action if this was put to me formally.”<sup>8</sup> In South Africa today, as in many countries, infants born with an ambiguous sex organs are surgically “corrected,” most frequently with a “clitoral recession.” In her activism, Gross asserted that parents should refrain from imposing surgery on their children because their intersex bodies do not threaten the child’s life so much as culture.<sup>9</sup> She was not critical of adults opting for medical interventions; to be clear, Gross opposed surgery done without informed consent. When Gross fled South Africa in 1977 due to her anti-apartheid activism,

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<sup>6</sup> Coan, “The Struggle to be Sally.”

<sup>7</sup> Gabrielle Le Roux, “A Tribute to Sally Gross,” February 23, 2014, <http://www.thefeministwire.com/2014/02/tribute-sally-gross/> (accessed September 21, 2016)

<sup>8</sup> Coan, “The Struggle to be Sally.”

<sup>9</sup> Coan, “The Struggle to be Sally.”

she escaped the coerced sex reassignment surgeries and aversion therapies that gay and lesbian conscripts suffered under theocratic apartheid.

In this chapter I place the pathologization of trans and intersex people in South Africa alongside Christ's transfiguration. What emerges are the ways in which the notion of gender as a biologically self-evident, natural dualism is curated by the state and church. Citizenship and salvation are awarded those who conform to either male or female sex and gender. Gayle Salamon's work illuminates the former, and apartheid theocracy serves as an example of the latter. After identifying the theo-political construction and management of sex difference I consider the implications of the spectacular event of Christ's transfiguration, which uniquely frees humanity from boundaries around the body, identity, and community.

### ***3.2 The State of Gender***

Discourse on trans and intersex people frequently conflates sex, gender, and sexuality. The notion that sex is the natural presentation of male or female genitals that corresponds unequivocally to masculinity and femininity, and facilitates heterosexuality underlies the impulse to "cure." Church and state attempt to remedy ambiguous sex designation under the assumption that proper gender performance and heterosexuality will follow. In exchange for adherence to this polarization, the church and state promise salvation and citizenship. Conversely, deterring from these extremes merits condemnation and disenfranchisement. Although a post-colonial, neoliberal understanding of subjectivity presumes sex and sexuality to be private matters, in what follows these prove to operate within the public sphere. Within the context of apartheid, which heightened the distinction and hierarchy between men and women, white and black, desire for "cure" emerged from an insufferable theo-political context.



Contrary to the notion that sex is either biologically self-evident or personally discerned, Gayle Salamon illuminates sex as property of the state. In *Assuming a Body: Transgender and Rhetorics of Materiality*, she articulates the second-class citizenship trans people suffer. This takes place on literal and figurative registers because the imagined health of the social and political body is at stake. Salamon finds that the structural conventions of trans autobiography bear a political register: “Foremost among these [thematic and narrative elements] is the way that gender is analogized to a country, and membership in one or the other gender is an allegiance figured as a kind of nationalism.”<sup>10</sup> She goes on to describe the function of state documents in demarcating sex in order to argue that sex is property belonging to the state rather than the individual. Salamon asserts:

My argument about trans specificity is at its most emphatic here, and I argue that sex is analogized to property or understood metaphorically as property in much literature, but sex is treated as material property in transpeoples’ dealings with medical and state bureaucracies and functions specifically as state property rather than private property for transpeople in a way that does not for the normatively gendered.<sup>11</sup>

Anthropologist Amanda Swarr contributes to Salamon’s insight the highly relevant aspect of race in the conferring or withholding of citizenship. With a play on words, Swarr links trans operations to the political transition from apartheid to democracy in South Africa. She interviews medical practitioners and patients of “specials” – meaning sex-reassignment surgeries offered for under 8USD to people of color.<sup>12</sup> Simone, a so-called “special,” explains that being trans during South Africa’s transition to democracy frequently entailed

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<sup>10</sup> Gayle Salamon, *Assuming a Body: Transgender and Rhetorics of Materiality* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 173.

<sup>11</sup> Salamon, *Assuming a Body*, 8.

<sup>12</sup> Amanda Lock Swarr, *Sex in Transition: Remaking Gender & Race in South Africa* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2012), 35.

sex-work because so few employers were willing to retain trans employees. Swarr argues that South Africans of color were further criminalized with experimental and “botched” sex reassignment surgeries, whereas white gay conscripts were conformed to distinctly dichotomous gender roles: “For apartheid’s architects, race and gender were inextricable: white homosexual conscripts were forced to align sex with compulsory heterosexuality, while specials’ liminally sexed bodies reinforced the perceived abnormality of black and coloured South Africans.”<sup>13</sup> According to Swarr, doctors who performed sex-reassignment surgery as a “cure” for sexuality intended to conform whites to the gender binary and heterosexuality, in order to prime whites for proper citizenship.

Heterosexuality was the benchmark of health and merited the rights and benefits of citizenship. Swarr found that the doctors accused of mistreating gay and lesbian conscripts understood post-operative heterosexuality to be the measure of successful healing. She quotes Dr. Jooste in 2000: “I wanted them to function in society as an ordinary straight man or woman. Transsexuals still hanging out in the gay clubs didn’t seem to have been very good candidates. Most were postoperatively heterosexual.”<sup>14</sup> Although sexuality is thought to be the private exchange between consenting adults, the specifics of partnership and its ends prove to have significant social and political consequences.<sup>15</sup> Under the weight of second-class citizenship, LGBTIQ South Africans hoped that aversion therapy or sex-reassignment surgery might offer a means to full citizenship. Altering genitals promised to shift gender

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<sup>13</sup> Swarr, *Sex in Transition*, 38-39.

<sup>14</sup> Swarr, *Sex in Transition*, 56.

<sup>15</sup> Prior to transitioning to democracy, “The grafting of colonial gender norms onto indigenous gender systems, coupled with the institutionalized racism of apartheid, ensured a qualitatively different experience of family life for black women in South Africa. Indeed, the practice of migrant labour, forcible removals and resettlements and the routine harassment, detention and imprisonment of those opposing apartheid showed scant regard for any notion of black families as inviolate, private or outside the reach of coercive State authority.” Lisa Vetten, “The ghost of families past: Domestic violence legislation and policy in post-apartheid South Africa,” *Agenda* 28.2 (2014): 49.

and, more importantly, to facilitate heterosexuality for the purpose of social integration and access to rights.

Trans gender and sexuality are treated as state property, whereas cisgendered heterosexuals enjoy the fantasy of privacy. Trans people expose the fiction of an autonomous, politically engaged individual subject. Salamon's reading of Freud considers the ways trans people complicate and challenge male-or-female designations as neither scientifically evident upon viewing the body nor psychologically asserted. Lacanian psychoanalysis enables Salamon to unmask the falsehood of coherence, wholeness, and mastery.<sup>16</sup> As she explores touch and affect as constitutive of the body, Salamon contends that the body's origins are relational, which "ensures that the body schema cannot be construed as an entirely voluntaristic project, somehow freely chosen by the subject."<sup>17</sup>

Anxieties about proper citizenship motivated attempts to "cure" gay and lesbian conscripts. Apartheid government surveillance considered same-sex intimacy to express political deviance and even defection. Conforming civilians and soldiers to hyper-gendered roles was intended to secure the nation. Daniel Conway asserts that, "The yoking of masculinity with violence and specifically military service, as a method for achieving hegemonic masculinity and citizenship, was a central tenet of apartheid society."<sup>18</sup> Intersex, trans, gay, lesbian, bisexual, and queer bodies and intimacy were presumed to threaten the country by challenging traditional masculinity. On the basis of Christian theology, the

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<sup>16</sup> Salamon, *Assuming a Body*, 23-24.

<sup>17</sup> Salamon, *Assuming a Body*, 31.

<sup>18</sup> Daniel Conway, "'All these long-haired fairies should be forced to do their military training. Maybe they will become men'. The end conscription campaign, sexuality, citizenship and military conscription in apartheid South Africa," *South African Journal of Human Rights* 20 (2004): 214.

National party regulated sex, gender, and sexuality for the sake of the nation. As mentioned above, the confusion of these categories with citizenship and faith persist to the present day.

Apartheid made same-sex attraction so insufferable that gays and lesbians sought out aversion therapy and reassignment surgery as a “cure.” Desperate to conform to heterosexuality, which would make one intelligible and acceptable within the apartheid state, no measure was unthinkable. Attuned to the unbearable isolation and criminalization of failing to be “cured,” LGBTQ people forcefully disciplined the body. For Christians, “cure” took the form of self-imposed celibacy, praying the gay away, marrying an opposite sex partner, having children, aversion therapy, and sometimes sex reassignment surgery. Denied intimate life together in churches and society proved to be a burden more unbearable than aversion therapy or reassignment surgery.

While it might appear progressive on the surface that the South African government paid for sex-reassignment operations and readily changed identity documents to align with the patient’s new sex, these were conducted in an effort to “cure” sexuality. Ironically, under democracy today the Department of Home Affairs infamously lags in changing identity documents.<sup>19</sup> Delays are significant because identity documents are required for voting, job applications, hospital access, school records, banking, travel, and obtaining a driver’s license. Activist organization Iranti reports that the Alteration of Sex Status and Sex Descriptor Act 49 of 2003 is regularly ignored and violated today, such that trans woman Nadia Swanepoel

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<sup>19</sup> Shelper’s quote in Paul Kirk, “Military Mutilation: Another Victim Steps Forward,” *Mail & Guardian* August 4-10, 2000, 1.

embarked upon a hunger strike.<sup>20</sup> Delays in the government issuing accurate identity documents disenfranchise intersex and trans citizens.

### ***3.3 Medical Ethics: Sex-Reassignment and Aversion Therapy, a Theocratic “Cure”***

In 2004 Kotzé and Labushagné set out to measure perceptions and acceptance of “transsexualism” among a variety of respondents including theologians. If their sample is representative, nearly a quarter of theologians deem “transsexualism” “the result of the sinful nature of man,” and are against surgical intervention because it would harm God’s creation and impede the call to reproduce.<sup>21</sup> Underlying the theologians’ concern is the assumption that sex difference is not only “natural” and self-evident, but an indication that God created people for reproductive sex. It does not account for the biological variety of bodies or the good of non-procreative sex for opposite or same-sex couples. Sixty-five percent of the theologians expressed the opinion that an operation, post-operation opposite-sex marriage, and parenting were tolerable – a few made an allowance for sexual fulfillment. In light of Kotzé and Labushagné’s findings, the investigators conclude that, “gender reassignment is not a cure, it is merely a treatment to prevent other, more serious problems such as suicide or substance abuse.”<sup>22</sup> Therefore, the researchers posit that transitioning is not a good, but rather the lesser of two evils; it is an allowance granted to avoid more dire outcomes. Kotzé and Labushagné’s published their article more than forty years after a study by South African doctor Alexander Don. Like Don, they similarly discourage patients from transitioning.

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<sup>20</sup> “The legal recognition of Trans People in South Africa,” September 16, 2016, <http://www.iranti-org.co.za> (accessed September 28, 2016). Iranti also published a toolkit titled: “Ending Pathological Practices against Trans and Intersex bodies in Africa,” (February, 2017). It can be downloaded from their website <http://www.iranti-org.co.za/content/Resources/ICD-pathologies-2017/toolkit-ending-pathological-processes.html>

<sup>21</sup> CJ Kotzé and CW Labushagné, “Transsexualism – an investigation,” *Social Work/Maatskaplike Werk* 40.1 (2004): 82.

<sup>22</sup> Kotzé and Labushagné, “Transsexualism,” 85.

In 1963, Don used a small sample size of four trans men to correlate trans “illness” with “a strong homosexual trait” and “generally subnormal I.Q.”<sup>23</sup> From these patients he outlined an aetiology of “transvestitism” as follows: (1) *Traumatic Theory*, (2) *Chromosomal and Hormonal Theory*, (3) *Theories of Psychological Conditioning*, (4) *Psychoanalytic Theory*, (5) *Relationships to Homosexuality*, and (6) *Transvestism as a Symptom of Disordered Brain Function*.<sup>24</sup> For Don, surgical intervention should be limited to establishing unambiguous genitalia. In addition, he cautioned doctors about potential legal recourse. Finally, and most germane to the discussion here, Don references scripture as establishing proper gender expression: “The condemnation of society for these practices stems from Biblical times and injunctions against such conduct were laid down in the Mosaic Code. “The woman shall not wear that which pertaineth unto a man, neither shall a man put on a woman’s garment: for all that do so are abomination unto the Lord their God.”<sup>25</sup> We see here that within the context of a scientific journal publication he appeals to religion to condemn trans dress. Don recommends three aversion therapies: psycho-, hormone, and electroconvulsive. He explains that during these treatments he would begin with recording the patient’s description of color slides in which the patient is wearing “female attire.” Don would then induce nausea and vomiting by apomorphine injections.<sup>26</sup> Two-hour sessions were conducted over the course of a week, and Don reports “complete recovery” in six-month follow appointments. Despite his reported rate of success, in his concluding remarks Don bemoans that few patients are dedicated to aversion therapy

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<sup>23</sup> Alexander M. Don, “Transvestism and transsexualism. A report of 4 cases and problems associated with their management,” *South African Medical Journal* 37 (1963): 485.

<sup>24</sup> The pairing of aetiology with theory as steps is Don’s phrasing in “Transvestism and transsexualism,” 482-483.

<sup>25</sup> Don, “Transvestism and transsexualism,” 484.

<sup>26</sup> Don, “Transvestism and transsexualism,” 485.

because the majority “will seek treatment in countries where surgical reconstruction is available or, failing that, suicide is not an unlikely outcome.”<sup>27</sup>

From Don’s article we learn of the frustrations he experienced treating trans patients, namely that the possibility of surgery short-circuits the most effective treatment – aversion therapy. Don’s reference to a Judeo-Christian Biblical text as founding implicitly justified biases against trans people suggests that: 1) the existence of trans people is not a new occurrence, 2) trans dress is an affront to God’s law, and, consequently 3) trans people are in need of correction and cure. In the decades that followed Don’s publication, the apartheid government made a concerted effort to “cure” conscripts identified as “homosexual” with aversion therapy and coerced “sex-change” operations. Apartheid was not merely theocratic in theory but pragmatically utilized religious leaders to abet regulating intimate partnering. In light of this collusion, it is necessary to consider the compatibility of Christian theology with violent state interventions into sexuality.

The construction of diseased sexuality entailed turning to both literal and figurative deployments of Christian theology for a “cure.” For example, researchers on *The Aversion Project* describe the use of confession and explicit theological language to regulate conscripts’ sexuality. Identified “homosexuals” were remedied with aversion therapy and sex-reassignment surgery. The latter was measured a successful cure if the patient then identified as heterosexual:

Within the military, homosexuality was seen as a “disease” requiring medical treatment rather than grounds for exemption from conscription. Conscripts who were suspected of being gay were encouraged to “confess” their deviance, and submit for treatment—electric shock aversion therapy—in the psychiatric unit. These treatments occurred despite the fact that the DSM-III had

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<sup>27</sup> Don, “Transvestism and transsexualism,” 485.

declassified homosexuality as a mental disorder in 1973, and electric shock aversion therapy for homosexuality has been discredited and was no longer used after 1967 in Britain.<sup>28</sup>

Military chaplains played an integral role in diagnosing homosexuality and prescribing aversion therapy. According to Resister No. 56:8 – “Military Chaplains try to turn conscripts towards a ‘Christianity’ designed to sanction the actions they are told to carry out, and to legitimise the SADF’s role in defense of apartheid.”<sup>29</sup> *The Aversion Project* researchers explain, “Within this persecutory and punitive religious framework, homosexuality was considered a sin, or worse—evil, and it was the task of the army chaplains to set homosexuals on the road to blissful heterosexuality.”<sup>30</sup> Chaplains deployed religious rhetoric that sanctioned the government in pathologizing conscripts. Theological tropes, such as sin and confession, provided shorthand for justifying mistreatment. Fortified with Christian theology, “curative” interventions appeared incontestable.

Claims that God created each person either male or female for the purpose of clearly demarcating social roles, signal an effort to catalog citizens. Intersex, bisexual, gay, lesbian, and queer South Africans were contorted into the male-female dyad and heterosexual hierarchy in the name of God and by the state:

The twin cornerstones of apartheid ideology was white Afrikaner nationalism, and a rationale for it based on Christianity as interpreted by the major Afrikaner churches. Both shared a conservative biologicistic construction of gender which also permeated the armed forces. In its rationalisation of its actions the Nationalist Party claimed that it was a citizen’s religious duty to support the

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<sup>28</sup> Mikki van Zyl, Jeanelle de Gruchy, Sheila Lapinsky, Simon Lewin, Raeme Reid, *The Aversion Project: Human Rights Abuses of Gays and Lesbians in the South African Defence Force by Health Workers During the Apartheid Era* (Cape Town: Simply Said and Done, 1999), v.

<sup>29</sup> van Zyl, et. al., *The Aversion Project*, 38.

<sup>30</sup> van Zyl, et. al., *The Aversion Project*, 38.



government, as it claimed its authority to rule from God—therefore the SADF had likewise gained its authority from God.<sup>31</sup>

The Dutch Reformed Church (in Afrikaans *Nederduitse Geredormeerde Kerk* – abbreviated as NGK or DRC) worked in concert with the state during apartheid. It utilized reformer John Calvin’s doctrine of creation to legitimate racism, sexism, and homophobia. This misappropriation asserted that the created order casts men superior to women and whites to blacks. Framing inequity as God’s original plan for humanity gave traction to apartheid policy; it also confused Israel’s election with the Afrikaans people.

Lack of media and scholarly attention to religion in justifying apartheid’s aversion therapy might explain the collusion of theology, medicine, and state. Ruth Bleier suggests that the hospital became the new church: “The psychiatric couch then became the secular confessional—confidentiality behind closed doors—and in medical categorisation the transgression slipped easily from ‘sin’ to ‘disease’, and a mental pathology was set in motion.”<sup>32</sup> *The Aversion Project* report suggests that medicine promised to free the gay or lesbian from religious condemnation.<sup>33</sup> In practice, the shift from religious categories to medical classifications remained negative:

The effects of labeling homosexuality as an “illness” were not restricted to male conscripts. In 1983, a number of women in the navy were sent for psychological counselling on account of their lesbianism. In the Permanent Force, homosexuality was forbidden, and many homosexuals lived in fear of being found out. Their promotion, careers and privacy were under constant threat, and they were in danger of being stigmatised and labelled “mentally sick.”<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> van Zyl, et. al., *The Aversion Project*, 38.

<sup>32</sup> The Aversion Project report quoting Ruth Bleier, *Science and Gender: A Critique of Biology and Its Theories on Women* (New York: Pergamon Press, 1984), 177. The Aversion Project Report also put it this way, “The law labelled male homosexuals criminals, religion made it a sin, and the medical profession treated it as a disease.” van Zyl, et. al., *The Aversion Project*, 55.

<sup>33</sup> “The authoritarianism of the broader society allowed them to accept the condemnation of the church, and to place their trust in a medical profession which offered them a ‘cure.’” van Zyl, et. al., *The Aversion Project*, 55.

<sup>34</sup> van Zyl, et. al., *The Aversion Project*, vi.

In addition to employment concerns, victims suffered biological and emotional costs including hormonal imbalance, gender ambiguity, sexual dysfunction, and psychological instability. Conscript Neil describes his experience:

My sexuality during adolescence was reasonably normal as far as libido goes. But after Dr. Reynders's "medicine" I could never have a normal sexual relationship. I had chronically low testosterone counts, that continue until now. The fact that the "medication" took such quick effect—within two months my body had changed so much that a doctor had no hesitation diagnosing severe hormonal problems—or that I might be a transsexual—indicates that the medication must have been highly toxic...For six months after this I was totally impotent.<sup>35</sup>

Medical language misled patients into believing that their sexuality was a curable disease.<sup>36</sup>

Neil unwittingly underwent transitioning by hormone treatment. Seeking to "cure" his same-sex attraction, Neil found himself designated female and suffering from impotence.

According to *The Aversion Project* report, duty to the government trumped healthcare:

"[Doctors'] allegiances were with a system that was based on an ideology of conflict and war, and not healing."<sup>37</sup> How did these events relate to the church and Christian theology?

From 1971 to 1989 chaplains identified gay and lesbian military personnel and referred them to psychiatrists to be "cured."<sup>38</sup> Within this context, informed consent took on a murky form because some of the conscripts were underage and many were desperate to

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<sup>35</sup> Original quote: My seksualiteit gedurende adollesensie was redelik normal wat libido aanbetref het. Ek kon egter na Dr. Reynders se 'medisyne' nooit weer normal 'n seksuele verhouding handhaaf nie. Ek het chroniese lae testosteron tellings gehad; wat tot vandag voortuur. Die feit dat die 'medikasie' so vining binne 2 maande my hele ligaam verander het; dat 'n medikus min twyfel gehad het date k of ernstige hormonale probleme moet hê—óf dalk transeksueel mag wees—moet aandui dat die medikasie hoogs giftig moes wees...Ek was vr 6 maande hierna total impotent." van Zyl, et. al., *The Aversion Project*, 84.

<sup>36</sup> "The information I had at the time from articles and the little I knew about it was that it was a disease, and because it was a disease I could be cured...I thought that [aversion therapy] was the only solution for my dilemma..." van Zyl, et. al., *The Aversion Project*, 72.

<sup>37</sup> van Zyl, et. al., *The Aversion Project*, 98.

<sup>38</sup> "Report: South Africa performed sex changes to 'cure' gay soldiers," *The Advocate*, July 29-31, 2000, <http://www.advocate.com/html/news/072900-073100/072900news01.html> (accessed September 25, 2016).

escape armed combat. Victims report being assured that the doctors could cure their same-sex attraction, though they were not apprised of the methods. Conscript Smith describes the embroilment of faith, citizenship, and sexuality in securing his compliance:

First I was forced to admit I was gay in front of my parents,” he said. “It was the first time they realised I was homosexual and they were horrified. Dr Levine told them he had a therapy that would ‘re-orientate’ me, so I agreed to the treatment. / He would strap electrodes onto my arms with wet cloths, show me erotic gay pictures and encourage me to tell him my fantasies. As I was aroused he would wind up the current from what looked like a souped-up massage machine and my arms would involuntarily twist back over my head – I would scream for him to stop. It was incredibly painful.” / After the electricity was turned off, Smith was shown pictures of naked women so that he would associate the lack of pain with the “normal” images and be “cured”. / “Almost immediately I knew it was not going to work, but I was just a troopie, a product of the Christian Nationalist school system. There was no way I could protest – I just endured.<sup>39</sup>

For Smith, his formation in the Christian Nationalist school system primed him to oblige Dr. Levine. Sensing his parent’s “horror,” Smith sought relief from social and religious stigma by way of painful aversion therapy. Another victim penned a letter to the editor of *Mail & Guardian* and cited the newspaper’s omission of churches and religious people’s culpability in failing to assist conscripts.<sup>40</sup> By the 1970s, aversion therapy had already been discredited within the global medical community. The use of chemical castrations and electroshock aversion therapy upon patients in Ward 22 of the Voortrekkerhoogte military hospital was not typical for the time. To the present day, some victims remain stranded between male or female classification due to incomplete procedures and lack of hormone treatment.

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<sup>39</sup> Ken Vernon, “Troopie tells of gay ‘torture horror,’” *Sunday Times*, June 22, 1997.

<sup>40</sup> “Letters: Exposé of evil omitted churches and parents,” *Mail & Guardian*, August 11-17, 2000.

In the years that followed South Africa's transition to democracy, the Health and Human Rights Project investigated claims of medical mistreatment and pressured the Truth and Reconciliation Commission to take action against the practitioners involved, in particular Dr. Aubrey Levine. Charges, however, were limited to Levine's use of shock therapy and not his sex-reassignment interventions. Levine went from practicing medicine in the South African Defense Force (SADF) to being a professor at Rhodes University, then the clinical head of the psychiatric ward of Fort England Hospital in Grahamstown, and finally he immigrated to Canada to continue his practice. Outraged that he appeared to have evaded accountability, a number of journalists took to publishing articles on the allegations troops made against him in *The Mail & Guardian*, *The Star*, *Business Day*, *The Lancet*, *Gay Times*, *Sunday Independent*, and others. Journalist Paul Kirk, who authored numerous articles on these "curative" efforts from the late 1990s through the early 2000s, asserts that, "Surgeons who served under the SADF confirmed that a number of patients died on the operating table while having their sex changed."<sup>41</sup> After three years of investigations, Amnesty International accused health professionals and the apartheid government of actively perpetrating human rights abuses. Although *The Aversion Project* researchers successfully obtained evidence for Levine's aversion therapy, they struggled to find interviewees who could give an account of suffering coerced sex reassignment surgeries. When I asked Graeme Reid, who oversaw the project, whether he had the sense that this implied a gap in the archive or that the claims had been sensationalized by the media, he explained that he remains ambivalent; though he was not able to find evidence corroborating coerced sex reassignment, he was not persuaded that

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<sup>41</sup> Paul Kirk, *Mail & Guardian*, July 28 to August 3, 2000, 4.

it was covered up or that it did not occur.<sup>42</sup> The lack of documentation and lost medical records proved insurmountable. Levine was scapegoated as an outlier rather than a representative of systemic injustice.<sup>43</sup>



Figure 2: Jonathan Zapiro Political Cartoon on Health Care

Unlike trans people seeking sex-reassignment surgery, the operations performed in apartheid military hospitals did not provide adequate preparation or aftercare; patients were not required to undergo the typical two years of therapy prior to surgery, nor were they given lifelong hormone treatments to maintain their new sex. Worse, medical complications rendered some patients asexual and/or incapable of sexual activity. Fistulas posed an added risk; fistulas are abnormal connections between two hollow spaces, such as a vagina and colon. They are typically are caused by prolonged labor, surgical trauma, rape, or subsequent

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<sup>42</sup> Graeme Reid recalled being phoned by Canadian police about accusations against Levine for indecent behavior with male patients. He informed me that Levine was charged and disbarred in 2010 on the basis of his sexual misconduct while a medical practitioner in Canada (Graeme Reid, in conversation with Michelle Wolff, October 26, 2016).

<sup>43</sup> Robert Kaplan, "The Aversion Project – psychiatric abuses in the South African Defence Force during the apartheid era," *South African Medical Journal* 91.3 (2001): 216.

infection, and render the patient incontinent. Transitioning as a “cure” for homosexuality introduced injury and disease where there previously was none.<sup>44</sup>

### ***3.4 Jesus Christ’s Transfiguration***

The story of Christ’s transfiguration infrequently receives attention from theologians, and yet a comparison can be drawn between trans existence and Christ’s transfiguration because scripture describes it not as a mode of change so much as a revelation.<sup>45</sup> In this biblical story we find a temporality and spatiality where the eternal and the momentary conspire. Christ’s presence is particular to a literal human body without compromising his eternal transcendence. His body reveals the eternal truth of Christ as the second person of the trinity. For Luther, the “real presence” of Christ is found in preaching. God created through speech – “let there be...” – and in Christ the Word became flesh and dwelt (or “tabernacled”) among us.<sup>46</sup> This references Christ’s contained body and also omnipresence. The verb “tabernacled” here, which of course does not exist in English and so is translated as dwelt, is the same that is used in Christ’s transfiguration. In what follows I outline how this curious revelation in Christ’s transfiguration enriches trans theory and praxis. Instead of “curing” sexuality, genital ambiguity, or mind-body disunity, transitioning is best understood in light of Christ’s transfiguration as revelation.

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<sup>44</sup> “After being told he was an ‘incurable’ homosexual Jonathan was told he should have surgery to ‘cure’ his ailment... The army completed his sex-change treatment, although they never kept him supplied with the expensive hormone treatments he still needs to take. They also offered him no psychological support or counselling... Mary is one of the many victims of the military’s sex-change programme who is stranded halfway between sexes. Mary has had some surgery to transform her into a male. But she was discharged from the military halfway through the procedure.” Paul Kirk, “Mutilation by the Military: Another Victim Steps Forward,” *Mail & Guardian* (South Africa), July 28-August 3, 2000, p. 4.

<sup>45</sup> Irenaeus, Origin, Maximus, Aquinas, Gregory Palmas, Luther, and Barth are among some theologians who discuss the transfiguration. Graham Ward briefly explores the economy of love at this event as performing a resurrection hope. In this chapter the commentary and aims are unique.

<sup>46</sup> Luther asserted the “real presence” of Christ in the Eucharist – though not in the form of transubstantiation – and in preaching. See Martin Luther, “Confession Concerning Christ’s Supper, 1528,” *Luther’s Works*, vol. 37 *Word and Sacrament III*, Robert H. Fischer ed. and trans., (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1961) especially p. 225.

First it is necessary to consider the implications of the terminology “sex reassignment” verses “alignment” in order to grasp the significance of revelation as an alternative. The phrase “sex reassignment surgery” or “sex-operation” (“sex-op” for short) implicitly foregrounds the doctor’s perspective; medical professionals “cure,” “correct,” or “disambiguate,” the genitals of an intersex and/or trans person. Alternatively, “sex alignment surgery” privileges the intersex and/or trans assessment as authentic over medical classification; the patient pursues medical intervention to bring the body into alignment with identity. Though distinct, these two positions were muddled during apartheid’s coerced sex-reassignment surgeries, which were intended to cure homosexuality rather than express gender identity. Practitioners and patients in Ward 22 shared the concern that same-sex attraction posed a problem to performing proper citizenship; their focus was to serve the spiritual political body by transforming individual bodies.

Even in contexts in which a person seeks gender “alignment” surgery absent of state pressure, the terminology suggests a mind-body distinction. Trans narratives in which the person describes an inner sense of gender juxtaposed against the body’s sex potentially reinforces the presumption that something is amiss. As explored throughout this chapter, questions about sex and gender identity are readily pathologized. Moreover, many intersex and trans people never seek surgery for a variety of reasons including the prohibitive financial cost, uncertainty about sexual function afterwards, and comfort with dress as sufficiently expressing gender. What might Christian theology contribute to trans and intersex theory?

It is with this question in mind that I explore transitioning in light of Jesus’ transfiguration. Biblical accounts of Christ’s transfiguration reorient our understanding of

clothing, disclosure, and relationship. Before parsing these out, it is important to acknowledge the struggles that trans and intersex people face when they do not easily pass as or conform to cisgender male or female aesthetics. Dissonance between voice and dress, for example, is met with suspicion and fear. The trans and/or intersex person is misrecognized and reduced to a threat. Consequently, trans and intersex people are criminalized, pathologized, and are targeted in hate crimes.<sup>47</sup> In South Africa, trans dress was illegal under the Prohibition of Disguises Act 16 (1969). Disallowing disguises supposedly ensured the safety and security of the nation. More recently, North Carolina's House Bill 2 in the U.S. appealed to trans-phobia in order to disenfranchise large swaths of citizens who depend upon anti-discrimination laws. In both instances trans people are cast as criminals in wait. I argue that it is precisely within efforts to express the truth of one's gender identity – i.e. acts of revelation – that intersex and/or trans people are mistrusted and punished, as was Christ.

### **3.4.1 Cloud, Cloak, & Christ**

Examining how Christ's faithfulness was met with religious rejection and state execution does more than resonate with trans and intersex experiences of hate crimes; revisiting Christ's story challenges Christian communities to cease "curing" trans and intersex people, to embrace the discipleship to which they are called, and, not least, it reveals trans people as adopted co-heirs with Christ. The transfiguration is primarily the revelation of Christ's identity as God. In this sacred event Christ is revealed to be the Son by the Father. Christ is the fulfillment of the law, the incarnation of the word, and salvation for humanity. Baptism is understood within the context of Christ's transfiguration. He is

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<sup>47</sup> Gqola argues: "Queer desire and gender non-conformity were explicitly criminalised and policed in apartheid South Africa, thereby further dissuading gay men and transgender individuals from reporting rape." *Rape: A South African Nightmare* (Auckland Park: MFBooks Joburg, 2015), 14.



revealed to be the second person of the trinity, and humanity is adopted as Christ's co-heirs. In light of baptism, trans and intersex people cannot be understood to mangle some "natural" division of the sexes because the Galatians text challenges that relation. They do, however, undermine state and church regulation of sex as public property. Again, this is compatible with the Galatians account of baptism that challenges coercive identity politics grounded in nationality, gender, or social status.

In this section I examine the biblical account of Christ's transformation alongside theologian Dorothy Lee and biblical scholars William Davies and Dale Allison in order to construct a trans theology. I begin with the significance of Christ's transfiguration, then examine the content of his revelation, next the means of it, and finally the implications for discipleship. Christian theology and scripture uniquely pose an alternative to neoliberal identity politics. What is outlined below effectively articulates the religious basis for LGBTIQ advocacy because it resists the self-possession and autonomy that progressive policy presumes. By starting from baptism, trans theology invites social buy-in without the pitfalls of human rights rhetoric. Before doing a close reading of the text, I include Matthew's version here, though the transfiguration appears in each of the synoptic Gospels:

Six days later Jesus took with him Peter, James, and John the brother of James, and led them privately up a high mountain. And he was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as the light. Then Moses and Elijah also appeared before them, talking with him. So Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here. If you want, I will make three shelters – one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." While he was still speaking, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my one dear Son, in whom I take great delight. Listen to him!" When the disciples heard this, they were overwhelmed with fear and threw themselves down with their faces to the ground. But Jesus came and touched them. "Get up," he said. "Do not be afraid." When they looked up, all they saw was Jesus

alone. As they were coming down from the mountain, Jesus commanded them, “Do not tell anyone about the vision until the Son of Man is raised from the dead.” The disciples asked him, “Why then do the experts in the law say that Elijah must come first?” He answered, “Elijah does indeed come first and will restore all things. And I tell you that Elijah has already come. Yet they did not recognize him, but did to him whatever they wanted. In the same way, the Son of Man will suffer at their hands.” Then the disciples understood that he was speaking to them about John the Baptist.<sup>48</sup>

Davies and Allison understand the transfiguration as one piece of a diptych, the other piece being Christ’s crucifixion. These events are reverse images of one another, they explain, in that the three male disciples in first story take the form of three female disciples in the second. Jesus is up on a mountain at his transfiguration, and elevated on a cross at his crucifixion. The former is a private epiphany, that latter a public spectacle. Christ’s garments glisten, and then are stripped; he is glorified and then shamed. Elijah appears at the first event but not the second. Christ is flanked by two fathers of the faith on the mountain, and then two criminals while on the cross. The Father declares Christ’s Sonship, and a pagan soldier does the same. The disciples reverently prostrate themselves before Christ, and then Christ is mocked before his execution. Together the two accounts display that the significance of the crucifixion cannot be grasped without the events that preceded it.<sup>49</sup> The devastation of Christ’s humiliation is obscured without the prior revelation of his Sonship.

What I aim to explain in this section are the ways in which looking to the sexual, emotional, religious, state, and homicidal violence inflicted upon trans (as well as LGBTQ) people must be explored within the context of revelation – that one has been adopted as co-heirs with Christ. While a fair number of theologians analogize Christ’s suffering and death

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<sup>48</sup> Matthew 17:1-13 (NET).

<sup>49</sup> W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, vol. 2 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991), 706.

to that of oppressed peoples – due to racism, classism, xenophobia, sexism, or homophobia – I consider the second piece of the biblical diptych in which we share in Christ’s Sonship – not in the sense that we are divine or male, but that in Christ we are made co-heirs with him. LGBTIQ South Africans rightly bemoan the overwhelming negative press on being targets of hate crimes because it reduces personhood to victimization. Flattening biographies to having been attacked and/or murdered actually obscures the horror, because without what came before – a person’s relationships within their community – one’s humanity is lost. Like Christ, then, personhood in relation to God contrasts their dehumanization. We do not assert ourselves primarily as repositories of violence. Christ imparts a sacred identity to us that condemns harm.

Each account of the transfiguration follows with Christ asking Peter, “Who do *you* say that I am?” and Peter declaring Christ’s messiahship. The Father declares Christ to be the Son, and yet at the trial religious leaders and state officials press Jesus to define himself: “Are you the king of the Jews?” To this Christ replies: “You say that I am.”<sup>50</sup> The distinction Christ reiterates is that there is controversy over how to categorize him. Has he blasphemed the church and state as a revile subject, or is he the fullest embodiment of God? The transfiguration overtly announces Christ’s identity, and yet the witnesses remain confused and unsettled. Christ has not come in the form his people expected. He appears to break sacred and secular law. How could this deviant be the holy Messiah that God declares him to be? God’s direct revelation, which so many people crave, proves to be so unexpected and boundary shattering that humans struggle to accept it. With this in mind, I consider the juxtaposition of the divine revelation that we are God’s adopted co-heirs with the church

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<sup>50</sup> Matthew 27:11; Mark 15:2; Luke 22:3; John 18:37.

and state's demands that people adhere to discrete categories. The former so thoroughly undermines the latter that it is met with violence unto death. The revelation that we are made co-heirs threatens church and state authority to rightly define us.

In *Transfiguration* biblical theologian Dorothy Lee argues that the import of Christ's transfiguration is the revelation of his identity as the Son of the Father and savior of humanity. She accomplishes this by comparing the transfiguration accounts in Mark, Matthew, Luke, 2 Peter, John "and elsewhere in the New Testament" in that order. She stresses the centrality of the transfiguration this way:

Normally we might expect the resurrection to be given this anticipatory role, pledging the reality of God's future in accord with the presence of the Spirit. But in 2 Peter it is the transfiguration that is given the function of anticipating the final appearance of Christ. This is itself extraordinary and bestows upon the transfiguration a remarkably high status. The [transfiguration] of Jesus – the revelation of his 'glory and honour' – is located before his death at the heart of his ministry, with definitive eschatological consequences.<sup>51</sup>

Lee's reading details the robust theological meaning of this uncanny event. Prophecy, fulfillment, and the world to come are simultaneously pulled together in Christ's transfiguration because it can only be understood within the context of his baptism, crucifixion, resurrection, and assumption. It proclaims the core and texture of the Christian faith – the need for Christ who enables us to be intimate with God, others, and even ourselves.

We read in these transfiguration accounts that Christ's disciples respond in earnest, though misguided, devotion because they struggle to grasp the content of what is revealed. Peter attempts to honor Jesus, Moses, and Elijah by offering to build each of them a tabernacle. This is an effort to linger in the miraculous event. Peter's proposal is met with a

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<sup>51</sup> Dorothy Lee, *Transfiguration* (New York: Continuum, 2004), 95.

bright cloud and a voice from heaven proclaiming Jesus' unique status, after which Moses and Elijah disappear. Revelation comes by means of a voice in a bright cloud, announcing Christ as the Son of God. In the Hebrew Scriptures, the pillar of cloud that led the children of Israel by day – a pillar of fire by night – also hovered over the tent of the covenant. Lee interprets the image as representing the glory and guidance of God, which is both concealed and revealed. The Gospel of Mark stresses the mystery of God within disclosure, and Matthew recounts for the disciples' fear upon hearing the divine voice. Lee underscores cloaking as revealing: "Yet, whereas clouds normally obscure the light, this one is dazzling and full of light.... The cloud reveals God's saving purposes, yet also veils the splendor of God, too bright for human eyes to gaze upon."<sup>52</sup> Christ's face and clothing glisten, confronting Peter, James, and John with the frightful and joyful truth: Jesus is the Son of God. It echoes Christ's baptism, in which a voice from heaven is the structural center of the pericope.

Despite different emphases, theologians do not dispute that the transfiguration is a revelation of the eternal God to humanity. Karl Barth, for example, points out that unlike other miracles, in the transfiguration something is done to (rather than by) Jesus. The point, Barth emphasizes, is Jesus' eternal divinity.<sup>53</sup> Thomas Aquinas asserts that God's eternal speech manifests the whole Trinity.<sup>54</sup> A cloud once signaled God "tabernacling" among the saints, and now Christ the Messiah "tabernacles" among heavenly and earthly people; the

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<sup>52</sup> Lee, *Transfiguration*, 51.

<sup>53</sup> Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, III/2.

<sup>54</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, III. q.45 "Of Christ's Transfiguration," a. 4.

Word became flesh and dwelt among us.<sup>55</sup> He is the Shekinah revealed, Davies and Allison explain.<sup>56</sup> No matter whom we say Christ is, God announces his divine Sonship.

Christ's transfigured body also presented a new context for understanding Moses, Elijah, Peter, James and John. Martin Luther interprets Moses and Elijah in this story as representing the law and the prophets – i.e. the entirety of the Hebrew Bible. The scriptures describe Moses' death and Elijah's assumption into heaven. Moses and Elijah's eternal lives in communion with Christ, as adopted sons of God, are a part of what Christ reveals at this moment. The miracle declares that because Christ will be crucified, resurrect, and ascend into heaven, not only is Christ the Son of God, but humanity will be adopted as Christ's co-heirs and commune with God and others through Christ. Christ comes between the law and the Gospel, Jews and Gentiles, humanity and divinity. Christ stands between me and myself, quashing both self-aggrandizing and condemning self-evaluations. His transfiguration reveals our familial relations with one another and God.

Christ endowed his disciples with faith and called them to discipleship despite their lack of understanding. The sight and sound at the transfiguration overwhelmed the disciples into fear-inspired prostration. The book of Matthew tells us that Christ responds by approaching and touching the disciples, initiating intimacy with those who pull away in horror. Reaching out to *touch* the disciples, Christ invites his witnesses to commune intimately together. He does not set himself apart, though he is the Son of God. He does not require that they prostrate themselves at his feet or quiver with reverential fear. On their way down the mountain Christ instructed them not to tell anyone about what was revealed until

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<sup>55</sup> New Testament scholar Colin Yuckman explained the verb “tabernacling” used here which is translated into English as “dwelt” though there is no direct corresponding verb (October 2016).

<sup>56</sup> W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, vol II (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991), 2: 700-701.

he rises from the dead. In these moments of profound revelation, Christ appeared furtive. Showcasing his body, dress, and nature as the Son of God, Christ simultaneously concealed his identity. The disciples who witnessed this event struggled to make sense of it. Even when Christ explained the meaning in relation to his coming death and resurrection, the disciples still did not understand that his transfiguration revealed his Sonship and their adoption as co-heirs.<sup>57</sup>

Though the modes of revelation in sight and sound, dress and voice, might affront or alienate preconceived notions of propriety and righteousness, we find in Christ the calling to intimate life together. Intelligibility is not a prerequisite for discipleship. The disciples were called to communion despite their fright and lack of understanding. Trans people are similarly met with confusion and rejection during self-disclosure. Trans bodies, clothing, and personhood confound witnesses to the extent that they are met with violence and death. Together, Christ and trans people reveal the unintelligible: that Christ is the Son of God and we are adopted co-heirs. Neither revelation is fully grasped in discipleship or community, because what we find in Christ is that we are known rather than knowing.<sup>58</sup> Christ calls us to a discipleship counter to apartheid separatism; his revelation is coupled with an outstretched hand and word of comfort. We are invited to touch and sojourn with God and one another in the midst of our unease and misunderstanding. Christ has not metamorphosed, but with his brilliant clothing reveals himself: “Jesus’s body is clothed in glistening garments, revealing

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<sup>57</sup> Or as Tonstad describes, “We must accept rather than being transparent to us, our faithfulness escapes our control and so is not even ours; it depends on a relationship to a Jesus whom we fail to recognize.” Linn Marie Tonstad, *God and Difference: The Trinity, Sexuality, and the Transformation of Finitude* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 270.

<sup>58</sup> See Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works*, vol. 26, *Lectures on Galatians 1535: Chapters 1-4*, Jaroslav Pelikan ed. and trans., (Saint Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1963) 403.

not just his own identity but ours, not just the destiny of the soul but also the body.”<sup>59</sup> His dress was a tool for revelation, not reassignment or alignment.<sup>60</sup> And in baptism, we are not restored to shameless nudity as Adam and Eve, male and female, but are clothed in Christ.<sup>61</sup>

The use of Christ’s cloak for revelation is not to be confused with reducing the person to their clothing. His cloak is a mode of concealing and revealing personhood as being for God, which is why the disciples do not remain on the mountain where Christ was transfigured. The disciples journey down, but find themselves unable to exercise a demon. Seeing and hearing the truth was not sufficient. In the chapter preceding Christ’s transfiguration, the book of Luke describes the hemorrhaging woman’s blood as barring her from social life. She humbly turned to Christ to touch the hem of his cloak for healing. Conversely, Christ’s tormentors and executors looked to Christ’s clothing for financial gain to improve their social standing. We look to his blinding cloth in terror, but God frees us to be for community. His clothes are not material gain, but point to his Sonship. Trans and intersex clothing does not define personhood, though they can be modes of revelation. Covering the body can be a form of disclosure. The content of that revelation is that we are adopted as co-heirs and clothed in Christ.<sup>62</sup> This is a certainty that sometimes confounds and offends the most religious of people.

Luke’s Gospel includes a detail that Matthew and Mark do not: the disciples nearly missed Christ’s transfiguration. After foretelling his death and resurrection, Christ had taken

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<sup>59</sup> Lee, *Transfiguration*, 134.

<sup>60</sup> For Maximus, Christ’s clothing symbolizes scripture made limpid to the disciples and creation itself being worthy of the Word. Andrew Louth, *Maximus the Confessor* (London: Routledge, 1996), 70-71.

<sup>61</sup> Martin Luther puts it this way: “Therefore Paul teaches that Baptism is not a sign but the garment of Christ, in fact, that Christ Himself is our garment,” *Lectures on Galatians 1535*, 353.

<sup>62</sup> In addition to the literal clothing of trans people as a form of disclosing being adopted co-heirs, in baptism we are all spiritually clothed in Christ (Galatians 3:27). Christ’s righteousness frees us from the shame described in Genesis, where Adam and Eve covered their naked bodies. He imparts a new relationship between humanity and our bodies in which we need not feel shame, but rather boldly declare our freedom as clothed in Christ.



them up on a mountain to pray. Luke tells us that Peter, John and James were weighed down with sleep, but stayed awake and witnessed Jesus speaking with Moses and Elijah. This contrasts with him asking the disciples to pray for him in the garden of Gethsemane just before being betrayed, and they gave into slumber. Luke's account suggest that something as simple as sleep can keep us from prayer, revelation, and discipleship. The consequences of indifference or lethargy are far more severe in this story. A trans person's request for prayers and community can also be met with drowsiness. Though seemingly benign, it can have dire consequences. Christ calls us to be alert and to pray for one another so that we might receive God's revelation and live into the call to discipleship.<sup>63</sup>

Misrecognition is bound up with revelation. Lee describes the crucifixion as the "disfiguration" of Christ.<sup>64</sup> The sickness and sin here is located in social rejection and slaughter. Though the church and state diagnose intersex and trans people as ill and in need of a cure, in so doing they reveal their own sin. When a trans or intersex person reveals their gender identity – whether that be as male or female, queer, or ambiguous – the "disfiguration" they suffer is not in breaking with cisgender extremes by way of surgery or dress; the disfiguration comes at the hands of those imposing a misguided cure. Trans

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<sup>63</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer links discipleship to vigilance in a letter to Eberhard Bethge. In it he describes a shift in his theology from costly discipleship to worldly holiness, and links this again to sickness: "I thought I myself could learn to have faith by trying to live something like a saintly life. I suppose I wrote *Discipleship* at the end of this path. Today I clearly see the dangers of that book, though I still stand by it. Later on I discovered, and am still discovering to this day, that one only learns to have faith by living in the full this-worldliness of life. If one has completely renounced making something of oneself—whether it be a saint or a converted sinner or a church leader (as so-called priestly figure!), a just or an unjust person, a sick or a healthy person—then one throws oneself completely into the arms of tasks, questions, successes and failures, experiences, and perplexities—then one takes seriously no longer one's own sufferings but rather the suffering of God in the world. Then one stays awake with Christ in Gethsemane. And I think this is faith; this is [repentance/*metanoia*]. And this is how one becomes a human being, a Christian," *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works* vol. 8, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, ed. John W. de Gruchy, trans. Isabel Best et. al. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004) 4/178, p. 486. Henceforth, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works* shall be referred to as *DBWE*; full information for volumes in the English edition is provided in the bibliography.

<sup>64</sup> Lee, *Transfiguration*, 130.

people are met with disbelief, inquiring gazes, and misunderstanding. Scientists look to the body and brain for physical evidence of a mind-body disjuncture.<sup>65</sup> There is pressure to uncloak bodies for proof of identity, because the clothing is not understood as an honest mode of disclosure. Despite repeatedly revealing one's self – through dress, styling, gait, speech, and actions – trans and intersex people are mistrusted and eschewed.

### **3.5 Conclusion**

At what cost did Sally Gross escape aversion therapy and coerced sex reassignment surgery? The victims of apartheid's medicine and theology were made acceptable to the church and state. Gross was disenfranchised despite her devotion to God, and her calling and service to the church. Revealing her gender identity as God's adopted child, she was rejected. Her intersex status disoriented the church and state; she was barred from formal ministry and personhood under the law. Gross' unflagging celibacy proved inconsequential. Had Gross lied, concealed her ambiguous sex and female gender, she could have continued to act as a priest and citizen. After being pushed out of ministry, her compassion could not be quashed and Gross continued to serve others by founding Intersex South Africa. Being a child of God was something that could not be stripped from her by the church or state, because, as with Christ's divinity, her adoption is eternally true. The tabernacle of monastic life could not enclose her. She went down the mountain, so to speak, and continued her ministry, even though her brethren did not understand her revelation.

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<sup>65</sup> Neuroscience studies of gender identity include: Garcia-Falgueras A Savic, "Sexual differentiation of the human brain in relations to gender identity and sexual orientation," *Progress in Brain Research* 186 (2010): 41-62; Melissa Hines, "Prenatal endocrine influences on sexual orientation and sexually differentiated childhood behavior," *Frontiers in Neuroendocrinology*, 32.2 (2011): 170-182; Georg S. Kranz et al., "White Matter Microstructure in Transsexuals and Controls Investigated by Diffusion Tensor Imaging," *Journal of Neuroscience* 34.46 (2014): 15466-15475.

Unease with surgical body modification of a trans person for supposedly transgressing the sanctity of the created body belies the actual operations imposed upon intersex infants – sometimes unbeknownst to parents – and gays as “cure.” Individuals receiving medical intervention by choice rather than coercion upset commitments to social and political structures’ exclusive property rights to sex. When people deter from the prescriptive male-female reproductive dyad, many regard the church and state to be authorized to intervene by reorienting and regulating individual bodies for the sake of the collective body. The individual, however, is not trusted to discern appropriate transitioning for fear that they complicate rather than reify an essentialist polarization of gender.

Heavenly and earthly citizenship, according to this framework, is contingent upon adherence to prescribed sex, gender, and heterosexuality. Though the parameters of these might shift to encompass a greater variety of people, the structure itself is not challenged or undermined. Trans and intersex people pose an insufferable challenge to these assumptions, and they become targets of violence, medical experimentation, and homicide. Aversion therapy, sometimes referred to as conversion or reparative therapy, deploys pathologizing rhetoric in diagnosing LGBTIQ people as ill.

South Africa is where the world’s first heart transplant, sex reassignment surgery, and cesarean section (in which both mother and child survived) were performed. While it might come as a surprise that these medical breakthroughs took place in South Africa, perhaps the colonial context provided suitable conditions for high-risk procedures. Such “firsts” might have been permissible precisely due to the latitude imparted to doctors within this colonial context – a culture of exploitation and inequity in South Africa might have enabled doctors to conduct experiments on people ascribed lesser social value. What is relevant for our

purposes here is the use of Christian theology to justify stratifying human beings; and also, the appeals to a divinely ordained vision to which bodies must be conformed. South Africa boasts some of the world's most remarkable medical achievements due in part to the racism, sexism, and homophobia imbedded within the colonial state. Certainly South Africa is not unique in this regard; the sordid history of gynecological advancements in the United States also includes the mistreatment of African women for the purpose of advancing the healthcare of white women.

Trans studies seek what Christ's transfiguration reveals: "...instead of understanding trans studies to be offering yet another subject position to be subsumed under the category of 'woman,' we understand the task of trans studies to be the breaking apart of this category, particularly if that breaking requires a new articulation of the relation between sex and gender, between male and female."<sup>66</sup> Christ introduces something new to the creaturely condition of humanity in the incarnation. His transfiguration situates him fully in heaven while on earth, as divine and human. In so doing, he does not merely contribute an additional category of gender, sexuality or relationship. Christ introduces something reorienting, and thus transforms categorization itself. It is for this reason that the author of Galatians is able to assert that in baptism: "There is no longer Jew or Gentile, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus."<sup>67</sup> This scripture does not disregard the reality of difference; it proclaims a Christological configuration of relations.

State documents determine the individual's position in society, and so the ramifications for demarcating sex are immense. One's legal sex designation establishes

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<sup>66</sup> Salamon, *Assuming a Body*, 98.

<sup>67</sup> Galatians 3:28 (NRSV).

whether one might be permitted to marry under the Civil Union Act or Marriage Act in South Africa. Transitioning, then, sometimes requires the divorce and remarriage of the same couples. Exacerbating the inequity in distributing rights and services among citizens is the lethal violence proliferating against impoverished, black lesbians and trans men in South Africa. Though specific to this country and history, a similar backlash to progressive policy appears to be surfacing in the U.S. context where homicides of trans people are increasing.<sup>68</sup>

Gayle Salamon provides excellent critique of confusing the mind-body problem with trans studies. Salamon persuasively argues that 1) we do not have unmediated access to the body, 2) we cannot have epistemological certainty about the body, 3) uncertainty has ethical and political utility, and finally 4) trans bodies and subjectivities enrich this classic debate.

She writes:<sup>69</sup>

I seek to challenge the notion that the materiality of the body is something to which we have unmediated access, something of which we can have epistemological certainty, and contend that such epistemological uncertainty can have great use, both ethically and politically, in the lives of the non-normatively gendered... and, perhaps more crucially, that our current ideas of what a body is will be irremediably diminished until trans bodies and subjectivities are considered in a more thorough way.<sup>70</sup>

Salamon preserves a mind-body unity by attending to sensing over sight and to relation over the body as mere envelope. She also explains the insufficiencies of merely expanding the

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<sup>68</sup> The specific statistics for this claim vary among sources due to underreporting, misidentification, and lack of awareness that a crime might have been motivated by transphobia. Activist organizations collect their own statistics in an attempt to redress these obstacles. Regardless of the source – *The Guardian*, *Time*, National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs, Human Rights Campaign, or the FBI Hate Crime statistics – the consensus is that there has been an increase and that impoverished black trans women are the most frequent targets.

<sup>69</sup> “Merleau-Ponty challenges both philosophical accounts of embodiment that rely upon a dualistic conception of body and self and mind/body theorists whose conceptions of the body are predicated on starkly drawn models of inside and outside. Instead, he suggests that our bodies are inextricably intertwined with both our selves and the worlds in which our bodies are situated. I consider his claim that bodies become material only through relations with others and explore the consequences that this might have for theorizing transsubjectivity.” Salamon, *Assuming a Body*, 5.

<sup>70</sup> Salamon, *Assuming a Body*, 1.

universal to include unrecognized subject positions: 1) it obfuscates the role of power in producing subjects, 2) different kinds of power function differently, and 3) intersectionality does not necessarily account for lived subjectivity.<sup>71</sup> Although she does so to challenge the discipline of Women's Studies, her argument pertains to the shortcomings of progressive policy. The trans theology presented here contributes to black feminism and queer theory an augmented notion of embodiment, the senses, and il/legibility not limited to the law, but also for intimacy within community.<sup>72</sup> Salamon asserts that instead of finding anchor in biology, we are reckoned only through relation: "The sexual schema is rather a way of becoming uncloistered in and through the body, in that it delivers my own body to me through the movement of my body toward another."<sup>73</sup> This sets up the constructive theology in chapter four, where I introduce Christ as mediator – who undoes the problem of seeking unmediated access to our own bodies and enables intimate life with others.

Examining Christ's transfiguration, we find that Christian theology offers a different approach to subjectivity and relationship in which we are oriented towards others, and, despite being misrecognized, our dress and bodies can reveal the truth of God's love for us. Liberty here requires neither converting one's sexual orientation nor adhering to a label for it; the freedom of a Christian, to borrow reformer Martin Luther's phrase, is freedom *from* these constraints so we can be *for* God and others.<sup>74</sup> Trans and intersex people rightly assert

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<sup>71</sup> Salamon, *Assuming a Body*, 99-100. Legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw argues that intersectionality faces unintelligibility within the law, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory, and Antiracist Politics," *University of Chicago Legal Forum*, 1.1, 1989: 139-167.

<sup>72</sup> For a critique of this as a progress narrative of inclusion see Robyn Wiegman's *Object Lessons* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012), 40-54. Wiegman returns the reader's attention to the archive of black women and lesbians in women's studies from the 1960's (64-65).

<sup>73</sup> Salamon, *Assuming a Body*, 56.

<sup>74</sup> See Martin Luther, "The Freedom of a Christian, 1520," in *Luther's Works American Edition*, vol. 31, Harold J. Grimm ed., W. A. Lambert trans., (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1957), pp. 327-378.

what Christ has revealed in his transfiguration – that humanity has been adopted as co-heirs with Christ.

## 4. Chapter Three: The Bride of Christ: Marriage, Citizenship, & Salvation

Therefore, the married state is now no longer pure and free from sin. The temptation of the flesh has become so strong and consuming that marriage may be likened to a hospital for incurables which prevents inmates from falling into graver sin.

- Martin Luther, 1519

Jesus replied, “You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God. At the resurrection people will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven. But about the resurrection of the dead—have you not read what God said to you, ‘I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob’? He is not the God of the dead but of the living.”

- Matthew 22:29-32, (NIV)

This human rights discourse is strongly connected to a feminist discourse on sexual freedom, but it can be mobilized to promote an assimilationist politics. The emphasis on individual rights for gay men and lesbians to be ‘just the same’ as heterosexuals in terms of the rights to marriage, medical benefits, child custody, and military service, is socially very conservative.

- Jacklyn Cock, 2003

### ***4.1 Introduction: Intimate Life Together***

This chapter critiques the use of marriage as a “cure” for sexuality. I argue that same-sex marriage in the church and state ensures neither salvation nor citizenship to the LGBTIQ person. This is not to say that marriage is unimportant or inconsequential. I interrogate the logic of same-sex marriage in order to understand its purpose and function within Christianity. Why are civil and ecclesial marriages significant to couples, and what distinguishes these two forms of marriage?

South Africa is a helpful site to explore these questions because it has already contended with the logistics of whether clergy should be compelled to marry same-sex



couples against their conscience, whether homophobia or homosexuality is a western import, how allowances for polygamy should be made, and how trans and intersex people complicate bureaucratic procedures. Thus, rather than buttoning up a hard-won victory, the legalization of same-sex marriage initiates a long series of negotiations.

After explicating the accomplishments and drawbacks that South Africa faces regarding same-sex marriage, I offer a constructive theological alternative to Eugene Rogers' push for sacramentality. Marriage is a unique relationship in which we experience intimate life together. A decolonial rather than postcolonial framework proves challenging. Understanding the distinctive features of Christian marriage requires more than choosing between two extremes: simply returning to tradition or outright dismissing the institution. Marriage serves many couples as a profoundly sacred commitment, made in and by community. I analyze the biblical book Hosea in order to account for the horrors of abuse experienced within intimacy, and also the prioritization of humanity's marriage to God over marriage among creatures.

#### ***4.2 Same-Sex Marriage in South Africa***

South Africa is a forerunner in progressive LGBTQTIQ policy-making. It was the first country to constitutionally protect LGBTQTIQ people against discrimination in 1996; it legalized adoption for same-sex couples in 2002; and it became the fifth country to legalize same-sex marriage in 2006. Perhaps more controversially, the Recognition of Customary Marriages Act (1998) allows for polygamy in accordance with "systems of indigenous African customary law." This, however, currently excludes Hindu and Muslim citizens.

Previously, Roman-Dutch law limited marriage to monogamous, opposite-sex couples and during apartheid interracial marriage was prohibited.<sup>1</sup>

The right to same-sex marriage is highly contested. Some understand marriage to be the exclusive right and privilege of opposite sex couples. According to this logic, marriage should not be extended to same-sex couples because to do so would compromise the institution's stabilizing and organizing function in society. The underlying assumption here is that LGBTIQ people would queer marriage.<sup>2</sup> However, as countries increasingly legalize same-sex marriage, evidence points to the contrary. Instead of being transformed, marriage quite readily assimilates same-sex couples. This homogenizing trend leads some to believe that the institution of marriage is inherently patriarchal and oppressive.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, even activists pursuing the right to same-sex marriage sometimes personally refrain from exercising this right.

For some citizens, the Civil Union Act was a triumph in advancing LGBTIQ rights.<sup>4</sup> Same-sex couples describe its significance in a variety of terms: it validates relationships, dignifies participants, increases status, demands commitment, stabilizes society, expresses

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<sup>1</sup> Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act, 1949.

<sup>2</sup> "It was apparent from the hearings that the discussions about same-sex marriage were an opportunity to express deeper concerns about changing gender roles, the erosion of masculine authority and the increased autonomy of women and youth." Graeme Reid, "'This thing' and 'that idea': Traditionalist responses to homosexuality and same-sex marriage," in *To Have & to Hold: The Making of Same-Sex Marriage in South Africa*, ed. Melanie Judge, Anthony Manion and Shaun De Wall (Auckland Park: Fanele, 2008), 81.

<sup>3</sup> "Hence some feminists argue that marriage is essentially a patriarchal institution and its main purpose is to control women's bodies and sexuality... Consequently [lesbian feminists] focused less on the extension of liberal rights and more on seeking to dismantle patriarchal and heterosexist institutions in general." Sally Gross, "De-gendering unions: The Civil Union Act and the intersexed," in *To Have & to Hold*, ed. Melanie Judge, Anthony Manion and Shaun De Wall, 261.

<sup>4</sup> "As an institution, marriage is an important property of the state. Such an institution is also accorded a special privilege by most religions... Marriage is not simply a symbolic institution that affords a legal status to a civil relationship, but also raises jurisprudential issues about the state's relationship to its citizens. In most countries marriage rights do not apply to gay and lesbian couples because same-sex relationships fall outside the scope of the legal definition of marriage." Vasu Reddy and Zenthu Cakata, "Marriage, citizenship and contested meanings," in *To Have & to Hold*, eds. Melanie Judge, Anthony Manion and Shaun De Wall, 275.

romance, is legally binding, is sanctifying, normalizes LGBTIQ partnership, grants access to benefits, facilitates child custody, and so on.<sup>5</sup> Acquiring the right to marriage, then, accomplished a great deal, which could be summarized as, 1) formalizing unions and separations, 2) aiding custody agreements, 3) facilitating the sharing and inheritance of economic goods, and 4) imparting state recognition. In other words, legal marriage organizes kinship relations and property ownership. Ideally, civil marriage benefits the couple and the state.

Unmarried adults know all too well that this framework imparts full citizenship upon marriage.<sup>6</sup> Singles, celibates, and the childless break the mold that the state privileges. Consequently, such individuals can feel deprived of full citizenship and rights. Rather than dismantling this structure, then, the extension of marital rights to same-sex couples reinforces the architecture where families are assumed to serve as the foundation of nation states. Despite the profound contributions that non-conforming citizens make to society their status is marginalized. Moreover, non-marital forms of intimate life are pathologized. Society presumes that there must be something wrong with someone who is not partnered, fecund, or most profoundly driven by desires other than sexuality. Marriage is touted as the cure for sexual ills.

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<sup>5</sup> “Consequently, the primary benefit of marriage is the extension of citizenship rights that facilitate the assimilation of gay and lesbian individuals into the mainstream of society ... The motivation for marriage, especially as advanced by many activists, is also informed by the strategy to normalize homosexuality in our society as an identity and not a behaviour that is viewed as a pathology.” Reddy and Cakata, 276.

<sup>6</sup> “The law-reform process that followed, culminated in the passing of the Civil Union Act, has served to strengthen the development of lesbian identities further, by securing rights that support citizenship. It is for these reasons that it is difficult to erase sexuality from its relationship to the law and citizenship.” Reddy and Cakata, “Marriage, citizenship and contested meanings,” 275. “I worry about marriage being the ultimate validation for anybody who is in a relationship.” Pumla Dineo Gqola, interviewed in “‘The traditional Model of Marriage is Oppressive’: Feminist Perspectives on Marriage,” in *To Have & to Hold*, ed. Judge, Manion and De Wall, 313.

In South Africa, instead of expanding the Marriage Act to same-sex couples, the Civil Union Act was formed. Same-sex couples are free to marry only under the latter, whereas opposite sex couples may marry under either the Civil Union Act or the Marriage Act. Melanie Judge, Anthony Manion and Shaun DeWaal explain the heightened resonance of having two Acts within their historical context: “The proposed ‘separate but equal’ (which is never equal) regime was reminiscent of apartheid, and it relegated LGBTI people and their relationships to second-class status.”<sup>7</sup> In seeking to strike a compromise in which traditionalists wouldn’t feel that same-sex marriage encroached upon the sanctity of marriage but same-sex couples could legally marry, the institution of a second Act reinforced distinction between opposite sex and same-sex couples. This difference became difficult to disentangle from the sense that heterosexual marriages imparted full citizenship and LGBTIQ marriages “second-class” citizenship. Political cartoonist Jonathan Zapiro illustrates the critique:



Figure 3: Jonathan Zapiro Political Cartoon on Same-Sex Marriage

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<sup>7</sup> Judge, Manion and DeWaal, ed., *To Have and To Hold*, 4.

The Civil Union Act reinforced rather than redressed the sense of second-class citizenship among LGBTIQ South Africans. Factors of race and class exacerbated disenfranchisement among disparate forms of citizenship, one reason being that the activists who actualized their right to same-sex marriage were predominantly wealthy, white gay men:

Thus race, class and education give some a distinct advantage in the claiming of constitutional rights such as financial benefits, the right to adopt, to take advantage of donor insemination, and so forth. By contrast, the claim of majority working-class black lesbians to their constitutional rights – and therefore to safety and security – are under the continuous threat of extreme violence, including brutal forms of ‘curative’ rape and murder.<sup>8</sup>

Mary Hames points to the very problem I outlined in chapter one – that the pervasive rape and killing of black lesbians and trans men in South Africa underscores the limitations of progressive policy. Framing intimate partnerships within human rights rhetoric limits access to same-sex marriage to privileged LGBTIQ people. Beyond the question of how religion figures in perpetuating discrimination, this problem cuts to a shortcoming of identity-based politics.

As discussed in chapter one, simply expanding inclusion into a framework of rights is a flawed strategy. South African statesman, Jan Christian Smuts popularized the phrase “human rights” when he penning the preamble to the United Nations and League of Nations. In part, this fact has been effaced from history outside of South Africa because Smuts espoused a hierarchical view of humanity as evidenced in his book *Holism*, in which he evaluates the potential among various people groups to achieve humanity. Smuts cannot be disentangled from his global influence on progressive politics, because his policies set the conditions from which apartheid sprang. While some scholars might relegate this history to

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<sup>8</sup> Mary Hames, “Lesbians and the Civil Union Act: A critical reflection,” in *To Have & to Hold*, ed. Judge, Manion and De Wall, 259.

the past, human rights rhetoric today also assumes a universal concept of humanity and functions to exclude variants. Though groups who remain marginalized or excluded might account for the majority of the population, they are only granted access to rights and goods by assimilation. This is especially relevant to the debates surrounding marriage, because LGBTIQ couples are not being integrated into full citizenship as is, but rather are cajoled into adhering to traditional family structures prior to inclusion.

The extent of assimilation reaches beyond merely monogamous, long-term unions that adopt children. What we find in South Africa, are a great number of LGBTIQ couples taking up traditional practices in order to secure the acquisition of full citizenship and salvation. Perhaps the most overt iteration of this can be found in the preservation of complementarity. Although the notion of complementarity – that families structured according to discrete roles best serve society and the church – is typically meted out according to gender, same-sex couples frequently adopt and engage in similar hierarchies of power and distributions of labor.

T. Dunbar Moodie, for example, investigates same-sex partnerships (so-called “mine marriages”) that took place when black South Africans were forced to work as migrant laborers in gold and diamond mines.<sup>9</sup> He assumes not only that men had sex with men because mine housing was all male, but also sets this same-sex relation against the more stigmatized alternative of partnering with prostitutes. Moodie argues that same-sex “mine marriages” were conceived of as temporary solutions that did not threaten the wives left on

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<sup>9</sup> T. Dunbar Moodie, “Black Migrant Mine Labourers and the Vicissitudes of Male Desire,” in *Changing Men in South Africa*, ed. Robert Morrell (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 2001). Marlize Rabe describes the legislation that coerced black South Africans into mine work, “Being a father in a Man’s World: the Experiences of Goldmine Workers,” in *Baba: Men and Fatherhood in South Africa*, ed. Linda Richter and Robert Morrell (Cape Town: HSRC Press, 2006), 252.

the homestead. Partnering with city prostitutes risked robbery, contracting venereal disease, and losing one's rural identity.<sup>10</sup> Moodie reports on the "wifey" and "hubby" roles to which same-sex mine marriages adhered. Hubbies acted as breadwinners; they were older men who held the exclusive right to initiate sexual contact, and tended to penetrate rather than be penetrated.<sup>11</sup> "Wifeys" were dedicated to housework, cooking, and being penetrated for the pleasure of the "hubby." Importantly, all "wifeys" were understood to one day outgrow their position and eventually attain "hubby" status.<sup>12</sup>

Some scholars use Moodie's research in order to debunk the myth that "homosexuality" is "UnAfrican." As stated in chapter one, these arguments preserve an essentialist notion of nationality and sexuality. My interest in citing Moodie here is to demonstrate the deep-seated internalization of hierarchical household roles, which explicitly cast one partner in domestic and sexual service to the other, in an exchange for financial support. Mine marriages say little about same-sex attraction, other than that perhaps most people are more fluid in their sexuality than presumed. In fact, such malleability might actually put pressure on identity politics that require that people ascribe to a strict label. What interests me here is how these mine marriages so thoroughly maintain inequity according to hierarchical roles. The institution of marriage often signals for participants the

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<sup>10</sup> "The attractions of town women might seduce a person into forgetting his home, absconding, becoming *amatsbipa*, or in Sesotho *lekhoboa* ('the ones who stay a long time on the mines'). In a society where rural marriage established an economic base for retirement the dangers of going *tsbipa* were the subject of a cautionary tale." Moodie, "Black Migrant Mine Labourers and the Vicissitudes of Male Desire," 307. Also, "Town women are engaged in a desperate struggle with country wives for men's wages and urban accommodation," 310.

<sup>11</sup> "What seems to have mattered to these senior men in sexual relationships was the right and power to initiate and control sexual activity." Moodie, "Black Migrant Mine Labourers and the Vicissitudes of Male Desire," 308.

<sup>12</sup> "Mine wives', after all, would always eventually 'grow up' and become men, so that there was a natural limit to mine marriage, a 'biological' terminus, as it were." Moodie, "Black Migrant Mine Labourers and the Vicissitudes of Male Desire," 307.

division of labor and exchange of goods that complimentarianists extoll. The key difference here is that these male same-sex couples were not permanently fixed in the “wifey” role, but rather assumed this role as a temporary necessity marking the passage from boyhood to manhood.<sup>13</sup>

After democracy took hold in South Africa the return to traditional roles did not dissipate among same-sex couples. These took multiples forms, including the paying of *lobola* bride prices, wearing wedding dresses, and hierarchical roles. Concerning the latter, trans woman Christelle explains that, “We still have the same functions. I’m still head of household. We’ve just taken gender out of it.” Her partner Raven agrees, “Our roles in our family didn’t change. Christelle is still the career person, and I’m still the homebody who takes care of the home and family.”<sup>14</sup> The notion that Christelle’s transition renders their roles genderless obfuscates preservation of disparity. A family’s acceptability is not predicated upon opposite sex couples so much as adherence to hierarchical roles. Despite being same-sex, this couple remains within a framework where one person is “head” of household and source of financial income. Christelle and Raven might appear to be a “queer” couple because they are same-sex and Christelle is a trans woman, however their power dynamics remain unchanged. In addition, like the mine marriages described above, this demonstrates the persistence of privilege for men and trans women in same-sex relationships; both enjoy an upward social mobility disallowed women who love women and trans men, as the violence in South Africa suggests.

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<sup>13</sup> Elizabeth Landis argues that South Africa’s government intentionally disallowed stable black homemaking, which it recognized as a threat. See “Apartheid and the Disabilities of Black Women in South Africa,” *Objective: Justice*, 7.1 (1975): 6.

<sup>14</sup> Interview with Raven Delpont, “I didn’t marry the body, I married the person inside,” in *To Have & to Hold*, ed. Judge, Manion and De Wall, 336.



The concern that same-sex marriage threatens gender roles and hierarchical relations proves tenuous. Gerald Kraak asserts, “In seeking full citizenship, the gay and lesbian community is confronting the deeply entrenched values and repressive institutions of patriarchy, as is the women’s movement.”<sup>15</sup> Instead of upending or disrupting patriarchal values, same-sex marriage (as much as opposite sex marriage) ascribes to these repressive conventions. Thus, the imagined threat that LGBTIQ couples pose to marriage proves farcical. The reality is that same-sex marriage often pressures LGBTIQ couples to demonstrate acceptability by conforming in order to justify access to formal recognition and entitlement to rights. The conditionality at work here might not be entirely inappropriate, because all citizens and church goers are held to some standard of participation and shared ideology, though these expectations appear to be unjustly elevated for LGBTIQ couples.

South African literature scholar Danai Muposta underscores the racialized elements of Christian marriage traditions. She analyzes marketing of “white weddings” to black South African women as a coming-of-age fairy tale genre. Girls are formed to believe that they become women through marriage. As the figure of ideal femininity, the bride at her wedding claims access to modern subjectivity, belonging, and citizenship, Mupotsa explains. Even when the bride is black, this image reinforces racist, sexist, and heterosexist scripts from the colonial encounter. Marriage “civilizes.” One expression of this that Mupotsa identifies is when a black bride selects which avatar – Zulu, Sotho, Xhosa, or Ndebele – and love plot best displays her freedom and equality in South Africa. Muposta finds that many women opt for both traditional tribal and white weddings. One bride that she quotes describes a strong connection between her religion and wedding:

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<sup>15</sup> Gerald Kraak, “‘Are our lives OK?’ Reflections on 13 Years of Gay Liberation in South Africa,” in *To Have & to Hold*, ed. Judge, Manion and De Wall, 282.

At first, I did not want a white wedding. I just thought that after the lobola [bride price] we could just have the lunch to celebrate. But then as time went by I realized that me being Christian, I was cutting God out of the whole process, because the caption and celebration happens after you have been to church and the pastor has blessed you. And then I thought that maybe we just need to have the ceremony and then they could witness this marriage and we could unite before God and say our vows. So that's how we ended up doing a white wedding. We never meant to do a white wedding.<sup>16</sup>

Muposta asserts that the notion of a white wedding formulates romantic love through the invocation of religion, tradition, and modernity. The marriage rite is reduced to a consumer right with the promise of happiness. Romance and freedom, Mupotsa writes, rely on repeated failure.<sup>17</sup> The promise of happiness and liberation via marriage are effectively unattainable because the pursuit of self-possession through property and propriety thrives on an inaccessible futurity.

LGBTIQ couples are disallowed expressions of full civil and ecclesial membership that would encourage, or at least be receptive to considering, new modes of community. Contrary to the hysteria that same-sex marriage might tarnish or transform the institution perhaps the lived reality is that it prohibits LGBTIQ couples from challenging or interrogating the institution of marriage. This is not to suggest that same-sex couples lack agency or critical reflection so much as it is an indictment of a political policy that carefully constricts the terms of integration such that LGBTIQ couples remain in a state of precarity despite having attained the right to marriage.<sup>18</sup> While this precarity differs from past

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<sup>16</sup> Danai S. Mupotsa, "Becoming Girl-Woman-Bride," in Danai S. Muposta and Elina Oinas "Visual Interruptions," ed. Danai S. Muposta and Elina Oinas, *Girlhood Studies*, 8.3 (2015): 75.

<sup>17</sup> Danai Mupotsa, "The Promise of Happiness: Desire, Attachment and Freedom in Post/Apartheid South Africa," *Critical Arts – South-North Cultural and Media Studies*, 29.2 (2015): 196.

<sup>18</sup> Mary Hames argues that, "Lesbians have brought about new transfigurations of the definition of conception and birth, and of family law; they have introduced new dimensions to the Birth and Registration Act, the Children's Act and divorce law. Lesbians too have shaped inheritance law because getting married they automatically receive the same inheritance privileges that heterosexual married women have been awarded all along, as well as the same financial benefits for same-sex partners. South African citizenship has acquired a

concerns about rights to adoption, power of attorney, shared assets, and so on, it arguably inaugurates a heightened contingency – one that is wedged within the daily performance of affirming democracy and minimalizing the threat one might pose to the systems in place. Same-sex couples are brought into the economics of exchanging their adherence to policy for rights. Instead of quieting anxiety, receiving rights might more thoroughly entrench same-sex couples in respectability politics.

One of the ongoing obstacles for identity politics operating as the foundation for the right to same-sex marriage are the ways in which sex/gender classification remains complicated. Intersex and trans people in South Africa continue to face difficulties in getting or staying married due to their genital classification. Cisgendered opposite sex and same sex couples more readily conform to the legal rubrics that facilitate marriage. However, when someone is born intersex or transitions, the state lags in imparting rights and services. This very glitch signals a shortcoming of progressive policy based on rights rhetoric and definitive and unchanging sex/gender taxonomy.

Being intersex means that someone is born with sex organs that doctors struggle to classify as exclusively male or female. Disquieted by this ambiguity, doctors in South Africa and around the world sometimes intervene surgically with or without parental consent. These actions stress the importance of all people to clearly align with one sex. Because society and common life is thoroughly organized according to sex difference, the intersex person is pathologized.

One of the most famous intersex South African Christians is Sally Gross (1953-2014) discussed in the previous chapter. Assigned male at birth, Sally was only deemed intersex at

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whole new meaning.” “Lesbians and the Civil Union Act: A critical reflection,” in *To Have & to Hold*, ed. Judge, Manion and Wall, 265.

age forty at which time she reclassified herself as female. Her status as a Dominican priest in the Catholic Church, which only allows men to be priests, was subsequently revoked. Sally was forced to leave her religious community and her vows were annulled. She describes this experience by using Orlando Patterson's phrase "social death," in her paper "Not in God's Image: Intersex, Social Death and Infanticide."<sup>19</sup> Her formal training in the Catholic Church and at Oxford University was discarded on the basis of her intersex status alone. One of the reasons that Gross embraced religious life as a celibate was due to her asexuality. Despite this Gross was deemed unsuitable for the priesthood upon revealing that her testosterone levels were in the "normal female range" and that she wanted to live as a woman.<sup>20</sup> Her story contains all the nuance of sex/gender identity as located in the body, expressed in dress, and demonstrated by performance.<sup>21</sup> As discussed in chapter two, Gross' status pushed her outside of her faith community. Ultimately she came to found the Intersex South Africa.

Intersex couples in South Africa continue to be pathologized within same-sex marriage policy. However profound, South Africa's progressive policies falter in securing rights and a sense of full citizenship for intersex people. Stephen Coan observes about Gross that, "Her attempt to return to her birthplace, South Africa, showed that secular authorities were equally unable to deal with the implications of her status."<sup>22</sup> In part, Gross' citizenship

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<sup>19</sup> See Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982).

<sup>20</sup> Maureen Isaacson, "Sally Gross: The fight for gender equality loses a giant," *Daily Maverick*, February 2014. <http://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2014-02-25-sally-gross-the-fight-for-gender-equality-loses-a-giant/#.Vwuswus4JUQ>

<sup>21</sup> Susannah Cornwall has published significantly on the Christian theological implications for intersex people. See, for example, *Sex and Uncertainty in the Body of Christ: Intersex Conditions and Christian Theology* (London: Equinox, 2010); "Understanding Gender Dysphoria: Navigating Transgender Issues in a Changing Culture," *Theology & Sexuality* 21.3 (2015): 221-223; "British Intersex Christians' Accounts of Intersex Identity, Christian Identity and Church Experience," *Practical Theology* 6.2 (2013): 220-236; "Asking about what is Better: Intersex, Disability, and Inaugurated Eschatology," *Journal of Religion, Disability and Health* 17.4 (2013): 369.

<sup>22</sup> Stephen Coan, "The Struggle to be Sally," *The Natal Witness Features*, February 21-23, 2000 (published in three parts), 1. <http://www.isna.org/pdf/gross3.pdf>

was complicated by her membership in the African National Congress. Once this was unbanned in 1991, however, her documentation retained her male name and classification. Eventually it surfaced that she was not given a birth certificate, in part due to being intersex. “Which suggested,” Gross explains, “by implication, that I could not get confirmation that I had been born. I had ceased in law to exist as a person.”<sup>23</sup> She was then told that the matter could be more easily resolved if she were to have genital “disambiguation” surgery, which Gross understood to be an unnecessary and even “immoral” suggestion because it was not freely chosen. Ultimately, Gross’ activism in South Africa secured the recognition of intersex people under the law for the first time. What remained unfulfilled was her work in the church: “One of her dreams was that she would share her experience with the church in a way that would make them change their policy on intersex people.”<sup>24</sup> The organization Intersex International Australia president, Morgan Carpenter, explains: “In a sense, the intersex community became her congregation, where she continued to live out her vocation, and where she was surrounded by people she loved right to the end.”<sup>25</sup>

Due to discrimination, Gross’ ministry was narrowed to intersex advocacy, though her religious and academic commitments suggest that she desired a broader scope. Gross also had a physical disability that limited her church attendance, which made for an unbearably isolated faith. She explains, “Religion looms large in my life narrative. My Christian commitment and faith died slowly and painfully of the probably calculated denial of the nourishment of fellowship it needed... Occasionally short meetings for worship at my

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<sup>23</sup> Coan, “The Struggle to be Sally.”

<sup>24</sup> Gabrielle Le Roux, “A Tribute to Sally Gross,” *The Feminist Wire*, February 2014. <http://www.thefeministwire.com/2014/02/tribute-sally-gross/> (accessed September 21, 2016).

<sup>25</sup> Serkan Ozturk, “Sally Gross Remembered as Fearless Intersex Leader,” *Star Observer*, March 2014. <http://www.starobserver.com.au/news/international-news-news/sally-gross-remembered-as-fearless-intersex-leader/118968> (accessed September 21, 2016).

house, sitting silently together in comfortable chairs, are a joy... Rejection by my Order and the Roma Curia still hurts, and I still miss religious life.” Gross’ story of activist triumph mixed with spiritual exclusion signals the misconception that progressive policy suffices to integrate intersex citizens into society. Attaining rights can only be part of the processes in the pursuit of equality, not the entirety. Like lesbian, gay, bisexual, and queer South Africans, intersex citizens seek the right to marriage and religious life.

Christian marriage that expects a couple to reproduce implicitly excludes intersex people who are often infertile. In addition, it attenuates the validity of such marriage, even postmortem. Gross explains:

The very disclosure that a party to a marriage was born intersexed would itself have been grounds for a declaration of invalidity, the finding that there was not a marriage in the first place. In contrast with divorce, which involves the dissolution or annulment of a valid marriage, invalidity involves the finding that, whatever the appearances, there was never actually any marriage. Potentially, there was danger even if an intersexed person and his or her partner managed to negotiate these obstacles and if the marriage remained unimpugned until the death of the non-intersex partner. The discovery at this stage that the surviving spouse was intersexed could constitute grounds for the denial to that person of all rights stemming from marriage on the grounds that the possession of such rights was conditional upon there having been a valid marriage, and that only someone determinately female and someone determinately male could be united validly in marriage.<sup>26</sup>

One of the predicaments that the first draft of the Civil Union Bill (2006) posed to intersex people was that they were technically neither heterosexual nor same-sex couples. Therefore, intersex people were excluded. Perhaps what is most germane to the concerns here are the isolating effects for intersex people. Gross avers, “In an urban context, being intersexed also makes it far more likely than otherwise that one is on the margins, alone and desperately

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<sup>26</sup> Sally Gross, “De-gendering unions: The Civil Union Act and the intersexed,” in *To Have & to Hold*, ed. Judge, Manion and De Wall, 269-70.

lonely. In these circumstances, being able to make a life in companionship with someone else is crucial to psychological survival and, at times of crisis or illness, can make the difference between surviving and going under.”<sup>27</sup> Like Eugene Rogers, Gross stresses the goods denied to those disallowed marriage. According to Gross, intersex people especially depend upon marriage for survival. Being marginalized for being an ambiguous sex/gender renders intersex people like her solitary.

Sharon Cox and Diane Holdsworth are committed to making it known that Christians were not unified against the Civil Union Act. There were churches ardently supporting the legalization of same-sex marriage. Many LGBTIQ Christians hoped to persuade their churches to facilitate the integration of their faith and kinship relations by officiating same-sex weddings. Hompi Januarie explains, “We got married in church because we wanted to do things in front of God...I wanted our marriage to be blessed by God.”<sup>28</sup> The legalization of same-sex marriage was not in opposition to religion, but rather made accessible the fullness of religious traditions to same-sex couples. According to Pierre de Vos, “As the parliamentary hearings showed, the issue of religion was central to social and moral engagements with the notion of marriage between people of the same-sex.”<sup>29</sup>

Certainly it is not necessary to thoroughly reject marriage in order to counter patriarchy and exploitation. Some forms of feminism and womanism support taking liberties in participating in traditions that others deem irredeemable. The following section examines the shortcomings of the opposite extreme of embracing assimilation in same-sex marriage,

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<sup>27</sup> Gross, “De-gendering unions,” 270.

<sup>28</sup> For a discussion on this see: “They knew we were serious,” Interview with Charles Januarie and Hompi Januarie in *To Have & to Hold*, ed. Judge, Manion and De Wall, 318.

<sup>29</sup> Poerre de Vos, “Difference and belonging: The Constitutional Court and the adoption of the Civil Union Act” in *To Have & to Hold*, ed. Judge, Manion and De Wall, 35.

which is to jettison the institution altogether. After exploring these two positions I will turn to the distinctive features of ecclesial marriage and biblical accounts of marriage before offering a decolonial theology of sexuality.

### ***4.3 Radical Reordering or Circling Back?***

More radical groups argue that the institution of marriage is ineluctably patriarchal and exploitative. Some feminist scholars chide the hierarchical, classist, and racist quality of marriage.<sup>30</sup> “Anti-social” queer theorists, such as Leo Bersani and Lee Edelman, resist respectability politics that require assimilation in exchange for rights and services. The conditional quality of ascribing to marriage motivates some scholars to question the institution of marriage altogether. In *Empire of Love*, Elizabeth Povinelli proposes that our contemporary context might benefit from innovative kinship structures. Perhaps Povinelli circumspectly posits this alternative only briefly in her conclusion rather than explicating her vision throughout the text because the mere suggestion is immensely radical. What would it mean for society to rethink the terms and operations of relationships outside of, or even opposed to, the traditional Greco-Roman family?

On July 1, 2006 twenty people released their document, “Beyond Same-Sex Marriage: A New Strategic Vision for All Our Families.”<sup>31</sup> Though it was drafted in the U.S., the authors articulate international commitments. Its purpose was to articulate a broader notion of relationships and economics beyond marriage. The authors begin by offering

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<sup>30</sup> For a history of twentieth-century feminists on marriage, see Serena Mayeri, “Marriage (In)equality and the Historical Legacies of Feminism,” *Faculty Scholarship* 6, California Law Review Circuit, Paper 1599 (2015): 126-136.

<sup>31</sup> The authors include Kartherine Acey, Terry Boggis, Debanuj Dasgupta, Joseph N. DeFilippis, Lisa Duggan, Kenyon Farrow, Ellen Gurzinsky, Amber Hollibaugh, Loraine Hutchins, Surina Khan, Richard Kim, Kerry Lobel, Alice M. Miller, Ana Oliveira, Cori Schmanke Parrish, Suzanne Pharr, Nancy Polikoff, Achebe Betty Powell, Ignacio Rivera, Kendall Thomas, Kay Whitlock, Beth Zemsky. The document is undersigned by LGBT and allied activists, scholars, educators, writers, artists, lawyers, journalist, and community organizers, who are listed in *Studies in Gender and Sexuality* 9.2 (2008): 161-171.



statistics that the majority of people defy the nuclear family model. Examples include: senior citizens living in community, adult children caring for parents, grandparents raising relative's children, polyamorous households, single-parent homes, queer couples who partner in adopting or having children and parenting, and caregiving relationships. Reducing family structures to the framework of marriage obfuscates the variety of care-giving and economic sharing structures in which we participate. One effect of a narrow kinship formulation is to disenfranchise people from healthcare benefits. A marriage-centric organization for society hinders the majority of people, not only those LGBTIQ identifying. The authors press that instead of pursuing the right to same-sex marriage that we might join together to make healthcare, disability services, benefits, public education, and affordable housing accessible to all people regardless of marital status.

Perhaps surprising to some readers, biblical accounts thoroughly explore a variety of kinship relations. As a child, Jesus fulfilled his vocation contrary to cultural obligations to his parents.<sup>32</sup> The apostle Paul's adherence to the hierarchical household, commonly referred to as the household codes, is given more prominence than his writings privileging singleness and celibacy. Historian Peter Brown outlines the subversive qualities of Christians in the early church who renounced social demands to thwart off death and preserve society via marriage and family.<sup>33</sup> Hebrew Bible kinship structures presume the validity and holiness of kinships marked by incest, rape, slavery, abuse, murder, polygamy, abandonment, remarriage, and others. Moreover, marriage is neither particular to the West nor Christianity.

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<sup>32</sup> Luke 2:41-52 narrates Jesus at twelve years old worrying his parents for days because they could not locate him. He had been in the temple courts, doing ministry. Upon discovering him, "His mother said to him, 'Son, why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you.' 'Why were you searching for me?' he asked. 'Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?' But they did not understand what he was saying to them."

<sup>33</sup> Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988).

Ethicist Kathy Rudy explores the revolutionary possibilities of baptism in different terms than I have throughout this project. Rudy understands the logical conclusion of baptism to be sexual hospitality: “Moreover, there will be no way to condemn what I have described as communal sex, for all of us as Christians would understand that sexuality that is hospitable—whether it is monogamous or communal—is good. Indeed, gay male and radical sex communities might even serve as models for explicitly Christian ‘experiments’ in communal living and communal sex.”<sup>34</sup> Rudy argues that baptism should establish promiscuous communities devoted to caring for the other and the stranger. For her, baptism overcomes our social and emotional obligations to biological family ties and thereby prioritizes reproduction via conversion. The Christian expresses hospitality through communal sex in order to advance the kingdom of God.

Rudy’s provocative position presumes an insider status for the baptized Christian who extends their privilege to others through sexuality. Counter to her framing, Willie James Jennings articulates the significance of a Gentile status for all baptized Christians.<sup>35</sup> Jennings attributes the misuse of theology in colonialism to the effacement of Israel’s election. Therefore, he reminds Christians that they have been grafted into salvation through Jesus Christ. Christ’s Jewishness and covenant with Israel makes a way for Christians. This means that Christians are the “other and the stranger,” not the insiders. His intervention stands against Rudy’s configuration of the church’s relation to all people. When Christians recognize their humble status within the kingdom of God, they do not have the privilege of offering hospitality. Instead, they point to Christ.

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<sup>34</sup> Kathy Rudy, *Sex and the Church: Gender, Homosexuality, and the Transformation of Christian Ethics* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1997).

<sup>35</sup> See Willie James Jennings, *The Christian Imagination: Theology and the Origins of Race*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010).

Secondly, Rudy's vision for Christian community lacks an account of the complex ethical negotiations entailed. Her vision for community is predicated on autonomous individuals enjoying sexual gratification on their own terms. Alternatively, polyamorous groups, for example, advocate for concerted communication that establishes and honors the fluctuating limits and concerns among all parties. It is an ethic of care for others as embedded within social networks. In other words, polyamorous groups consider the effects of sex acts beyond the individuals involved. While they cannot be spoken for as a homogenous group, those who write and speak publically about polyamory articulate something far richer than hedonist gratification or asserting their freedom to enjoy sex as play. Certainly this is more sophisticated than Christian theologies of sexuality that reduce marriage to conjugal obligation. The interplay of emotions among partners in relation to family and social networks distinguishes it from open relationships.<sup>36</sup> Consent is also detailed as participants delineate curiosities and concerns. My mention of polyamory here is not to extend it as an ideal vision for Christian community, though perhaps that is where Rudy was leading. Rather, I posit it as a more ethical secular understanding of intimacy than what she suggests we might find in baptism.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> In analyzing women's subjectivity in polyamory, Elisabeth Sheff argues that unlike polyamorous groups, "swingers maintain conservative attitudes regarding gender roles," "Polyamorous Women, Sexual Subjectivity and Power," *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 34. 3 (2005): 253. Traditional gender roles are not necessarily oppressive. The distinction here is that polyamory does not take gender or sexuality arrangements for granted, but rather presumes that intimate discussion in community formulates an ongoing negotiation of those terms. See also Deborah Anapol, *Polyamory in the Twenty-First Century: Love and Intimacy with Multiple Partners* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2010); Ann Tweedy, "Polyamory as a Sexual Orientation," *University of Cincinnati Law Review* 79.4 (2011): 1461-1515; Heather Anne Trahan, "Relationship Literacy and Polyamory: A Queer Approach," PhD diss., Bowling Green State University, 2014; Nicole Atkins and Jeremiah Bullock, "Not Monogamous? Not a Problem: A Quantitative Analysis of the Prevalence of Polyamory," 2011; Ronald C. Den Otter, ed., *Beyond Same-Sex Marriage* (Lexington Books, 2016).

<sup>37</sup> A theological account of polyamory is beyond the scope of this project, though an intriguing inquiry.

Although Rudy and I both turn to baptism in order to explore the meaning of sexuality for theology, our logic and conclusions are dissimilar. The reason I pause to distinguish my argument from hers is because the geography of Rudy's theology problematically situates the Christian as elect and magnanimous. In so doing, her theology lends itself to serving the interests of hegemonic powers, such as apartheid, despite her efforts to advocate for LGBTIQ Christians. She does not sufficiently account for sexual exploitation or sex acts as ethically obligating people to one another and their communities. Her sacramental theology paired with liberal politics has been a false start.

#### ***4.4 Christian Marriage***

Like civil marriages, motivations for same-sex church weddings are the same as opposite sex couples. People of faith express desire for God and their faith community to participate in supporting their marriage. For some, there is an added sense of solemnity and meaning within the ecclesial setting. As civil unions actualize legal rights and obligations, religious ceremonies facilitate spiritual blessings and expectations. Integrating religion can make marriage feel more personal because some couples locate their identity within religion more profoundly than within nationality.

Historian John Witte Jr. outlines four Christian frameworks for marriage in *From Sacrament to Contract: Marriage, Religion, and Law in the Western Tradition*. I will summarize his work before considering some contemporary theologies of Christian marriage. First, Witte describes the Catholic position on marriage as a sacrament, subject to creeds and canons, that sanctifies the opposite sex couple. St. Augustine outlines the three goods of marriage in his treatise *De bono coniugali* – commitment, reproduction, and sacrament. Only in the 12<sup>th</sup> century did the Catholic Church put marriage into canon law for the first time. It borrowed

from Greco-Roman custom. In the centuries before Christ, classical Greek philosophers treated marriage as a natural and necessary institution designed to foster the mutual love, support, and friendship of husband and wife, and to produce legitimate children who would carry on the family name and property. Marriage was formalized in the Catholic Church in 1563 at the Council of Trent. New codes were issued twice in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The Catholic Church asserts the three goods of marriage: offspring, fidelity, and unbreakable bond.

By the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Protestant reformers were foregrounding marriage as a holy vocation, not just clerical celibacy. John Calvin argued that Christian marriage is a covenant, created by God and governed by both church and state in concert. As covenant, marriage for Calvin is grounded in the order of creation and governed by the law of God. The consistory, magistracy, and community were made responsible for the proper functioning of the marital covenant and the enforcement of God's moral laws for marriage.<sup>38</sup> Reformer Martin Luther changed his views on marriage over time. During his early years, he espoused a Catholic understanding of marriage. With time, however, he became adamant that marriage is a civil estate rather than an ecclesial one. As such, marriage should be directed primarily to human goods, ends, and needs. Marriage deters prostitution, promiscuity, and sexual sins, according to Luther. He also spoke about domestic sainthood and the preferred state of marriage. Both reformers considered marriage an antidote or prophylactic against concupiscence. Married couples were compelled to fulfill their "conjugal duty" to one another in order to defeat lust and temper sin.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> For more on this, see John Witte Jr.'s *Sex, Marriage, and Family in John Calvin's Geneva* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005).

<sup>39</sup> Jon Lemmond, "The greatest disorder on the earth": Domestic abuse in sixteenth-century Nuremberg." PhD diss., University of California Santa Barbara, 2009.

Witte then describes how Anglicans conceptualized marriage as a small commonwealth subordinate to England's "great commonwealth." According to this framework the head of state is also the head of church, and the church must follow the state's lead. Last, Witte explains how the Enlightenment reduced marriage to a voluntary contract between autonomous individuals. Within modernity, God, nature, the church, state, tradition or community do not establish marriage. Rather, the individuals involved set the terms of the contract. Into the present day, marriage and family have become increasingly privatized.

Theologian David McCarthy argues that Christian marriage in the U.S. today is thoroughly saturated in capitalism, through which we seek freedom: "Contractual politics reduces the home to a private place, and in doing so, undermines the possibility of alternative social forms."<sup>40</sup> In other words, modernity demands that we conform to traditional social forms as a prerequisite for a clean, contractual exchange. McCarthy describes these contractual marriages as "closed families" which polarize men's roles and women's roles. Within closed families, McCarthy asserts, sustaining romance is incompatible with quotidian life.<sup>41</sup> Children merely consume and contribute little to the household. Because, "[t]he closed family understands its health and well-being in terms of emotional and financial independence," it seeks freedom in contractual agreements.<sup>42</sup> Contractual agreements facilitate impersonal and discrete transactions. Strangers are paid to fulfill tasks and friendship is relegated exclusively to leisure activities.

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<sup>40</sup> David Matzko McCarthy, *Sex and Love in the Home: A Theology of the Household* (London: SCM Press, 2004), 96.

<sup>41</sup> "With the rise of industry, the world of production and politics comes to be located in the public life of men, while women are thought to sustain the emotional and moral sphere of home...domestic life, on its own dull terms, is considered inhospitable to romance and must be remade and enlivened by...leisure, exotic vacations, and expensive nights out without the kids." David Matzko McCarthy, *Sex and Love in the Home: A Theology of the Household* (London: SCM Press, 2004), 89.

<sup>42</sup> McCarthy, *Sex and Love in the Home*, 93.

Conversely, McCarthy suggests, “open families” embrace the discomfort, risk, and intimacy of non-contractual relationships: “the critical feature of the open home is its practical dependence on a wider network of exchange, particularly in relation to a dominant cultural and economic narrative that gives privilege to the isolated, self-sufficient home.”<sup>43</sup> He persuasively argues that Christian marriage and family be marked by risky intimate life together. Instead of contracts creating a comfortable distance between one another, an open home stirs us into vulnerable relationships. Gifts are not mere excess, but meet real needs. Therefore, they are returned at unknown hours and are likely incommensurate. This iniquity facilitates an ongoing interdependence beyond biological ties.

Although McCarthy does not explicitly mention same-sex couples in his notion of “open families,” they are compatible with his concept. One might go so far as to suggest that same-sex couples are more predisposed to live into the Christian “open family” that McCarthy describes. This is in part due to necessity, but is significant nevertheless. Consider for a moment that opposite sex couples sometimes accidentally become pregnant, desire children who share family features, seek deep emotional bonds with their children, and depend on their children in old age. Such couples are also pressured to do pre-natal testing early into pregnancy in order to determine whether they should terminate children with mental or physical disabilities. Conversely, same-sex couples are subject to rigorous assessment and scrutiny before being considered as foster or adoptive parents. Surrogacy proves complicated, and many of the children in need of homes have suffered trauma and sometimes have physical and/or mental disabilities. In breaking with the conventions of couples having reproductive sex in order to thwart off death, privileging blood ties over

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<sup>43</sup> McCarthy, *Sex and Love in the Home*, 101.

spiritual family, and refusing medical intervention for the purpose of biological offspring, same-sex couples embody “open families.” Perhaps this openness stems from the experience of family, friends, and co-workers rejecting LGBTIQ Christians. In such cases the latter depend on open and affirming churches to provide unconditional love and support.

Eugene Rogers is one of the most well-known and respected theologians published on same-sex marriage. Undoubtedly his contribution is tremendous – he accounts for natural theology, the doctrine of the Trinity, ecclesiology, and the economy of salvation to argue that same-sex couples should not be denied the sanctifying function of ecclesial marriage.<sup>44</sup> Rogers draws a great deal of inspiration from Anglican Archbishop Rowan Williams’ *The Body’s Grace* in constructing his argument. An Episcopalian himself, Rogers borrows from Eastern Orthodox, Catholic, and Anglican theologians, in order to craft an ecumenical theology of sexuality. With this method, Rogers makes a compelling case that same-sex couples should not be denied the sanctifying quality of marriage. He works through how Christian marriage witnesses to the Triune relations, builds up of the church, and participates in the economy of salvation. In addition, Rogers explains how same-sex couples trust in God over reproduction in a manner like Moses’ willingness to sacrifice Isaac. He appeals to God grafting in the Gentiles in order to open Christians to including same-sex couples.

For many theologians, Rogers’ argument is sufficiently if not thoroughly persuasive. In asserting the sanctifying quality of sacramental marriage he admonishes the church to be inclusive of same-sex couples. However, Rogers’ position could be pressed further by the concerns and alternatives posited here. These include: 1) non-sacramental Christian

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<sup>44</sup> See Eugene Rogers, “Sanctification, Homosexuality, and God’s Triune Life,” in *Theology and Sexuality: Classic and Contemporary Readings* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002) and *Sexuality and the Christian Body: Their Way into the Triune God* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999).



marriage, 2) the Triune relations as unique, and 3) marriage metaphor as the divine-human relation. Below I explore these in an integrated form.

Protestant theologians must account for the purpose and function of Christian marriage that is not sacramental. Protestant Reformers rejected the notion of seven sacraments and only maintained Baptism and the Eucharist as sacraments. How curious that Protestants continue to consider marriage to operate in a sanctifying, if not saving, capacity. Similarly, cisgender heterosexual reproduction is understood as both a penitent *literal* labor and fruit evidencing one's faith. In part this has to do with what many Reformation historians describe as the re-domestication of women.<sup>45</sup> Previously, nuns enjoyed access to education, libraries, and even publishing. However, the "domestic sainthood" that the reformers extolled – a component of their priesthood of all believers doctrine – so effectively centralized marriage as the context for holy sexuality that the two have become confused.

The marriage metaphor is mishandled. Christians wrongly point to the institution of marriage for evidence of salvation rather than relying upon God. When interpreted as a simile, Christians attempt to demarcate the features of holy marriage between people. Contrary to this approach, Janet Martin Soskice traces various theories of metaphor and ultimately argues that metaphor adds to our understanding. She explains, "A good metaphor may not simply be an oblique reference to a predetermined subject but a new vision, the birth of a new understanding, a new referential access. A strong metaphor compels new

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<sup>45</sup>See: Peter Matheson, "A Reformation for Women? Sin, Grace and Gender in the Writings of Argula Von Grumbach," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 49.1 (Feb 1996); Mary Wisner, "Beyond Women and the Family: Towards a Gender Analysis of the Reformation," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 18 (1987): 311-321; Jeffrey Watt, "Women and the Consistory in Calvin's Geneva," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 24 (1993): 429-493.

possibilities of vision.”<sup>46</sup> Thus, metaphor does not simply refer to something known or compare two things; rather it expands our sense of, in this instance, God’s intimate life with humanity. This is what drives the force of Jesus’s metaphor when he asks, “How can the guests of the bridegroom mourn while he is with them? The time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them; then they will fast,” (Matthew 9:15, NIV). The comparison he makes after this verse is that at the resurrection people will be like the angels in heaven, neither getting married nor being married. In the scriptures, our inquiries into intimate relations are continually directed back to the creature-Creator relationship. Jesus speaks of marriage in metaphorical terms not to aid us in “getting it right” or doing it better.<sup>47</sup> The purpose of the marriage/wedding/bridegroom metaphor is to expand our imagination into the kingdom of God where relations are uniquely and profoundly intimate.

Instead of the Triune relation – which is uniquely sinless, selfless, and sufficient – to remind humanity of our need for God, some theologians attempt to recreate this community through marriage in the church and state. Doing so distorts our understanding of our daily dependence upon God for any hope of embodying love, grace, joy, or peace. For when we place our trust in marriage, we find over and over again that the institution fails. It fails Christians and non-Christians alike, though not due to a lack of understanding the doctrine of the Trinity. Humanity bears the image of God as an *analogia relationis* [analogy of relations] rather than *analogie entis* [analogy of being], which is for humanity to be free for others.<sup>48</sup> It

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<sup>46</sup> Janet Martin Soskice, *Metaphor and Religious Language* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 57-58.

<sup>47</sup> “The strong metaphor does not prompt the routine renaming of aspects otherwise identifiable, but suggest new categories of interpretation and hypothesizes new entities, states of affairs, and causal relations.” Soskice, *Metaphor and Religious Language*, 62.

<sup>48</sup> In Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s terms, “Instead the analogia or likeness must be understood very strictly in the sense that what is like derives its likeness *only* from the prototype, so that it always points us only to the prototype itself and it is ‘like’ it only in pointing to it this way,” *DBWE*, vol. 3, *Creation and Fall: Gen. 1:26-27*

does not correlate human marriage and reproduction with Triune forms; the community of three persons in the Godhead invites us participate in the freedom of life-giving intimacy.

#### ***4.5 For the Bible Tells Me So***

The form of marriage that is hallowed throughout scripture is not a literal union of a man and a woman; it is the metaphorical image for the Creator-creature relation. This marriage is not one of fidelity or purity. The book of Hosea details God's commitment to Israel despite their unfaithfulness. It is a difficult passage of scripture containing sex, violence, and intimate partner abuse. I explore it here because Hosea's marriage confronts us with the horrors of intimate relationships and reorients us towards God. In my reading, this story attests to the limitations of human relationships and the need for God. When it is read in the opposite direction, as an ideal vision for the divine-human relation that people should emulate, it authorizes a host of abuses and atrocities.

Counter to theologies stressing the wedding of abstinent and monogamous individuals, in this biblical text God instructs the prophet to marry a promiscuous woman: "When the Lord began to speak through Hosea, the Lord said to him, 'Go, marry a promiscuous woman and have children with her, for like an adulterous wife this land is guilty of unfaithfulness to the Lord.'"<sup>49</sup> The children born of this union are given names meaning, "not loved" and "not my people." It is hardly the picture of a puritanical household. Like Hosea's wife, a sex worker of sorts, we the church seek creaturely comforts apart from God: "I will go after my lovers, who give me my food and my water, my wool and my linen, my

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*The Image of God on Earth*, ed. John W. de Gruchy, trans. Douglas Stephen Bax (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007) p. 65.

<sup>49</sup> Hosea 1:2 (NIV).

olive oil and my drink.”<sup>50</sup> The chiasm exhibits an already-not-yet quality in juxtaposing this dreadful state with the one to come.

“In that day,” declares the Lord, “you will call me ‘my husband’; you will no longer call me ‘my master.’ I will remove the names of the Baals from her lips; no longer will their names be invoked. In that day I will make a covenant for them with the beasts of the field, the birds of the sky and the creatures that move along the ground. Bow and sword and battle I will abolish from the land, so that all may lie down in safety. I will betroth you to me forever; I will betroth you in righteousness and justice, in love and compassion. I will betroth you in faithfulness and you will acknowledge the Lord.... I will show my love to the one I called ‘Not my loved one.’ I will say to those called ‘Not my people,’ ‘You are my people’; and they will say, ‘You are my God.’”<sup>51</sup>

What we find is that the Lord does not seek us out because we are righteous. Our sexuality is no barrier to intimacy or covenant. God partners with creation and makes all things new – the heavens and the earth. With God we will put down our idols. All of creation will live in harmony. There will be no war. During this time, God will be wed to us forever and transform us into loved and chosen people. This returns us to Jennings’ argument, that when Christians lose sight of their humble status – grafted into the family of God – atrocities like colonialism take place. Living into our calling is not a triumphant display of self-righteousness or moralism. Rather, with God we are free from our sin and for others because we rely on Christ’s righteousness. In Christ our promiscuity is turned to fidelity – fidelity that is centered on the Creator-creature relation. Which is why theologies of sexuality go astray when they fixate on the minutia of regulating sexual conduct rather than pointing people to Christ.

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<sup>50</sup> Hosea 2:5b (NIV).

<sup>51</sup> Hosea 2:16-23 (NIV).

Most troubling, Hosea's story paints a frightful image of a possessive and possibly abusive husband punishing his unfaithful wife. Similarly, the weakness and frailty of our creaturely marriages point us to our need for God. We are not capable of loving another well. We are as unfaithful as the wife and seek to possess the other as much as Hosea does. In this passage, it is God who is aligned with Hosea – a man who shames his wife through public stripping, then abuses and neglects her children as punishment for her sins. Exacerbating the horror of their marriage relations, Hosea follows this punishment with tender speech and the promise of goods. He purposely renders her social conditions desperate in order to reestablish a relationship of dependence and dominance.

Who in the church might relate to feeling manhandled by God and God's people? Who might describe their journey of faith in similarly violent terms, feeling manipulated and desperate to survive? Perhaps Hosea speaks truth where we fear it most; our pews and pulpits overflow with this sort of love, thereby entangling the divine with trauma. We return to the church and scriptures like a battered partner, seeking reconciliation and relationship. Intimacy confronts us with the painful reality of our abject inability to acquire what we long for most - to be loved and to be part of a people group. Entering into communion entails risk; there is no safeguard against harm. Perhaps, like lament psalms, the book of Hosea could be read as descriptive instead of prescriptive; perhaps it names them in order to indicate the tragic nature of harm and abuse within sacred communities, rather than to authorize them.

Biblical scholars use a variety of tactics to cope with the sexual violence and abuse in Hosea. Some scholars stress the use of the marriage metaphor in Hosea as a literary device for expressing Israel's historical experience of exile. Others critique this technique because of

its harmful effects on present day people – i.e. it authorizes domestic violence. While feminist and womanist scholars are censured for taking these metaphors literally, Soskice has argued that metaphors necessarily transform our understanding of both elements. Soskice’s contribution suggests that “texts of terror” cannot be easily glossed or finessed. The use of sexually violent metaphors in itself requires interrogation before its implications for readers are considered.

Hebrew Bible scholar Christl M. Maier locates the origin of the marriage metaphor in the ancient Near East’s concept of covenant. If understood along the lines of Hittite and Neo-Assyrian vassal treaties, YHWH’s covenant to Israel would be one of a superior to an inferior, and would be marked by protection in exchange for obedience. The “whore metaphor” gestures to the superior’s vulnerability to dishonor should the inferior disobey. Veneration of other deities, for example, would be described in terms of adultery. Maier explains that the ambiguous language in the Hebrew terminology does not delineate adultery or illicit sex from prostitution. “All Hebrew texts are unanimous,” she writes, “in condemning as adultery any sexual intercourse that violates a man’s control over the sexual activity of either his unmarried daughter or his wife.”<sup>52</sup> Maier concludes that the whore metaphor should not be taken literally as descriptive of women or gender relations. It a polemic language common to Hosea’s social-historical context, she asserts. These are counter-balanced by other scriptures, and ultimately do no legitimate violence in the present day. Hers is a dissatisfactory claim to disregard the ways in which this metaphor is leveled over and against contemporary women, especially within religious contexts. Also, the use of it as a metaphor *in se* is part of what I object to and what remains unresolved.

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<sup>52</sup> Christl M. Maier, *Daughter Zion, Mother Zion: Gender, Space, and the Sacred in Ancient Israel* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008), 96.

Biblical theologian Renita J. Weems braves the troubling use of marriage metaphors in the prophetic texts. Weems understands Israel's historical investments in patriarchy as fueling the impact of sexual metaphors; the grotesque accounts of rape and abuse are effective literary tools. She confronts readers with scriptural accounts of God as punitive, jealous, and even raping. These emphasize the divine-human bond as relational, hierarchical, mutually obligated, and accountable. Weems underscores the high stakes in using these metaphors because she, like Sallie McFague, traces a relationship in which the text shapes the reader's thinking and reality. Instead of easing the reader's anxiety, Weems pulls us face to face with the trauma in the text, "Hence, however one might take exception to the image of God as abusive and destructive, one must commend Israel for its courage to grapple with the dark side of human history, the hard side of God, and the dark side of intimacy."<sup>53</sup> Though this assertion might disquiet the reader, Weems admirably resists glossing and minimizing the affect Hosea's book evokes.

Stuart Macwilliam fervently disagrees with feminist readings of Hosea, which understand the third section to be part and parcel with cycles of abuse and romance. He reads this final section as a restorative picture of forgiveness for Israel who has abandoned, but not necessarily committed adultery against, God. Macwilliam rightly explains the historical use of terms such as fornication to be shorthand for apostasy. Oddly, Macwilliam argues that Hosea's marriage is not structurally part of the marriage metaphor proper, even though he goes on to analyze it as such. Stressing the sex of the characters, Macwilliam argues that in Hosea Israelites are cast as the wives of YHWH. Awareness of the patriarchal

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<sup>53</sup> Renita J. Weems, *Battered Love: Marriage, Sex, and Violence in the Hebrew Prophets* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 82.

assumptions underlying a man's right to his wife's sexuality serves as an entry point for Macwilliam's queer reading. He argues that the third Movement:

...is expressed in terms of unconditional forgiveness, of fulfilled sexual intimacy and, moreover, at a cosmic level with solemn divine asseveration. And to appreciate the queer significance of the third Movement it only as to be asked who the referent is of this cosmic marriage. Whose heart is Yhwh about to win over? Whose body is he about to enjoy? One of the queerest features of the *marriage metaphor* in Hosea is that it is the male Israelites who are the recipients of this sexual fervor.<sup>54</sup>

Macwilliam's assertion readily disregards the validity of reading an abusive cycle in Hosea in order to fixate on a static gendering of God and a supposed emasculation of Israelite men:

But the inexorable logic of the *marriage metaphor* also demands in the Third Movement that male Israelites are foretold a bond with Yhwh that is expressed *positively* in explicitly sexual terms: male Israelite will be Yhwh's happy brides. Here is a very odd situation in the Hebrew Bible, that exemplar of patriarchal values, where men envisioned as women do not symbolize only shame and humiliation, but also sexual fulfillment expressed in cosmic terms.<sup>55</sup>

Macwilliam delves into the homoerotic potential of Hosea without interrogating the reification of gender entailed in his reading. Though he takes pains to proclaim his indebtedness to feminist and womanist scholars, Macwilliam ultimately jettisons their suspicion of the text in order to advance a queer reading of Hosea. In what sense is Macwilliam's reading queer though? He certainly posits his hermeneutic in terms of same-sex intimacy, but Macwilliam's logic necessitates conventional notions of sex, gender, and sexuality. Heteronormativity, patriarchy, and essentialized sex/gender relations are prerequisites for his reading. Presuming that Israel operated within these frameworks is not

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<sup>54</sup> Stuart Macwilliam, *Queer Theory and the Prophetic Marriage Metaphor in the Hebrew Bible* (Sheffield: Equinox, 2011), 213.

<sup>55</sup> Macwilliam, *Queer Theory*, 129.



only anachronistic, as Foucault has demonstrated in his *History of Sexuality*, but also unfitting for contemporary readers committed to queer politics. Reviewers attribute the greatest value of Macwilliam's book to his camp reading of Ezekiel, but his analysis of Hosea preserves hegemonic typology and the shortsightedness of a privileged social location.<sup>56</sup>

Instead of turning to the state for succor, which Hosea warns against, we might read Hosea as an admission of the harm experienced within the church when it associates abuse with God and scripture. After all, the text is an indictment of God's people having lost their way. Perhaps the most difficult aspect of the marriage metaphor is that God forgives those who have used God's name and word to do evil. The scandal of the cross and the Gospel is just that. We remain in community with our abusers. But instead of authorizing their violence, God condemns it as unfaithfulness to God and humanity. God goes to the sinner and tells them to repent. They are neither affirmed nor condemned. This is the strange place of grace. Rapists and murders must stop their crimes, but need not be segregated or dehumanized. Perhaps the horror of Hosea is not that God punishes us, but that God doesn't punish those who sin against us. We long for divine wrath to pour down on those who have wronged us, and yet they are counted as no more or less sinful than us. This does not make the experience of suffering or death sacred; it attests to the messy business of life together.

What we see in the church and society is precisely the embodiment of the marriage metaphor. Rebuttals to feminist critiques that metaphors are harmful when taken literally are true, though dismissive. Christians wrongly look to marriage for salvation and civil marriages are imagined to promise full citizenship. LGBTIQ people are urged to participate in the

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<sup>56</sup> For example, see Hugo Córdova Quero's review in *Religion & Gender* 4.1 (2014): 49-52.

institution of marriage in exchange for rights and services. It is no longer a metaphor for God's intimacy with creation; it has been reduced to utilitarian purposes.<sup>57</sup>

Could this be a reverse of the transfiguration diptych? When we read Hosea as an account of the harm people suffer at the hands of the church and scriptures, and by implication God, the marriage metaphor for Christ the bridegroom presents the second piece of the diptych in which God's faithfulness makes us fitting for marriage. We marry Christ as the church, not as individuals. As individuals we are the fruit of this union – children, or adopted co-heirs. We owe our existence to the marriage relationship between the church and Christ. It is not a matter of gender bending women or same-sex loving men marrying Christ. We are neither male nor female according to the baptismal formula in Galatians. It is in this wedding, not of us to one another, that we find our salvation and heavenly citizenship. The discontent this diptych evokes, where a harmful marriage is turned wholesome, underscores the need for revelation prior to horror. What we learn from the transfiguration in the previous chapter is that despite our inability to grasp what is revealed in the moment, the horror that follows has a different meaning within the context of revelation. Moving from horror to joy in the marriage metaphor without revelation compromises the meaning and purpose of baptism.

Even in the most devout and tender relationships we hurt one another because such intimacy must be mediated. Christ and the Spirit enable us to rightly embrace another without seeking to possess or exploit. With Christ as our mediator the possibility of love and intimacy are present. We are devastatingly insufficient for one another. God alone is able to meet our profound needs. In relationships we experience the need to turn to Christ daily.

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<sup>57</sup> Interestingly, the use of marriage as a metaphor in Hosea shifts to a parent simile.

His redemptive work enables us to pursue intimacy with one another that is not marked by enduring harm. Christ emboldens us to confront sin and to be freed from it. It no longer necessitates condemnation and exile. With Christ we find the freedom to be for God and others.

However, does Christ bear the burden of God's wrath in our place as substitutionary atonement theologies suggest? Does Christ make us fit for marriage to God? What we see in Christ's suffering and death, as theologian René Girard has pressed, are the ways in which violence and bloodlust spring from human desire rather than God.<sup>58</sup> Allowing himself to be mistreated and executed, Christ exposes the misjudgment of humanity. We are not called to endure marriage to a wrathful God. The gospel accounts narrate dialogues between the Pharisees, Sadducees, and Christ within a broader scriptural context; they are bookended with inquiries about God's kingdom in which we learn that the first shall be last, the lowly exalted, the unconventional rewarded, and the poor blessed.<sup>59</sup> Having fulfilled the law, Christ reorients all things. Our attempts to demarcate the terms of Christian sex and marriage frequently invoke the Pharisees and Sadducees whom Jesus rebukes. Our earnest desire to attain holiness and righteousness go astray when we pursue these without the aid of God. Were the incarnate God to stand before us, as Jesus did, we would ask similarly devious and misguided questions. Not because we intended to forge an alternative, but precisely because we would be so appalled at his disruptive theology. Jesus reveals to us that the kingdom of God upsets civil, political, and religious mores. He specifically names the erroneous prioritization of work and service to family over God. Jesus overturns the procedures for marriage, divorce, adoption, inheritance, and vocation. Our relationships and sexuality are

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<sup>58</sup> René Girard, *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning* (New York: Orbis Books, 2001).

<sup>59</sup> Matthew 19; Matthew 22; Mark 10; Mark 12; Luke 14; Luke 20.

not services to the state, but rather to the kingdom of God. Christ explicitly states that there will be no marriage in the resurrection.<sup>60</sup> The only marriage we will know is that of us as the church to God in Christ.<sup>61</sup> In addition, Jesus explains that marriage and divorce were allowances made for us due to weakness, not piety. Finally, he asserts that choosing him might very well entail rejecting our families and obligations in favor of discipleship.<sup>62</sup>

Therefore, marriage between God and humanity neither mimics hierarchical heterosexual marriage nor prescribes ideal Christian marriage.<sup>63</sup> The biblical and theological use of this term points us to something new and unique.<sup>64</sup> In God, through Christ, and with the Holy Spirit we are wed. This marriage is crucial and unending. It is not marked by equality, righteousness, or perfection. Rather, it draws together the profound asymmetry of unfaithful creatures with the faithful one, sinners with the righteous one, and humanity with God. Part and parcel of this marriage is a reordering of all other relationships; it transforms us. This marriage frees us from sin, death, and self-interest so that we can be for God and others. We miss the point entirely when we fixate on adjudicating the terms of marriage between people.

While Rogers admirably makes a case for same-sex Christian marriage, he does so without interrogating Jesus' ambivalence about the institution. Moreover, Rogers preserves an ideological vision of marriage tied to the liturgy as some sort of safeguard for Christians.

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<sup>60</sup> Matthew 22; Mark 12.

<sup>61</sup> Hosea 2; Matthew 25; Mark 2; Luke 5; Revelation 19.

<sup>62</sup> Matthew 12:46-50; Luke 14:26.

<sup>63</sup> "In so far as metaphor suggests a community of relations (and all active metaphors do), its significance is not reducible to a single atomistic predicate. This same relational irreducibility characterizes other forms of figurative speech common to religious writings and is especially noteworthy in the case of parable. Rather than irreducibility being a flaw, it is one of the marks of the particular conceptual utility of metaphor." Soskice, *Metaphor and Religious Language*, 95.

<sup>64</sup> "The interesting thing about metaphor, or at least about some metaphors, is that they are used not to redescribe but to disclose for the first time. The metaphor has to be used because something new is being talked about." Soskice, *Metaphor and Religious Language*, 89.

Trusting in marriage as sacrament to sanctify or redeem Christians might be consistent with Catholic dogma, but it does not explain why Protestants so fervently revere it. Certainly Rogers would attribute his commitments to ecumenism. However, political discourse claiming the Christian need to preserve and protect the sanctity of marriage suggests that the work to include same-sex couples does not adequately interrogate distortions of Christian theology. This explains why some conservatives might support same-sex marriage, and liberals reject it; both imagine marriage as an organizing and ordering of sexuality, which the former desires and the latter resists. My intervention here is to upset Christian theology that clings to marriage rather than God for sanctification and salvation. While God is free to work through marriage in order to accomplish both, participation in it does not ensure this end.

In his work, Rogers readily embraces Williams' attention to desire as the shared quality of the Triune relation that is opened to humans in marriage. Williams' argument moves forward on the basis of sexuality being mediated primarily through desire. This premise allows him to move from the divine desire among the persons of the Trinity to God's desire for humanity. He asserts that desire is holy and thus there is a sacred erotic quality to the relations between the persons of the Trinity and humanity. Williams explains, "The whole story of creation, incarnation, and our incorporation into the fellowship of Christ' body tells us that God desires us, *as if we were God*, as if we were that unconditional response to God's giving that God's self makes in the life of the Trinity. We are created so that we may be caught up in this, so that we may grow into the wholehearted love of God by

learning that God loves us as God loves God.”<sup>65</sup> For Williams, the body mediates God’s grace. Therefore, sexuality has a positive place within the Christian life.

Williams attempts to draw desire and pleasure together in “The Body’s Grace.” Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze differed on whether desire or pleasure is the mode through which sexuality is best understood.<sup>66</sup> For some, the distinction lies in the latter necessitating a body. One experiences pleasure in the body whereas desire might limit itself to a disposition. Foucault argued against the repression hypothesis and Sigmund Freud’s notion of sexuality. However, Deleuze asserts that lack is not a prerequisite for “desire,” and desire is not necessarily natural. Interestingly, Rogers quotes celibate Sebastian Moore: “The most dramatic, indeed comic, insistence of cross purposes between the Vatican and the married, is that the Vatican sees the problem as one of curbing desire, whereas the married know that the problem is to keep desire going, which means to keep it growing, which means deepening.”<sup>67</sup> He suggests that our fear that sexual desire is inherently sinful actually misses the true problem – that sustaining sexual desire within a monogamous Christian marriage over the course of a lifetime proves quite challenging.

Despite Williams and Rogers’ rich exploration in the theological purpose of desire, the two bypass the terrors of being desired.<sup>68</sup> Black South African lesbians and trans men, for example, experience being sexually desired in the frightful form of violent rape and

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<sup>65</sup> Rowan Williams, “The Body’s Grace,” in *Theology and Sexuality: Classic and Contemporary Readings*, ed. Eugene Rogers (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), 311-312.

<sup>66</sup> Their debate can be found in Michel Foucault’s *The Will to Knowledge* (1976) and Gilles Deleuze’s “Desire and Pleasure” (1977).

<sup>67</sup> Sebastian Moore, “The Crisis of an Ethic Without Desire,” in *Jesus the Liberator of Desire* (New York: Crossroad, 1989), 104

<sup>68</sup> “Grace, for the Christian believer, is a transformation that depends in large part on knowing yourself to be seen in a certain way: as significant, as wanted” and “The life of the Christian community has as its rational – if not invariably its practical reality – the task of teaching us to so order our relations that human beings may see themselves as desired, as the occasion of joy.” Williams, “The Body’s Grace,” 311.

murder. Too many women, children, people of color, and LGBTIQ Christians similarly know that being desired and occasions for others' joy is deeply embedded in sin.

Exploitative sexuality must never be confused with God's grace. One of the most insidious effects of someone being harassed, coerced, molested, or abused, is the muddling of pleasure with sin. The presence of delight is no indication of God's grace. It is one reason that sexuality is so complex. If there were no pleasure involved on either side of the exchange in sexual violence it wouldn't be as compelling or prevalent. Therefore, although pleasure needs to be reclaimed by Christian theology as a good, it certainly cannot be an unequivocal measure of grace.

Now Williams is not suggesting that sexual joy inherently imparts grace, and he certainly is not advocating for sexual violence. However, his theology in *The Body's Grace* leaves the possibility of these distortions open, which is why we must press into them here. Pleasure is not sinful, and sexuality can be an opportunity to experience God's grace within one's body and through intimate community. Williams effectively makes this argument. What is not interrogated are the ways in which the most nefarious forms of sexuality fit within this paradigm. The terms of desire must be further nuanced to account for the distinction between the loving desire that Williams describes and the desire to overpower and capture that haunts many women and LGBTIQ Christians. The latter is unlike lust between lovers. It is not the fear of being rapt with a sexual partner. Rather, the prevalence of punitive and lethal sex in South Africa points to a desire to "cure" and possess another. Fueled by patriarchy and entitlement, such desire seeks to reestablish a "healthy" and orderly society in which perceived deviants are corrected and purged.

While there is no safeguard against sin in sexual encounters in our already-not-yet state, perhaps there are tools for recognizing how it operates and for being open to find righteousness among sexual outcasts. This position could enable one to recognize the holiness in same-sex relations verses the evils of “corrective” rape. Opposite sex partnering, marriage, and reproduction are not inherent features of Christian sex. In fact, they can be literal and social death-dealing forces – as discussed here within the South African context. What Williams and Rogers miss, then, are the ways in which being desired is one of the most terrifying and confusing qualities of sexuality. Moreover, Christian marriage offers no sanctuary from sexual sin. Our focus cannot be to only expand the dominion of ecclesial marriage to include same-sex couples. Rather, as Christians and theologians we must investigate the difference that Christ makes for our sexuality. Embodied joy might be one feature of that, but it cannot be the entirety because it fails to name the rape and murder of black lesbians and trans men as evil.

Williams mentions that rape, pedophilia, and bestiality are characterized by asymmetry. He writes, “These ‘asymmetrical’ sexual practices have some claim to be called perverse in that they leave one agent in effective control of the situation – one agent, that is, who doesn’t have to wait upon the desire of the other.”<sup>69</sup> However, symmetrical desire would be difficult if not impossible to demarcate. Is asymmetry not present to some degree in every sexual encounter? For some, power differentials are the substance of eroticism, though the use of play in underscoring asymmetry entails a voluntary and limited handing over of control. Marriage certainly does not eradicate asymmetrical sex. Perhaps what Williams means to suggest is the necessity of consent. He responds to the slippery-slope

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<sup>69</sup> Williams, “The Body’s Grace,” 313.



argument that should the church embrace same-sex couples it would lack grounds to condemn rape, pedophilia, and bestiality (we might add necrophilia). What Williams misses here is an opportunity to expose the sinfulness and lack of consent within heterosexual, reproductive structures.

Underlying the shortcomings of Williams and Rogers, then, is the presumption of a Western subject who is self-possessed and autonomous. Understanding theology from this perspective necessarily limits its vision and value. These two theologians effectively question the pursuit of self-mastery, however they do not explore the problem of mastery itself. When marriage is reduced to a context for Christians to regulate sexuality with the hope of improving relations to God, it is an exercise in mastery. The Christian must not confuse marriage for God. Marriage is not a cure for sexuality. It does not guarantee the expunging of sin. Asserting that the institution does so is idolatrous. Williams and Rogers would counter that their reverence for marriage is that it is a means of God's grace; however it is imperative that the limitations of Christian marriage be explicitly stated. What I put forward here is that perhaps these shortcomings are not unfortunate byproducts, but might actually be the very instances within which God works most intimately with us, because it is the inability of marriage to secure righteous intimacy that goads us to turn to Christ.

#### ***4.6 A Decolonial Theology of Sexuality***

We are not capable of sinless relationship, and so we are dependent upon Christ even after conversion. Marriage and family offer no haven from our foibles, in fact these intimate relationships often underscore our need for God. In the church marriage and family does not mean the hierarchical partnering of opposite sex couples, for the purpose of reproduction, and in service to the state. Rather, we are called to collectively marry Christ,

our bridegroom, who establishes us as adopted co-heirs. This curious mixing of metaphors is a longstanding legacy in the scriptures and tradition. Protestants lose sight of Christian marriage and family when they hold up romance and fecundity as goods in and of themselves. The witness of Christian marriages and families failing and fracturing need not dishearten the faithful. When understood rightly, in fact, these press us towards Christ. In this final section before concluding I propose turning to Christ to decolonize intimacy. In chapter four I provide more theory and theology to substantiate this claim under the shorthand “Christ as contagion,” and in chapter five I give concrete examples from the lives of South Africans. For the purpose of this chapter, I focus my discussion on the effects of Christ mediating relationships on marriage specifically.

Turning to Christ daily is a particular Christological configuration for intimacy and community, which involves recognizing our sinful desire to possess one another. Due to our mortality and precarity, we cling to the institution of marriage and hierarchically ordered families for footing. Of course, these disappoint us repeatedly. Why, then, do we return to them as if we are capable of loving God and one another free of self-interest? We assume that immediate access to one another will deepen our bonds and secure our futures, however our sinful nature forecloses these objectives. When we turn to Christ to mediate our relationships – to stand between those we hold dear and ourselves – we can begin to pursue loving others despite our shortcomings.<sup>70</sup> With Christ between us we receive one another’s embrace as life-giving, because it is not limited to what creatures can provide.

It is not an easy or simple thing to embrace Christ as mediator in marriage. Doing so in no way promises an elevation of social status or claims to rights, as civil unions suggest.

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<sup>70</sup> I elaborate on the meaning of mediation in chapter four and offer concrete examples in chapter five.

Partnering with Christ at the center is a continual entering into uncertainty. Christian marriage and family cannot ensure stability, profit, or prestige. On the contrary, entering into Christian marriage is about relying on Christ in order to face the immense risk and potential harm that intimate relationship poses. We do so boldly, not only because Christ calls us to, but also because with Christ our shortcomings do not defeat us. Certainly, human sin harms us. However, with Christ, that is not the end. Our *telos* is marriage to God in Christ, where we will join in an eternal wedding feast with one another – not as married couples or possessive parents, but as co-heirs.

German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer delivered a set of lectures based on Jesus' sermon on the mount to a group of pastors who were standing against Nazism. In going against Nazism's political program, they were also challenging cultural structures of family and church.<sup>71</sup> Dietrich spoke of Christ as a mediator who stands between them and their commitments to what appears natural – what he called “immediate,” because of the way they feel natural to us, even though they have been shaped by our context. Not only do we seek to own and enslave one another through sexuality, those desires feel reflexive. Our attempts to resist this sinful nature often take the form of self-possession and restraint, but underlying these strictures is a misguided notion of sanctification. The more ardently one ascribes to regulating sexuality the more thoroughly we become entangled in sin. Any form of Christian devotion and pursuit of righteousness apart from Christ necessarily does.

Alternatively, turning to Christ daily as the mediator of intimate relationships frees the Christian from self-interest, sin and death. Moreover, it frees the Christian to be for

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<sup>71</sup> For more on gender and Nazi Germany see Claudia Koonz's *Mother's in the Fatherland: Women, the Family, and Nazi Politics* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987) and *The Nazi Conscience* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2003).

loving God and others joyfully because it springs from abundance rather than fear of punishment or hope for reward. The distinction may be subtle, but the implications are tremendous for sexual ethics. When the focal point becomes relying on Christ as mediator between the Christian and another person, capture is an abomination. This process also entails Christ coming between the Christian and one's sense of self, thereby prohibiting self-possession. Instead of quieting desire, then, or embracing it, we invite Christ to interrupt our desires.

There are components to Williams' argument that could augment embracing Christ as mediator. Williams astutely asserts that Christian sexuality cannot attempt to avoid risk because "that makes the project of 'getting it right' doomed;" rather, "Nothing will stop sex being tragic and comic."<sup>72</sup> For Williams, the context of life-long, monogamous, Christian marriage allows the time and space necessary for grace to abound. Risk is not avoided; instead it is a necessary feature of such relationships. What Williams suggests constitutes this risk is relying on someone else's joy in order to experience joy. Perversion, for him, is attempting to control one's own happiness. As discussed in the next two chapters, Christ as contagion moves and acts beyond our control, infecting us with joy.

When Williams writes that sexuality involves "entering into a sense of oneself *beyond* the customary imagined barrier between the 'inner' and 'outer,' the private and the shared," he gestures towards a decolonial, anti-apartheid theology of sexuality.<sup>73</sup> With Christ we have hope of decolonial intimacy that is a reiteration of neither colonialism nor post-colonialism. Post-colonialism remains captured within an exchange founded upon domination and violence. Decolonial intimacy rejects apartheid and also allows for critiquing appeals to

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<sup>72</sup> Williams, "The Body's Grace," 314.

<sup>73</sup> Williams, "The Body's Grace," 317.

“tradition” for polygamy in the secular democratic state of South Africa. It says that progressive policy and appeals to human rights rhetoric are not enough. A decolonial theology of same-sex marriage calls for a different notion of subjectivity. It does not demand that one conform to identity politics in exchange for rights and services. It does not ask whether you are male or female, queer or heterosexual, married or single, fecund or infertile. It primarily centers upon pointing people to Christ. A decolonial theology of sexuality trusts in Christ to convict, affirm, and redeem a person. It does not boast in any institution, including marriage. Rather it continually points us to Christ and the church community daily. With Christ between us, among us, and within ourselves we have hope for sanctified sexuality. Here the asexual, trans, heterosexual, bisexual, gay, lesbian, queer, inquiring, single, childless, and parents are all pleasing to God because their righteousness is a gift from Christ. Theology empowers us to identify the sinful operations within our intimate life together, and the way out is Christ.

Put differently, what does Williams and Rogers’ work do for LGBTIQ South Africans? Due to their social location, these theologians identify the problem of sexuality within Christianity as necessitating a better understanding of sanctified pleasure within same-sex marriage. But this is not the pressing issue for black LQBTIQ South Africans – who do not represent a minority position; but the majority of the world’s population is not white, cisgender male, Western, and privileged. If theology is incoherent at best and injurious at worst for such Christians, we must do better. In the next two chapters I pose alternative constructive theology with these concerns in mind. My point here is that Christian marriage promises no security, sanctification, salvation or citizenship – earthly or heavenly. If the institution could there would be no need for God’s participation. Even if marriage is a mode

through which God works, it certainly is not the only or sure one. Like the Sabbath, marriage is for us. We are not for it.

#### **4.7 Conclusion**

South Africa's lead in implementing progressive policy for LGBTIQ citizens over the past two decades makes plain that, "[c]hanging deeply entrenched public attitudes, values and beliefs that result in homophobia is the greatest challenge the gay and lesbian community faces. This cannot be secured through legislative fiat alone."<sup>74</sup> While these legislative reforms are invaluable and momentous, they mark a need for further engagement. The right to same-sex marriage hardly settles social discomfort around LGBTIQ sexuality. On the contrary, it can provoke backlash.<sup>75</sup> It also brings to the surface social investments in tradition and can be an opportunity for revisiting and reconsidering intimacy. Such immensely transformative moments posit a unique opportunity for theologians and ethicists to actively engage and influence the course of political and ecclesial responses. The constructive Christology outlined above makes one such contribution.

In the next chapter, I delve into how "Christ as contagion" reorients our theology of sexuality, so as to decolonize it from post-colonialism. Post-colonialism in South Africa attempts to hold together the sordid history of colonization with progressive policy and traditional African culture. Consequently, appeals to African traditions sometimes reassert sexism and homophobia despite South Africa having one of the most progressive constitutions in the world. Decolonization, alternatively, breaks with colonization rather than

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<sup>74</sup> Gerald Kraak, "'Are our lives OK?' Reflections on 13 years of gay liberation in South Africa," 283.

<sup>75</sup> "As the escalation of the rape, torture and murder of black lesbian women and other LGBTI people demonstrate, we have a long way to go before the lived reality of LGBTI people is anywhere near the constitutional aspirations of human dignity, equality and freedom." *To Have & to Hold*, ed. Judge, Manion and De Wall, 13.

reworking politics in response to apartheid. As chapter one reveals, decolonization remains limited when severed from theological engagement. This is a baptism by drowning. In order for social buy-in to take place and to actualize progressive policy, a trans theology is required. Christ's transfiguration as revelation provides the context for understanding marriage to God. As demonstrated in this chapter, progressive policy, such as same-sex marriage, remains limited in its reach because marriage is inextricable from religion for many people. What resources do scripture and tradition offer Christians and churches for decolonizing sexuality? Christ as contagion, we will see next, orients intimacy around God.

## 5. Chapter Four: Christ as Contagion: Decolonial Intimate Life Together

Christ becomes the one from whose contamination one attempts to protect oneself in the fervent and death-driven clutching of one's own virginal state in refusing to touch or be touched by the other...Christ thereby set himself in direct opposition to the logic of concern for one's own religious purity.<sup>1</sup>

### 5.1 Introduction: Contagion

Initially, the notion of Christ as contagion might strike one as an affront to his ministry of healing. Throughout the gospels we read accounts of Christ raising the dead and curing stubborn ailments. In the midst of these, the ninth chapter of John's Gospel corrects the misconception that blindness indicates punishment for sin. Christ reaches out to a man whom society ostracizes and judges immoral. Mixing dirt with saliva, he pulls together the land with his body and touches the man's eyes. In this moment Christ's actions signal his eternal divinity as Creator. God created humanity with soil and the spoken word, so also Christ heals with it. But the healing does not go as we might anticipate. Instead of inspiring worship, neighbors disbelieve that he is the same person. His identity is so thoroughly collapsed with his blindness, which they understand to be a punishment for sin, that they misrecognize and rejected him still. Religious leaders confront Christ, we read, asserting that a man of God would not break the Sabbath even to heal. Their attention centers on the law for stability over and against the living, incarnate God who heals their brother. How dare Christ enable this man to rejoin his community? The blind man's parents are called to testify, and yet, the scriptures tell us, their fear of being pushed out of the synagogue overwhelms

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<sup>1</sup> Linn Marie Tonstad, *God and Difference: The Trinity, Sexuality, and the Transformation of Finitude* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 271.



them. They confirm their son's identity, but not that it was Christ who healed him. When the Pharisees badger the man about how he was healed, he provocatively asks if they would like to become Christ's disciples. Indignant, the religious leaders drive the healed man out.

The man healed of blindness, though rejected by his religious community, worships Christ and pursues discipleship. Overhearing Christ's conversation with the man, the Pharisees shudder at the notion that they might be among the disabled: "Surely we are not blind, are we?" In this moment Christ responds in kind to their abject commitments with the assurance that they are not blind. But Christ's meaning is that he has come for the blind to which he imparts a different sort of sight. Moreover, Christ levels their association of blindness with sin against them by inverting the relationship: "If you were blind, you would not have sin. But now that you say, 'We see,' your sin remains" (John 9:41, NRSV). What this suggests is that the religious pursuit of purity and righteousness actually condemns us, which is significant for a theology of sexuality. Conversely, sexual weakness and inability draws Christ to us. The former necessitates an apartheid, separatist theology, and the latter embraces Christ as mediator of all relationships.

American literary theorist Samira Kawash examines the etymological meaning of contagion in order to draw out its connection to touch and community. She writes, "While contagion may not immediately seem relevant to a rethinking of justice, community, or self, we should not lose sight of the literal meaning of *contagion*, derived from the Latin prefix *con-*, meaning 'together,' and the verb *tangere*, meaning 'to touch.' The together-touching of contagion is a different way of conceiving of or experiencing community."<sup>2</sup> When Christ touches the untouchable leper or spreads dirt and his saliva on a blind man's eyes, his touch

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<sup>2</sup> Samira Kawash's *Dislocating the Color Line: Identity, Hybridity, and Singularity in African-American Literature*, (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997), 201.

is not necessary for physical healing, as demonstrated in Christ's other healings where he merely speaks a word or someone grasps at his cloak. Touch plays a crucial social role in both reintegrating the outcast into community and also underscoring the problem of exclusion. Christ critiques the religious and political structures that divide persons.

In this chapter I refract a variety of voices – theologians, a psychiatrist, theorist, and biblical scholar – in order to explore this notion of Christ as contagion. German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-1945) informs my theology of discipleship and community. I draw upon his corpus broadly, as well as insights from his father Karl (1868-1948), who was a prominent psychiatrist and neurologist in Germany. In addition, American literary theorist Samira Kawash (1963- ) contributes to my analysis the notion of contagion as “touching together,” which I cast as intimate community. Kawash reminds us of the positive associations we have with this term, such as contagious laughter or infectious joy. Read in this light, contagion opens up an alternative to Christianity as cure for sexuality; Christ as contagion challenges apartheid theocracy and also post-colonial neo-liberalism. He brings together physical bodies to form a new social body. Protestant Reformer Martin Luther provides theological insight into justification, sanctification, and the freedom of a Christian. Last, I look at Galatians 3-4 with East German biblical scholar Brigitte Kahl in order to better understand being made co-heirs with Christ as an alternative to identity politics.<sup>3</sup>

The Bonhoeffers, Kawash, Luther, and Kahl emerge from dissimilar contexts, and it is necessary to hear transnational voices together in order to explore a constructive

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<sup>3</sup> By identity politics I mean to reference the use of identity as a coping mechanism under neoliberalism in Mary Wrenn's “Identity, Identity Politics, and Neoliberalism,” *Panoeconomicus* 61.4 (2014): 503-515. For debates on the phrase, see Mary Bernstein, “Identity Politics,” *Annual Review of Sociology* 31 (2005): 47-74; Wole Ojurongbe, “Identity Politics: Afrocaribbeanamerican of Cablinasian,” *International Journal of Diversity in Organisations, Communities and Nations* 8.2 (2008): 135-140.

alternative to the concerns explored in previous chapters. What follows is neither the jettisoning of traditional theology nor the reassertion of a narrow authoritarian canon; this chapter is neither post-colonial nor colonial in those ways. It is a decolonial method which, despite Christianity's entanglements with coloniality, has the capacity for religious commitments to partner with activism for the sake of communal life.

## 5.2 “*Together-Touching*”

Samira Kawash directly points to the idealization of community as the means by which societies pursue health and purge illness via violence.<sup>4</sup> She reminds us that contagion need not affirm illness or death; contagion signals various forms of intimacy and relationship:

The common usage of the word *contagion* links it to sickness and disease, but I want to provisionally suspend these negative connotations in order to explore further the implications of the literal meaning, “together-touching.” Not only bad things, but also good things, may be transmitted by the action of contagion: we think of the virus, the infection, but also of the laughter, the mood.<sup>5</sup>

When I posit Christ as contagion, I stress our need for Christ to mediate our relationships – with God, each other, and ourselves. Christ as contagion returns us to our corporeal, spiritual, and social need for touch. Without Christ, our drive to forge touch in these various capacities takes the form of violence. Rape, assault, homicide, though atrocious and intolerable, express our human felt need for touch. The desire for “together-touching” itself is not sinful. God created us to be for God and one another; the longing is sacred. Our inability to obtain touch without Christ frustrates even altruistic efforts.

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<sup>4</sup> Kawash, *Dislocating the Color Line*, 176-177.

<sup>5</sup> Kawash, *Dislocating the Color Line*, 205.

Sexuality makes concrete the risk and necessity of intimacy, both ecclesial and societal. It is the site of the most grotesque violations of creaturely dignity, and also exquisite outpourings of sacred relationship. Apartheid theocracy thoroughly offends because it seeks to safeguard against risk and subsequently intimacy. By partitioning bodies and inequitably allocating resources, apartheid theocracy inserts boundaries between black and white South Africans. The Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act (1949) explicitly prohibited marriage and sexual relationships between whites and designated non-whites. Although present day democracy integrates people into legally recognized marriages and families, it also subscribes to neoliberal ideals such as safety and security.<sup>6</sup> The contractual terms of legislation in the 21<sup>st</sup> century explicitly prioritize the interests of autonomous individuals. Agents are presumed to enjoy the form of subjectivity that was created in the West for privileged people. Even the so-called “rainbow nation” of present day South Africa fails to decolonize intimacy, because it essentializes tribal traditions and sexual identity through the very bureaucratic processes that alienate us from one another. Alternatively, the decolonial theology of intimate life together presented here pursues rich and longstanding relationships, cognizant of the stakes and therefore utterly dependent upon Christ. Understood as contagion, Christ mediates all relationships so as to challenge our sinful desires to possess and exploit one another.

Even in the midst of performing life-altering miracles for those marginalized in society, Christ weeps at death. His ability to raise someone from the dead does not inhibit his mourning, because it indicates our departure from God’s intention for us. God desires life abundant, and life takes place in community. Christ makes this clear in John’s Gospel, in

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<sup>6</sup> Recall Keri Day, *Religious Resistance to Neoliberalism: Womanist and Black Feminist Perspectives* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 2016.

the section after healing the man of blindness. His audience struggles to discern whether he is in fact the good shepherd or a demon possessed person. When Christ healed the sick he did not promise health and prosperity to believers. Rather, these accounts demonstrate the work of Christ to dismantle our partitions between clean and unclean, holy and depraved, able-bodied and afflicted. Christ came between the outcasts and the rulers and collapsed their distinctions. We are all in need of God and require Christ to mediate our relationships to enable intimacy because we fear harm. However that very fear causes us to inflict harm. Protecting our communities and ourselves, however well-meaning, in practice exacerbates sins against one another. Christ serves as a point of connection and kinship for us. It is in this sense that he acts as contagion.

Christ as contagion enables “together-touching” and intimacy that grows and spreads due to the love of God. Christ transmits a new social order in which the ostracized are embraced and the powerful humbled. Only from him, not the church or state, do we receive our identity as adopted children of God. Christ as contagion interrupts heterosexuality and fecundity as an ideology by privileging a queer kinship of partnering and adoption. This contagion cuts across apartheid barriers, because contagions do not recognize or respect xenophobia, misogyny, or self-righteousness.<sup>7</sup> When we understand the contagious quality of Christ, his hypostatic union affirms our embodied particularity as well as our boundless love. Perhaps what frightens us most about the latter is its unpredictability. Kawash observes, “Contagion happens by accident, by proximity, by touch. One cannot foresee the trajectories contagion may take; one cannot predict the mutations that may be produced in its wake.

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<sup>7</sup> “*Decolonization* as Fanon uses the term is not isolatable to the in-between of the struggle between colonizer and colonized, foreign and indigenous, or white and black. Rather, the violence of decolonization erupts in the midst of these oppositions, unsettling and undermining them.” Kawash, *Dislocating the Color Line*, 180.

Indeed, one cannot always distinguish the direction of contagion.”<sup>8</sup> When we realize that Christ is a person rather than a principle, Christ touches us and draws us into community with others without mapping out our role, because we are to look to Christ daily and depend upon him for intimacy. Before delving into theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s assertions on discipleship and community that underlie this theology of sexuality, the next section considers the influence of his father, psychiatrist Karl Bonhoeffer.

### ***5.3 Father & Son: Karl Bonhoeffer’s Medical Ethics***

It could almost seem as if we have witnessed a change in the concept of humanity. I simply mean that we were forced by the terrible exigencies of war to ascribe a different value to the life of the individual than was the case before.<sup>9</sup>

–Karl Bonhoeffer

Embracing Christ as contagion entails more than theoretical and linguistic imagination; it is imperative that this “together-touching” be specific and embodied. Cure and contagion shape literal and social bio- and necropolitics; they must be investigated always as discourse in relationship to communal and individual bodies on the line. In this section I begin with the work of psychiatrist Karl Bonhoeffer, father of the theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer, in order to understand his influence on his son’s Christian ethics. The bulk of this material is published in German, and so it is a helpful exploration to contextualize Dietrich’s theological and ethical developments on matters of sickness and health. Together, Karl and Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s experiences attest to the life and death, medical and spiritual, stakes of pathologizing LGBTIQ people.

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<sup>8</sup> Kawash, *Dislocating the Color Line*, 205.

<sup>9</sup> Michael Burleigh, *The Third Reich: A New History* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2000), 349.

Karl Bonhoeffer's legacy is one of a leading psychiatrist at the University of Berlin and head of the psychiatric and neurological department of the Charité hospital (1868-1948). He the chairperson of the German Association for Psychiatry (1918-1934), and in this post Karl was responsible for the annual conference that was the most important meeting place for German psychiatric science at the time.<sup>10</sup> Karl was also a liaison with the government and after his election to this position Karl faced a serious problem: the sea blockade by the allies in 1917 was starving Germans to death. Approximately 45,000 people died of hunger or because they were weakened by hunger and could not fight the Spanish flu. The result of this food shortage was the additional death of 800,000 civilians. In despair over this situation, Germans began to wonder whether institutionalized people should get the same amount of food rations (1000 calories/day). Karl was indignant over such an inhumane suggestion, and believed that the greater danger was for society to turn to this kind of thinking.<sup>11</sup>

Karl opposed the notion that war justified the German population purging sick people in order for the healthy to prevail. This was a prelude to his political engagement in advocating for the rights of psychologically ill people, in which he resisted laws that allowed for forced admission. Karl set out to establish a process with which to determine whether institutionalization was valid. In a time when the public was told that psychiatric wards were for the incarceration of criminally insane people, i.e. a public safety issue, and that public spending would be reduced if these "inmates" were starved, Karl's counter medical ethic was needed. He believed that people should be free to admit themselves with the

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<sup>10</sup> In order to avoid confusion between Dietrich and Karl Bonhoeffer, as well as Karl Barth for that matter, I will refer to the Bonhoeffers by their first names.

<sup>11</sup> Uwe Gerrens, *Medizinisches Ethos und theologische Ethik: Karl und Dietrich Bonhoeffer in der Auseinandersetzung um Zwangssterilisation und 'Euthanasie' im Nationalsozialismus* (München, Oldenbourg, 1996), 63. Lindsey Brandt assisted me with translating this text in 2014.

recommendation of a doctor, rather than forced admission. Karl advocated for mental illness to be understood as a misfortune to which everyone is vulnerable, rather than bad behavior. He wanted to change public perception of mental illness. After the law form was redrafted to state that people who wanted to admit themselves could only go to clinics if they were not paying for themselves, Karl protested again. While Uwe Gerrens does not discuss it at length, it is significant that the government used the word *Irrenfuersorgengesetz* (“insane”) whereas Karl deemed the same people *Geisteskrank* (“mentally ill”). Karl believed that mentally ill patients had suffered long enough and that the new law would reinforce stigmatization by denying free access to care. Karl asserted that the police exaggerated the danger of mentally ill people to society and allowed institutions to experiment on them for the purpose of correction for society rather than their own well-being.

Germany’s government reasoned that due to financial strain it could not help *Minderwertig* (“inferior people”). Karl feared the logic in which a population struggling to care for the healthy should restrict services for designated non-productive citizens. The way in which Karl went about fueling resistance was by casting his profession as threatened alongside these supposedly inferior people. He wanted to correct the misconception that institutions were the unproductive custodianship of people who will never contribute to society.<sup>12</sup> In addition, *differenzierten Fuersorge* (“differentiated care”) troubled Karl and a number of Protestant churches that debated these ethics.

According to Gerrens, Karl Bonhoeffer fundamentally opposed totalizing theories and preferred diagnosing and treating patients as individual cases. He also believed that psychological disorders were “symptomatic psychoses” or psychic manifestations of bodily

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<sup>12</sup> Gerrens, *Medizinisches Ethos und theologische Ethik*, 67.



poisoning.<sup>13</sup> That is, Karl understood the mind-body connection in a nuanced manner not to be confused with gross phrenology. While some scholars have flattened Karl's attitude towards psychoanalysis as antipathetic, both Gerrens and Clifford Green concur that Karl was actually ambivalent.<sup>14</sup> Arguably Karl's most significant contribution to the discipline of psychiatry was that he thought WWI shell-shocked soldiers and "psychopaths" should be considered ill, should not be treated with electroshock therapy or returned to the front lines.<sup>15</sup> When patients with syphilis were being treated with malaria, which had a 25% survival rate, Karl developed more humane alternatives. Similarly, he forbid a colleague from using insulin for schizophrenic therapy, which he likened to methods 120 years prior such as ice showers and spinning patients around. Karl was suspicious of lobotomies as treatment for schizophrenia, and what he considered "wild" experiments in the region of the brain. Instead, Karl advocated for moderate treatment. Gerrens claims that Karl resisted aggressive psychiatric treatment, preferring instead moderate and cautious means.<sup>16</sup> In addition, Karl believed that experiments should be permitted for legally competent people only, who could consent in writing and without motives for financial benefit. In sum, Karl advocated for patients who he saw as vulnerable to being criminalized and purged from society.

Despite these admirable efforts, it must be acknowledged that Karl still participated in sterilizing the mentally ill because at the time medicine was embedded within the eugenics movement. Karl was not blameless. It does appear, though, that partaking in this troubled

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<sup>13</sup> Gerrens, *Medizinisches Ethos und theologische Ethik*, 57.

<sup>14</sup> Clifford Green argues: "[Karl's] attitude toward the psychoanalysts was cautious and judicious, yet tolerant and not dogmatic or obstructive" and, "This apprehension was apparently related to Bonhoeffer's opinion that by 1920 psychoanalysis had not yet established itself as a proven discipline. This comes out in a most illuminating paragraph which Abraham wrote after meeting with Bonhoeffer in June 1920 to discuss establishing a professorship of psychoanalysis." "Two Bonhoeffers on Psychoanalysis" in *A Bonhoeffer Legacy*, ed. A.J. Klassen (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1981), 62-63.

<sup>15</sup> Gerrens, *Medizinisches Ethos und theologische Ethik*, 59.

<sup>16</sup> Gerrens, *Medizinisches Ethos und theologische Ethik*, 60.

him to the extent that he articulated cautions against eugenic sterilization, which were later used to protect mentally ill people.<sup>17</sup> While the majority of neuroscientists collaborated with the Nazi euthanasia programs, Karl was among those who at least demonstrated some resistance. Some laud Karl's efforts, while others, such as Lawrence Zeidman, consider Karl to be among the neuroscientists of "ambivalent" resistance to the Nazi regime.<sup>18</sup>

Karl's uncle was a pastor, and so initially Karl thought that Dietrich's life would be boring and dispassionate. However, during Nazi rule, Karl came to recognize the controversy and difficulty that his son Dietrich faced in ministry. One of the ways Karl displayed his shift from apathy to supporting Dietrich was by allowing his son to borrow his doctor's car and chauffeur to get past the Gestapo and pass out anti-Nazi fliers.<sup>19</sup>

Interestingly, Karl was a friend of Max Weber, and took an interest in Max's mother who was a revolutionary democrat fighting for women's rights.<sup>20</sup> Due to his personal experience in the military, Karl was uniquely opposed to military obedience. As a doctor and a scientist, Gerrens tells us, Karl's main concern with politics was to perform his practice without too many limitations from the government. This suggests that while Karl advocated for vulnerable populations, he maintained confidence in medical interventions.

Karl's disfavor for the Nazi take-over began when he witnessed five Nazis beating a suspected communist to death in his apartment.<sup>21</sup> Hitler was praised for this crime in a

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<sup>17</sup> For more on this see H. Helmchen's "Bonhoeffers Position zur Sterilisation psychisch Kranker," *Der Nervenarzt* 86.1 (January 2015): 77-82.

<sup>18</sup> See R. J. Lifton, *The Nazi Doctors: Medical Killing and the Psychology of Genocide* (New York: Basic Books, 1988), Andrew Ströhle et. al. "Images in Psychiatry," *The American Journal of Psychiatry* 165.5 (2008): 575-576, and Laurence A. Zeidman, "Neuroscience in Nazi Europe Part II: Resistance against the Third Reich," *Le Journal Canadien des Sciences Neurologiques* 38.6 (2011): 830.

<sup>19</sup> Gerrens, *Medizinisches Ethos und theologische Ethik*, 62.

<sup>20</sup> Gerrens, *Medizinisches Ethos und theologische Ethik*, 61.

<sup>21</sup> Gerrens, *Medizinisches Ethos und theologische Ethik*, 61. For more information see Ebenda, S. 99f. and Bethge, Bonhoeffer, S. 256f.

public telegram. Later, Karl was aware that his sons and sons-in-law were conspiring to overthrow Hitler and the Nazi regime because he promised to diagnose them as legally insane in order to exempt them from harsh charges. However, the Nazis deemed Karl equally guilty of treason, though the public did not necessarily see any trace of Karl being implicated.

The import of Karl's equivocal medical ethics in partnering with the state while also seeking to reform laws is how it influenced his son Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Though typically revered among Protestant theologians, Dietrich's theology and ethics are not without controversy. Many scholars look to Dietrich's work as one of the most robust articulations of discipleship and "life together." This project similarly underscores Dietrich's reformed theology, though not indiscriminately. It is no secret that Dietrich comes from a privileged background and was groomed for success. As a white, educated German man Dietrich has established an authoritative voice in Christian theology and ethics. Recent scholarship has begun to interrogate the effects of whiteness and masculinity upon his theology.<sup>22</sup> In his letters to his fiancé Maria von Wedemeyer exhibit a patronizing tone, and his letters to Eberhard Bethge an intense homosocial bond.<sup>23</sup> Consequently, the meaning for his insights,

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<sup>22</sup> See Reggie Williams, *Bonhoeffer's Black Jesus: Harlem Renaissance Theology and an Ethic of Resistance* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2014); Charles Marsh, *Strange Glory: A Life of Dietrich Bonhoeffer* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2014); Karen V. Guth, "To See from Below: Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Mandates and Feminist Ethics," *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics* 33.2 (2013): 131-150; Ulrike Auga, "Decolonizing Public Space: A Challenge of Bonhoeffer's and Spivak's Concepts of Resistance, 'Religion' and 'Gender,'" *Feminist Theology* 24.1 (2015): 49-69; David S. Robinson, "Confessing Race: Toward a Global Ecclesiology after Bonhoeffer and Du Bois," *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics* 36.2 (2016): 121-140.

<sup>23</sup> Eve Sedgwick coined the term "homosocial," which refers to male bonding in *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985). She underscores the ambiguity among heterosexual, homosexual, and bisexual experiences between men. For example, Dietrich writes to Eberhard Bethge: "Perhaps you are surprised at such a personal letter. But when I feel like saying such things sometimes, who else should I say them to? Perhaps the time will come when I can speak to Maria this way, too; I do very much hope so. But I cannot put that burden on her yet," *DBWE* vol. 8, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, 4/178, p. 486. Throughout his letters to Eberhard, Dietrich expresses concern that he has put too much of a burden on

as well as reformer Martin Luther's, concerning discipleship and community require expansion and modification in light of the lived experiences of those in the global South, women, people of color, and LGBTIQ Christians to name a few. To do so I turn next to one of Dietrich's letters to his grandmother, in which he describes the holiness of epileptics in a church service. His insights in this particular moment make way for a decolonial theology of intimate life together that embraces Christ as contagion and rejects Christianity as cure for sexuality.

#### ***5.4 Dietrich Bonhoeffer: The Sick & Christ***

Dietrich Bonhoeffer is most revered for his theology outlining the ideal Christian community and its members, which he calls "life together" and "costly discipleship." He is well known among theologians for his writings on "costly discipleship" and "life together." The sixth of Karl Bonhoeffer's eight children, Dietrich stood up to state violence, which ended in his execution (1906-1945). As such, Dietrich represents a grand counter to Christianity's role in perpetuating colonization and the Nazi regime; he embodies a heroic figure despite having been deeply inculcated in whiteness, masculinity, and privilege. Instead of turning to Dietrich to alleviate Christian guilt, I suggest that it is precisely within his limitations that the richness of Christ emerges. The process of pressing into Dietrich's shortcomings need not besmirch his legacy; in fact, it might revitalize it in the contemporary context. In this section I use Dietrich's insights into sickness to reframe theology of sexuality.

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Maria in a tone that I read as patronizing. See *DBWE* vol. 8, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, 2/88, 3/177, 4/186, etc.

Dietrich's visit to the Bethel Institution led to a theological insight compatible with my assertion of Christ as contagion. At times, medicine, church, and state collude to pathologize and purge select citizens. Just as the church both legitimized and undermined apartheid government, so also it was used to advance and thwart the Third Reich.<sup>24</sup> What is particularly helpful about Dietrich's response to attending church at the Bethel Institution is how it challenged his theology of the body. There he worshiped alongside epileptic patients who were spared euthanasia. During this time Dietrich came to see the holiness of precarity over and against self-mastery and developed his theology of "the proximity of the crucified one to the invalid."<sup>25</sup> He describes his experience in a birthday letter to his grandmother Julie Bonhoeffer:

The time here in Bethel has made a deep impression on me. Here we have a part of the church that still knows what the church can be about and what it cannot be about. I have just come back from the worship service. It is an extraordinary sight, the whole church filled with crowds of epileptics and other ill persons, interspersed with the deaconesses and deacons who are there to help in case one of them falls; then there are elderly tramps who come in off the country roads, the theological students, the children from the lab school, doctors and pastors with their families. But the sick people dominate the picture, and they are keen listeners and participants. Their experience of life must be most extraordinary, not having control over their bodies, having to be resigned to the possibility of an attack at any moment. Today in church was the first time this really struck me, as I became aware of these moments. Their situation of being truly defenseless perhaps gives these people a much clearer insight into certain realities of human existence, the fact that we are indeed basically defenseless, than can be possible for healthy persons. And it is just this abrupt alternation, between standing there healthy and falling down sick, which must be more conducive to this insight than being healthy all the time. Today in church I was constantly reminded of Rembrandt's "Hundred Guilder" etching and the gospel stories it illustrates. There is nothing sentimental about any of this; it is tremendously real and natural. It knocks down some of the barriers with which we

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<sup>24</sup> Laurence A. Zeidman argues, "Much resistance to the Nazi euthanasia program came not from the medical profession but from the churches. Most clergy leaders either went along with the Nazis or did nothing. But Protestant Pastor Fritz von Bodelschwing, director of the Bethel Institution at Bielefeld, which mainly housed and cared for epileptic patients, was part of a group within his church which advocated fighting against the euthanasia program." "Neuroscience in Nazi Europe Part II: Resistance against the Third Reich," *Le Journal Canadien des Sciences Neurologiques* 38.6 (2011): 827.

<sup>25</sup> Gerrens, *Medizinisches Ethos und theologische Ethik*, 129.

usually shut ourselves off from this world. Here it simply is a part of one's own life, as it is in reality. It is said of Buddha that he was converted by an encounter with a seriously ill person. What utter madness when some people today think that the sick can or ought to be legally eliminated. It is almost like building a Tower of Babel and must bring vengeance on us. Anyhow, our concept of sickness and health is pretty ambiguous. What we see as "sick" is actually healthier, in essential aspects of light and of insight, than health is. And the two conditions depend on each other is surely an essential part of the plan and the laws of life, which can't simply be changed to suit people's impertinence and lack of understanding.<sup>26</sup>

In these reflections, Dietrich echoes his father's medical ethics.<sup>27</sup> Dietrich proposes that the transition between psychically ill and health is fluid, that illness will not be eradicated through forced sterilization, and that a principle difference between mental illness and other kinds of illnesses cannot be made.<sup>28</sup> Like his father Karl Bonhoeffer, Dietrich witnessed the mistreatment of the mentally ill in early 20<sup>th</sup> century Germany. But rather than pity epileptics, Dietrich recognized their proximity to Christ and their lives as expressions of faithfulness. He saw in their creaturely vulnerability a sacred dependence upon God.

Dietrich's realization reorients reformer Martin Luther's notion that sexuality is literally or figuratively a sinful sickness.<sup>29</sup> If Dietrich is correct in asserting that which is called sickness verses health is ambiguous and sometimes a misjudgment, then our

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<sup>26</sup> Bonhoeffer, "Letter to Julie Bonhoeffer August 30," in *DBWE* vol. 12, *Berlin: 1932-1933*, Letters and Documents, ed. Larry L. Rasmussen, trans. Isabel Best and David Higgins, and Douglas W. Scott, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 1/86, p. 157. See also GS II, S. 77ff., Dietrich and Julie Bonhoeffer, 20.8.1933 after a sermon on 2 Corinthians 12:9, vgl. *DBW* 13, S. 409, and vgl. *DBW* 13, S. 174f., Bonhoeffer an Fricke, 31.7.1934. Note that not "having control over themselves" can also be translated as not "mastering themselves" (Lindsey Brant, 2014).

<sup>27</sup> Approximately one month earlier (July 14, 1933) the Reich government issued the Law for the Prevention of children with Hereditary Diseases, which subjected such persons to compulsory sterilization.

<sup>28</sup> Similarly, theologian Mary McClintock-Fulkerson asserts about her ethnographic work on a "special needs" church service: "All of us are persons with degrees of dis-ability, and the supposed clear line between the abled and the disabled is a social fiction." Mary McClintock-Fulkerson, *Places of Redemption: Theology for a Worldly Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 113.

<sup>29</sup> "[Sex is] so hideous and frightful a pleasure that physicians compare it with epilepsy or falling sickness. Thus an actual disease is linked with the very activity of procreation. We are in the state of sin and death; therefore we also undergo this punishment, that we cannot make use of women without the horrible passion of lust, and, so to speak, without epilepsy," Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, vol. 1. "Lectures on Genesis Chapters 1-5," Peter Brown observes that during early Christianity in the West, "[Sex] bore a dread resemblance to the falling sickness: orgasm was a 'minor epilepsy.'" *The Body and Society: Men, Women, & Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 18.

understanding of holy sexuality requires similar reflection. Perhaps it is not the hierarchical, heterosexual, reproductive couple that is most holy. In fact, what if adherence to this ideology actually draws one away from dependence upon Christ, shoring up self-mastery in place of Christ's righteousness? Importantly, Dietrich asserts: "Illness is the loss of human power over oneself and forces recognition of a foreign power, namely a loving God; God's power is stronger in the absence of human efficacy."<sup>30</sup> Like epilepsy, sexuality draws us into our creaturely existence – embodied and precarious. It is a blindness that the Pharisees feared and Christ embraced; the sort of blindness that he came to heal. But not to heal in an ablest sense; Christ heals our relationships. By touching us, he draws us back to our bodies and imparts a new identity to us as his co-heir. With him we are called into community. Our sexuality is not a good or evil in itself, so much as another avenue by which we remember our dependence upon Christ for life and love. Relying on Christ as mediator need not absolve one from committing atrocities against another; on the contrary, to truly recognize Christ between us denies us ownership and exploitation of another. It is to confess our inability to engage in holy intimacy without Christ, whereas efforts to attain holiness by our own means demonstrate the very impossibility.

In addition to the inversion of ablest theology, the notion of Christ as contagion also counters apartheid theology by calling into question the distinction between sickness and health. "All sickness is already inherent in our health," Dietrich explains, "The law of the world is the cross, not health. It is not good to remove the ill by concentrating them in clinics out of sight of the healthy. In Bethel the sick and healthy live naturally together, in

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<sup>30</sup> Gerrens, *Medizinisches Ethos und theologische Ethik*, 132.

everyday life and in church service as a constant reminder for the healthy and sick.”<sup>31</sup> Our fear of contamination drives us to separate out the unhealthy for the sake of ecclesial and political bodies. It is the logic and technology of apartheid theocracy.<sup>32</sup> When placed in conversation with Kawash, Karl and the scriptures, Dietrich challenges this impulse.<sup>33</sup> He blurs the line between wellness and illness because Dietrich’s theology maintains the necessity of all members of community. While he does not explicate the flawed process of adjudicating between such citizens, he detects the misconception that segregation is good or necessary.

Christ as contagion upsets our diagnoses and exclusions. He comes between us in order to make us disciples and to enable loving community. Dietrich asserts that, “Christ is the one who dissolves the boundary (breaks through the boxes) between healthy and sick...Correspondingly those who follow after Christ must appear to be ‘those who are for this earth completely unworthy of living, superfluous.’”<sup>34</sup> This runs counter to a society that evaluates citizens according to productivity, erecting walls, and doling out rights and services unfairly. Apartheid theocracy sets out to reify the boundaries that Christ abolishes. Same-sex intimacy might appear indulgent or superfluous, but even if that were the case, the trajectory of Dietrich’s logic would affirm it alongside unproductive and sensuous heterosexual intercourse. The value of the Christian is not measured according to capitalist profit, heterosexuality, or jingoist nationalism. Faithfulness is evident when the Christian turns from

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<sup>31</sup> Gerrens, *Medizinisches Ethos und theologische Ethik*, 131-132.

<sup>32</sup> John de Gruchy also understands Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s theology as directly critiquing apartheid South Africa in his book *Bonhoeffer and South Africa: Theology in Dialogue* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1984).

<sup>33</sup> Clemens Count von Galen, Catholic bishop of Münster also protested the purging of sick Germans. In August 1941 he delivered a sermon in which he aligned mental patients with sick congregants and wounded soldiers. His point was to expose the Nazi’s killing in the name of life as blasphemy and ungodly. Zeidman, “Neuroscience in Nazi Europe Part II: Resistance against the Third Reich,” 827).

<sup>34</sup> Gerrens, *Medizinisches Ethos und theologische Ethik*, 131.



the categories of health versus sickness, and looks to Christ. In Christ, the first are last and the dross is treasured. We as creatures wrongly categorize and partition people, and the good news is that Christ upsets all that.

At the Bethel Institution Dietrich sees the image of the crucified Christ in the weakest and most dejected of citizens. In his Finckwalde Pastoral Ministry lecture (1936/40) he posits:

The exclusion of the weak and unsightly, the seemingly unuseful, from a Christian community can mean the outright exclusion of Christ, who resides in the impoverished brother who knocks on the door...the savior of the sick, the lord over illness is not the untouchable miracle healer but rather one who shows solidarity with children, the weak, and mentally ill by sharing their life. The savior is not a gleaming, world-enraptured, and exalted figure, but rather he is the Lord as servant taking part in the suffering of the ill.<sup>35</sup>

Directly opposed to a health-wealth gospel, Dietrich's theology affirms disability within the kingdom of God. For him, the Christian life is not evident in the one who is healthy or who has conformed to the values of society. What is holy is Christ physically embracing and delighting in sick people. Thus, he maintains:

Jesus is not a miracle worker exempt from sickness but rather God identifies himself in human incarnation with both illness and with the lost world. For the healthy, a new epistemological principle follows from this: illness belongs directly to this world, and it cannot be phased out or eradicated. The ill are signs of the factual instability of human existence. And more than that: they are signs of God's alignment with the lowly.<sup>36</sup>

Dietrich poses sickness as a feature of our creaturely existence that reminds us of our need for Christ and his suffering on the cross. It is not something to be eradicated or moralized. What makes someone holy is the righteousness of Christ, not any ontological feature.

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<sup>35</sup> [BW citation]

<sup>36</sup> Gerrens, *Medizinisches Ethos und theologische Ethik*, 133.

Suffering and frailty might more overtly display our need for Christ, but it is not in itself some sort of sanctuary. Illness can be an entry point where Christ as contagion draws us together into intimate relationship. In Christ our weakness and vulnerability can aid intimacy rather than foreclose it. The parts of ourselves that we instinctively conceal due to shame can be the very points of connection to God and others. We rightly fear exposing these because without Christ they are sites of exploitation and abuse. Christianity is not about inviting others to mistreat you. Inviting Christ to stand between us as contagion soothes our wounds with the balm of his righteousness. With him we identify and resist injustice; we disallow someone to mistreat us because He is in us.

### ***5.5 Christological Relationality***

Where does he stand? For me, he stands in my place, where I should be standing. He stands there because I cannot, that is, he stands at the boundary of my existence and nevertheless in my place. This is an expression of the fact that I am separated, by a boundary that I cannot cross, from the self that I ought to be. This boundary lies between my old self and my new self, that is, in the center that I have regained. As boundary, the boundary can only be seen from its other side, outside the limit. Thus it is important that we human beings, in recognizing that our limit is in Christ, at the same time see that in this limit we have found our new center. It is the nature of Christ's person to be in the center. The One who is in the center is the same One who is present in the church as Word and sacrament. If we bring the question of "how" back into the question of "who," the answer is given: Christ, as the one who is being-there *pro-me*, is the mediator. That is Christ's nature and way of existing.<sup>37</sup>

Christ exists among us as church-community, as church in the hiddenness of historicity. The church is the hidden Christ among us. Hence the human being is never alone; instead he exists only through the church-community that brings Christ, a community incorporating the human being, drawing that person into its life. The person in Christ is the person in the church-community; wherever that person

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<sup>37</sup> Bonhoeffer, *DBWE*, vo. 12, *Berlin: 1932-1933*, "Lectures on Christology (Student Notes)" Summer Semester 1933, ed. Larry L. Rasmussen, trans. Isabel Best and David Higgins, and Douglass W. Stott, 324.

is, there is the church-community. But because that person as an individual is simultaneously wholly a member of the church-community, only here is the continuity of that persons' existence in Christ guaranteed. Hence the human being can understand himself no longer from within himself but rather from within the Christ who exists as church-community, from within his word that supports the church-community and without which that church-community does not exist.<sup>38</sup>

What does it mean for Christ to be the center? In his Christology lectures quoted above, Dietrich Bonhoeffer develops theological themes from which I construct a decolonial theology of intimacy. These include his concept of Christ's "incognito" righteousness in which obedience might look like disobedience, Christ as person rather than principle, "worldly holiness," the ubiquity of Christ's presence, and community in Christ. Together, I use these to assert that intimacy requires Christ's mediation. It is a Christological account of sexuality, though Trinitarian commitments are not absent. In addition, it thoroughly undermines apartheid theocracy's misappropriation of Christian theology and challenges secular democracy for failing to engage religious citizens. Seeking immediate access to the self through neoliberal identity politics, others through the mediation of contracts, and God without Christ, necessarily leads to sin and death.

The first quotation above serves as a basis for receiving oneself from Christ and the second quotation maps his vision for community – i.e. "costly discipleship" and "life together." Some limit their understanding of receiving oneself from Christ in terms of Paul's "old man" verses "new man" in Christ, where Christ justifies humanity before God. Certainly Dietrich meditates on soteriology within his Christology, though he is careful to

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<sup>38</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *DBWE* vol. 10, *Barcelona, Berlin, New York: 1928-1931*, "Inaugural Lecture: The Anthropological Question in Contemporary Philosophy and Theology," ed. Clifford J. Green, trans. Douglas W. Scott, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008) 2/7, p.407.

distinguish the two and prioritizes the latter.<sup>39</sup> He explains, “Christ as the center means that he is the fulfillment of the law.”<sup>40</sup> Dietrich’s use of *Stellvertretung* suggests that he is speaking of both the human-divine relation and also subject formation via human relations. Instead of centering some sense of self over and against an external other, Dietrich’s Christology implies a displacement of self that is both circumscribed by and centered upon Christ.<sup>41</sup> In other words, Christ’s body reorients us spatially.<sup>42</sup> He invites us into a new relationship with ourselves that is dependent upon him. Christ reveals to us that we have been adopted as co-heirs. In this way, it is far more radical than autonomous individual identity politics.

The second quotation similarly centers on Christ, but more overtly articulates the nature of one’s relationship to the body of Christ – both Christ as an individual and as the present day church body. The language of adopted co-heirs assumes a kinship community. Unlike appeals to the *imago dei* as an *analogia entis* or human rights discourse, Christ as contagion touches us and brings us into intimacy with others. Instead of identifying ourselves as asexual or cisgender, we are reoriented in relation to our selves, each other, and God. While we bear the image of God, Christ makes us new. That newness is not the regulation of sexuality. Sexuality is but one site upon which the church and state struggle for possession of us, to which Christ says: no. We are not the property or technology of ecclesial and civil bodies; we are the body of Christ. Christ initiates a newness in which our sexuality

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<sup>39</sup> Bonhoeffer explains, “In this way, the Christological question is shown to have theological priority over the soteriological question. I must first know who it is who does something before I can know what it is that the person has done.” *DBWE*, vol. 12, *Berlin: 1932-1933*, “Lectures on Christology (Student Notes)” Summer Semester 1933, 2/12, p. 310.

<sup>40</sup> Bonhoeffer, “Lectures on Christology (Student Notes),” 324.

<sup>41</sup> Bonhoeffer gets this concept from Martin Luther, who writes that Christ, the Word, is the center and circumference in *Luther’s Works*, vol. 26, *Lectures on Galatians 1535: Chapters 1-4*, Jaroslav Pelikan ed. and trans., (Saint Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1963), 392-3.

<sup>42</sup> Bonhoeffer writes, “Here the historical power corresponds more to the temporal character of Jesus’s presence, while the image corresponds to its spatial character.” “Lectures on Christology (Student Notes),” 311.

can be a conduit for intimacy. I will return to how this differs from the *imago dei* and *Ubuntu* theologies.<sup>43</sup> For now, there are more components to Dietrich's theology worth examining in relation to sexuality.

In his Christology lectures, Dietrich sets out his account of individuals in relation to their communities. Initially Dietrich exhorted the German church to pursue holiness, but he later emphasized "worldly holiness" and the "incognito" nature of Christ's holiness. The latter can be understood as God's calling, which risks looking disobedient or sinful to others. A most obvious example is Dietrich's participation in plotting a political coup to overthrow Hitler. A strict pacifist principle would disallow such action, and yet just war theory would also offer too much certainty and self-assurance. What Dietrich proposes is far more radical: that Christians turn to Christ daily not knowing what he will call them to, exaltation or humiliation.

Later, Dietrich explains that relating to the Word as a *person* changed the meaning and nature of holiness for him.<sup>44</sup> The reason Dietrich stresses the Word as person is because he witnessed the failure of Schleiermacher's Christocentric theology and his own former principle-oriented theology in the midst of Nazi Germany. Dietrich presses the significance of relating to Christ as a person rather than a principle in the form of the theologian asking "who" God is rather than "how" God works.<sup>45</sup> It is a quest for intimacy rather than

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<sup>43</sup> A brief description of *Ubuntu* is that it is a term used in Southern Africa that defines humanity in relationship to others.

<sup>44</sup> In a letter to Eberhard Bethge, Dietrich reflects on his writings and describes this shift: "I thought I myself could learn to have faith by trying to live something like a saintly life. I suppose I wrote *Discipleship* at the end of this path. Today I clearly see the dangers of that book, though I still stand by it. Later on I discovered, and am still discovering to this day, that one only learns to have faith by living in the full this-worldliness of life," *DBWE*, vol. 8, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, 4/178, p. 186.

<sup>45</sup> He draws these as differing perspectives – one centered on Christ's authority and about loving one's neighbor, and the other being self-interested. See "Lectures on Christology (Student Notes)," 303.

instruction. According to Dietrich, as person, the Word/Christ interacts with us continually and surprisingly; Christ's activity is not static or predictable.

Christ is the center in three ways, according to Dietrich: in being for humanity, history, and nature.<sup>46</sup> Dietrich outlines this Christological temporality and spatiality with the hope of achieving a new church-state relation. He refines our sense of the church's space: "The church, as the Christ who is present, gives proof of its being in the center not by being visibly at the center of the state, not by being a state church."<sup>47</sup> Unlike apartheid theocracy, Dietrich advocates for the church to be the "hidden center" of the state. Finessing Martin Luther's notion of the two kingdoms, Bonhoeffer draws the church inside of the state in such a way that the two do not become indistinguishable, but so that the church comes to willingly inhabit a liminal space guided by Christ.<sup>48</sup> He describes this precarious existence in his lectures when he argues that: "Even the church, as the presence of Jesus Christ—God who became human, was humiliated, resurrected, and exalted—must receive the will of God every day anew from Christ. For the church, too, Christ becomes, every day anew, an offense to its own desires and hopes."<sup>49</sup> The church cannot assert itself within the state as *possessing* the will of God; rather, the church must daily *receive* the will of God from Christ *anew*. We lose the force of Bonhoeffer's insight when we seek to apply his theology as is to all times and places. Instead, he beckons us to look to the humiliated Jesus and obey the call

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<sup>46</sup> Bonhoeffer, "Lectures on Christology (Student Notes)," 315.

<sup>47</sup> Bonhoeffer, "Lectures on Christology (Student Notes)," 326.

<sup>48</sup> Bonhoeffer's theology is greatly influenced by reformer Martin Luther (1483-1546), who articulates a Protestant theology of righteousness and Christian freedom. Bonhoeffer tends to favor Luther's earlier works, which speak more favorably of Jews.

<sup>49</sup> Bonhoeffer, "Lectures on Christology (Student Notes)," 360.

that might appear disobedient or sinful within our context. It is a new spatial relationship centered upon the person Jesus Christ.<sup>50</sup>

Looking to Christ to receive the will of God daily is a form of discipleship vulnerable to misrecognition and condemnation. Bonhoeffer reminds us that even Jesus, who was perfectly obedient to the first person of the Trinity, “did things that appeared to be sins. He gave a hard answer to his mother in the temple; he evaded his opponents’ questions; he called for resistance against the ruling castes of the pious and of people. In people’s eyes, he must have looked like a sinner. So he entered in, to the extent of being unrecognizable.”<sup>51</sup> In other words, Christ’s righteousness was not self-evident according to human logic. Christ was read as transgressing the law and propriety in the very instances of his faithfulness. Therefore, “The statement about Jesus being without sin is not a moral pronouncement but rather an insight of faith ... That is why Christ’s incognito had to become even more impenetrable, the more urgently people asked whether he were the Christ.”<sup>52</sup> Christ’s “incognito” sinlessness challenges our ideologies. Sexual propriety cannot be equated with Christianity because Christ exemplifies the processes of mischaracterization and misrecognition. The one who is eternally sinless is condemned and executed according to human judgment. LGBTIQ Christians might similarly be mistakenly accused of sinning or blaspheming, while the sexually restrained and righteous do not act as Christ. Even more disconcerting than external displays of decorum under the auspices of righteousness is the confusion of propriety with salvation. Not only are our rubrics for measuring sin distorted;

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<sup>50</sup> Again, Bonhoeffer borrows from Martin Luther who writes, “Therefore faith is a constant gaze that looks at nothing except Christ...” *Luther’s Works*, vol. 25, *Lectures on Galatians 1535: Chapters 1-4*, Jaroslav Pelikan ed. and trans., (Saint Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1963), 356.

<sup>51</sup> Bonhoeffer, “Lectures on Christology (Student Notes),” 357.

<sup>52</sup> Bonhoeffer, “Lectures on Christology (Student Notes),” 358.

we go further when we condemn deviants. Christ reveals to us God's "incognito" righteousness, not as a model for us to emulate but as an invitation into grace. We cannot attain salvation by conforming our sexuality to sinlessness because we are incapable of that. Instead we turn to Christ because his righteousness saves us and his mediation opens us to genuine intimacy. It is never an accomplishment of the individual; it is an ongoing, daily dependence upon our living God, who frees us to be for others.

Despite Dietrich's masculine language, he rightly centers identity as received from God, "...because it is only with reference to God that human beings know who they are."<sup>53</sup> Instead of discovering an innate sense of self, or ascribing to static identity politics, receiving oneself from God is freeing. In Christ, we learn that we are God's creation and adopted co-heirs.<sup>54</sup> We are not reducible to male or female, South African or American, normative or queer because there is no neutrality in identifying with a gender, culture, or politics. Our categories remain mired in exploitative relationship structures. When we adhere to these we are not free, and yet we do so for at least two reasons: first, because of a shared history marked by inequity; second, because our societies compel us to do so. It would be impossible to function as a citizen without ascribing to labels, even though we understand that these categories are not eternal truths. They are socially and historically contextual cues for intelligibility. Labels can help and harm us in various circumstances. We can choose to

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<sup>53</sup> Bonhoeffer, "Lectures on Christology (Student Notes)," 305. The translators of this series change his language from "men" to human beings, "brothers" to brothers and sisters, etc. Other translations preserve his masculine language.

<sup>54</sup> I use the gender-neutral language of adopted co-heirs. Susanne Hennecke also points out Dietrich Bonhoeffer's particularly masculine language – that we are made sons of God and brothers with Christ – in her lucid description of his Christology in "Reading Bonhoeffer's *Christology* from a Gender-Theoretical Perspective: A Comparison with Luce Irigaray," *Sino-Christians Studies* 10 (2010): 39-64.



leverage these markers, but they need not be determinative.<sup>55</sup> The fullness and richness of our selves can only be known by God and revealed to us.

To be adopted as co-heirs needn't be confused with the effacement of subjectivity. Dietrich's understanding of *Stellvertretung* is that we do not have direct access even to ourselves, but rather rely on Christ to deliver our humanity to us which is necessarily relational. The Christian requires Christ to mediate all relationships – not just humanity with God. We need Christ not merely as a substitutionary sacrifice to atone for our sins, and to daily to stand between us and God, us and each other, but, perhaps most under-recognized, we need him to come between us and ourselves. Unlike the variety of identity politics that demand we understand ourselves according flat and static labels, having Christ continually deliver our humanity and dignity to us allows for dynamic personhood grounded in God. Who we understand ourselves to be and how we conduct ourselves changes over time. God is able to fully know the rich texture of why we identify with categories and social roles at any point in time without reducing us to them. A person is not merely a mother or a soldier, for example. Neither concept fully encapsulates the person. While these might be dominant features in someone's life, what is eternal is our adoption into the family of God. This invitation– “God for us” – is good news for the devout Christian as much as the non-

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<sup>55</sup> For feminist theorist Simone De Beauvoir, what it means to be a woman is to account for her “total situation,” in *The Second Sex*, trans. Judith Thurman (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2010). Citing phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Beauvoir articulates a definition of gender that explores meaning making through material phenomenon. She adds to his work, among a great number of things, the role of the social and historical context in influencing this meaning making. In so doing, she preserves the importance of physical bodies and difference while critiquing biological determinism and psychoanalysis. Toril Moi explores exercise of foregrounding and backgrounding the body as a situation in *What is a Woman?: And Other Essays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001). Theologian Mary McClintock Fulkerson writes about the church community she did ethnographic research on: “By reading it as a wound—a situation characterized by interpersonal forms of obliviousness and averseness marked and sustained by larger social-political processes—I understand Good Samaritan [church] as a situation characterized by harm that demands redress,” *Places of Redemption: Theology for a Worldly Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 17. My project explores what it might mean to understand the individual and communal body as a situation, characterized by harm that demands redress.

Christian. God is for us because God is our creator. God shares our distress and pain in the face of death. God's desire for us is to enjoy the fullness of intimacy with one another and the divine. South African theologian John de Gruchy elaborates: "For Bonhoeffer the *pro me* always implied the *pro nobis*, because the 'I' and the 'thou' are inseparably related."<sup>56</sup> In other words, God being for us is necessary precisely because we exist in relationship; there is no individual outside of community. Humans are like God not *analogia entis* (analogy of being), but *anaologia relationis* (analogy of relations).<sup>57</sup> Human relations do not tell us about God, what we share with God is the freedom to be for others because of Christ. This freedom is accessed through Christ. As a community of three persons, the Triune God invites all of creation to participate in life-giving intimacy.

Dutch theologian Susanne Hennecke turns to Luce Irigaray to resolve Dietrich's masculine discipleship and Christology. In order to grasp her contribution, we must take Dietrich's *Creation and Fall* lectures into consideration. In these, Dietrich articulates his doctrine of creation, and centers his theological anthropology on sexuality. First, he explains that prior to the fall God was at once the boundary and center of our existence.<sup>58</sup> This is represented through the two trees – the tree of life and the tree of knowledge of good and evil. The first sustained being, the second served as a boundary. In this state humans were free, by which he means humans shared in God's freedom to be for others. In the fall, humanity attempted to transgress the spatial orientation of being decentered and dependent. The notion of self as being independent and self-sufficient runs counter to our creaturely condition. We seek immediate access to life apart from God and creation, which is

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<sup>56</sup> John W. de Gruchy, *Bonhoeffer and South Africa: Theology in Dialogue* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1984), 22.

<sup>57</sup> Bonhoeffer, *DBWE* vol. 3, *Creation and Fall: A Theological Exposition of Genesis 1-3*, ed. John W. de Gruchy, trans. Douglas Stephen Bax, Wayne Whitson Floyd Jr. gen. ed., (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007) 65.

<sup>58</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall*, 86.

impossible because in Dietrich's theology life is received and cannot be grasped. The grasping itself negates the possibility of life. Existence is constituted by God and with others such that there is no individual apart from these.

It is vital to underscore that in Dietrich's Christology, Christ does not restore what was lost in the fall, but that Christ's body introduces a new relation. Dietrich returns to the terms "middle" and "boundary" as he develops his Christology and ecclesiology. He argues that shame signals to us our loss of the boundary that the tree of knowledge of good and evil once was. Christ is the embodiment of this boundary and limit, but how is that different from the trees? Dietrich asserts that both trees in the Garden of Eden are "untouched and untouchable," which is utterly distinct from Christ who *touches* us.<sup>59</sup> Smearing mud on the man's eyes reconnects humanity with the earth, all of creation, and our Creator. In so doing Christ joins what the fall rent asunder – humanity with God, one another, and nature.<sup>60</sup> Unlike the untouchable trees that establish boundaries, Christ's contagious touch frees us from sin and death to be for God and others. We are not brought into a state of prelapsarian innocence; in baptism, we do not return to nakedness but are clothed in Christ, who is our new middle and boundary.<sup>61</sup>

Dietrich focuses on sexuality as the demonstration of what was lost in the fall and our need for Christ. Because Eve was created from Adam's rib, and Adam was created from the earth, these share a relationship that was severed in the fall. Our sexual partners are the embodiment of our limit and our love helps us to bear this limit: "This means nothing other

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<sup>59</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall*, 89.

<sup>60</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall*, 135.

<sup>61</sup> "Nakedness is the essence of being oblivious of the possibility of robbing others of their rights," which is not the state that we are in; rather, "God does not expose [human beings] to one another in their nakedness; instead God covers them;" so our state is such that, "The tree of life, the cross of Christ, the center of God's world that is fallen but upheld and preserved – that is what the end of the story about paradise is for us," Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall*, 124, 139, and 146.

than that both people, while remaining *two* as creatures of God, become *one* body, that is belong to one another in love.”<sup>62</sup> The postlapsarian state, however, is marked by our obsessive desire to possess and violently destroy one another.<sup>63</sup> Instead of being free for others, we seek to be over against one another – in other words, free from one another.<sup>64</sup> The ultimate belonging to one another occurs through human sexuality, according to Dietrich, “Quite plainly sexuality expresses the two complimentary sides of the matter: that of being an individual and that of being with the other. Sexuality is nothing but the ultimate possible realization of belonging to each other. It has here as yet no life of its own detached from this, its purpose.”<sup>65</sup> Perhaps what I have described sounds compatible with my concern for sexuality in the South African context. To some extent it is, which is why I have included it here. However, Dietrich’s gendered language and distinctions between Adam and Eve are typically leveraged to assert a heterosexual, reproductive coupling. His description of humanity and marriage presumes these features. So I want to be clear that his is not a queer theology, though it might be applied in that manner. Something that I have attempted to demonstrate throughout this project is how the pursuit of propriety exacerbates sin, which is in alignment with Dietrich’s distinction between the *imago dei* and *sicut deus*.<sup>66</sup> He censures pious speech and actions for seeking to be like God instead of turning to Christ as limited

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<sup>62</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall*, 99.

<sup>63</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall*, 99, 101, and 123. Baptism as drowning the queer threat in chapter one could be understood in Dietrich’s assertion that violent sexuality seeks to destroy the other person in order to preserve and reproduce one’s own life (123). Rape as a means to ensure the continuance of community is a biblical theme, according to Michael Carden in *Sodomy: A History of Christian Biblical Myth* (London: Equinox Publishing Ltd., 2004), 27.

<sup>64</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall*, 66.

<sup>65</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall*, 100.

<sup>66</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall*, 113 and 115.

creatures.<sup>67</sup> The implications for sexuality, I suggest, are that seeking holiness often backfires. Our purpose is to cling to Christ, who delivers our humanity back to us by being our limit and center. Dietrich's attention to how sexuality demonstrates what is lost in the fall suggests that it might also be the place where we most overtly embrace Christ.

With the use of French feminist theory, Hennecke argues that Christ acts as a third term between men and women, which leads to new interpretations of sexual identities and body performances.<sup>68</sup> Her analysis is innovative and interdisciplinary; it is not possible within a closed canon of Dietrich's works. As with Karl Barth's theology, Dietrich Bonhoeffer's doctrine of creation is often used to advocate for complimentary gender roles because the two stress the creation of humanity in the image of God as the coupling of "man and woman."<sup>69</sup> Instead of reading either theologian as compatible with feminism, perhaps it is best to cite the necessary contribution feminism makes to their theologies. As contextual theologians, Barth and Bonhoeffer's work welcomes redirection. The links that I am making here to sexuality, let me be clear, are not to uncover or recover Dietrich's theology. His theology bears the traces of paternalism and whiteness, and to point that out is not to dispose of his work. What I am suggesting is that diverse voices and perspectives continually contribute to Christian theology, not in a progress narrative or mode of nostalgic recovery, but in the ongoing process of discipleship and life together. We are all called to this process of turning to Christ and receiving our call.

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<sup>67</sup> A foil for Christ's incognito righteousness, "They themselves stand at the center. This is disobedience in the semblance of obedience, the desire to rule in the semblance of service, the will to be creator in the semblance of being a creature, being dead in the semblance of life." Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall*, 117.

<sup>68</sup> Susanne Hennecke, "Reading Bonhoeffer's *Creation and Fall* from a Gender-theoretical Perspective," *Sino-Christian Studies*, No 6, December 2008, p. 79-80.

<sup>69</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall*, 62-66.

## 5.6 *The Freedom of a Christian*

German Martin Luther (1483-1546) was a devout Catholic monk who – with others including John Calvin – led the Protestant Reformation. Luther suffered from a tortured conscience, and the theme of easing the Christian conscience persists throughout his writings; it was the basis for his understanding of soteriology, justification, and sanctification. Perhaps most infamously, Luther’s writings increased in anti-Semitic vitriol as he aged. His views on marriage also shifted over time from it being a lesser good, to equal with, and finally superior to celibacy.<sup>70</sup> These shifts, as times disconcerting, underscore the human quality of Christian theology. Preaching and publishing about God springs out of particular contexts and among people of peculiar temperaments. John Calvin took a more systematic and seamless approach to his theology, intimating his training as a lawyer, which might be the reason that some readers are more attracted to Calvin’s theology. It is Luther’s overt missteps and adaptability that I find most compelling for the task of theology. For example, Luther’s attention to the Christian conscience leads him to increasingly affirm sexuality, yet he simultaneously reifies the heterosexual, reproductive household as *the* holy life. His theology, like all theology, should be engaged contextually so as to appreciate the contributions within its shortcomings. That theology was implemented within colonial contexts, and, most significantly for this project, that the apartheid state made racist use of Calvinist theology, is reason to continually investigate the purpose of theology.

Freedom for Martin Luther is not merely freedom *from* sin and death, but also freedom *for* God and others. This liberation is distinct from “inalienable rights belonging to

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<sup>70</sup> Jane E. Strohl notes that Luther conceives of marriage as an antidote or prophylactic against concupiscence, “Luther’s New View on Marriage, Sexuality, and the Family,” *Lutherjahrbuch* 76 (2009): 159-92.

human life.”<sup>71</sup> Human rights rhetoric and progressive policy do not truly liberate us, as critiques of neoliberalism have demonstrated many times over.<sup>72</sup> The requirement to ascribe to identity politics, and often respectability politics, flattens and restrains us. The “freedom of a Christian,” according to Luther, is to be free for God and others, to love free of self-interest.<sup>73</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s use of his theology is apparent, however it is worthwhile to briefly describe Luther’s theology.

Having witnessed the sale of indulgences and simony in the church, Luther set out to reform the church and reassert Christian doctrine. He reasoned that instead of encouraging good works for fear of damnation or hope of reward, he would proclaim salvation in Christ’s righteousness. This, he explained, frees the Christian to joyfully do truly good works for God and others because they are free from self-interest.<sup>74</sup> According to Luther, we are incapable of doing good works without Christ because they are always tainted with self-interest. Hence his criticism of hedonism and asceticism in his 1520 text that describes the freedom of a Christian.<sup>75</sup> Luther describes the high risk of hypocrisy and condemnation in the pursuit of righteousness. For Luther, sexual chastity is wrongly prioritized and lends one to unbelief: “Therefore God has rightly included all things, not under anger or lust, but

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<sup>71</sup> Bonhoeffer, *DBWE* vol. 8, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, “Thoughts on the Day of Baptism of Dietrich Wilhelm Rüdiger Bethge (May 1944), (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010), 3/145, p. 50. See also *DBWE* vol. 8, 2/114, p. 301, 2/115 pp. 305-6, and 3/145, p. 387.

<sup>72</sup> Note that my reading of Luther differs from that of Janet Jakobsen, who argues that the reformers first asserted the modern sense of individual freedom and capitalist family structures theologically. Janet R. Jakobsen, “Sex + Freedom = Regulation: Why?” *Social Text* 23.3-4 (2005): 285-308.

<sup>73</sup> In its most concise form, Luther writes: “A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none. A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant to all, subject to all,” “The Freedom of a Christian, 1520,” in *Luther’s Works American Edition*, vol. 31, Harold J. Grimm ed., W. A. Lambert trans., (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1957), 344.

<sup>74</sup> “A Christian...seeks neither benefit nor salvation since he already abounds in all things and is saved through the grace of God because in his faith he now seeks only to please God,” Martin Luther, *LW*, vol. 31, ed. Harold J. Grimm, gen. ed. Helmut T. Lehmann, *Career of the Reformer I American Edition* (Philadelphia: Concordia, 1957), p. 361-362. Luther echoes this in his “Treatise on Good Works.”

<sup>75</sup> Luther, “The Freedom of a Christian, 1520,” in *Luther’s Works American Edition*, vol. 31, Harold J. Grimm ed., W. A. Lambert trans., (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1957), pp. 327-378.

under unbelief, so that they who imagine that they are fulfilling the law by doing the works of chastity and mercy required by the law (the civil and human virtues) might not be saved. They are included under the sin of unbelief and must either seek mercy or be justly condemned.”<sup>76</sup> “On the other hand,” he writes, “it will not harm the soul if the body is clothed in secular dress, dwells in unconsecrated places, eats and drinks as others do, does not pray aloud, and neglects to do all the above-mentioned things which hypocrites can do.”<sup>77</sup> Put simply, doing works in exchange for justification is inherently not good and condemns the person, but once someone understands their justification as a gift from Christ they are free to do actual good works joyfully.<sup>78</sup> The order of operations are crucial.<sup>79</sup> For Luther, it is impossible for good works to precede or contribute to righteousness. He describes Christian freedom as finding expression in the works of freest service, cheerful and loving, without hope of reward.<sup>80</sup>

Luther describes two kinds of righteousness. Salvific righteousness is given in the form of baptism, he explains, which weds the human to God.<sup>81</sup> He asserts that when our starting place is the assurance that we are made righteous by Christ, then we are free to do truly good works in abundance because they are really gifts to God and others. Doing the right thing is only possible when we know it is not for our own eternal self-gain. It is not the neoliberal human rights rhetoric of identity politics that seeks freedom through progressive policy, individualism, and contractual relationships. Using Christianity to “cure” sexuality

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<sup>76</sup> Luther, *LW*, vol. 31., 350-351.

<sup>77</sup> Luther, *LW* vol. 31, 345.

<sup>78</sup> Luther, *LW* vol. 31, “So the Christian who is consecrated by his faith does good works, but the works do not make him holier or more Christian, for that is the work of faith alone,” 360-361.

<sup>79</sup> Martin Luther, *LW* vo. 35, *Word and Sacrament I*, “Sacrament of Penance,” E. Theodore Bachmann ed. and trans., (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1960), 14.

<sup>80</sup> Luther, *LW* vol. 31, 365-6.

<sup>81</sup> Martin Luther, “Two Kinds of Righteousness,” circa 1519 *LW*, vol. 31, ed. Harold J Gromm, Lowell J. Satre trans., *Career of the Reformer I American Edition* (Philadelphia: Concordia, 1957), 297.



with the promise of salvation and/or citizenship, then, wrongly orients us because it is nearly entirely centered on self-interest. Conversely, seeking Christ as mediator not only frees the person to be for others, it also frees others for them. It works both ways. Christ proscribes exploitation and possession of all people.

Baptism, for Luther, functions as more than a mere initiation into the Church – it enables believers to live a holy life. It is not the triumph of the spirit over the body, but rather the gift of faith that redirects one’s course from damnation to salvation. Luther seeks to avoid two extremes: one where the Christian persists in good works for salvation, and the other where the Christian believes that their baptism cleanses them of the sin completely. The latter leads to either deathbed baptisms for the fearful or recalcitrant sin for the brazen – both of which Luther thought misunderstood this hallowed sacrament: “It is true, then, that there is no vow higher, better, or greater than the vow to baptism. What more can we promise than to drive our sin, to die, to hate this life, and to become holy?”<sup>82</sup> Indubitably Luther rails against the elevation of clerical life, and especially vows of celibacy, when he proclaims that baptism is the greatest vow. One might go so far as to extrapolate that neither the vow of celibacy nor civil institution of marriage has the power to foster holiness in the Christian life in and of itself – heterosexual or otherwise.<sup>83</sup> There are various vocations to which God calls individuals, according to Luther, but the point is to “slay sin.”<sup>84</sup> The holy life is marked by commitment to daily and ongoing sanctification, not specifically celibacy, the priesthood, or marriage: “Thus a Christian life is nothing else than a daily baptism, begun

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<sup>82</sup> Martin Luther, “The Holy and Blessed Sacrament of Baptism, 1519” *LW*, vol. 35 *Word and Sacrament I American Edition*, E. Theodore Bachman ed., Charles M. Jacobs trans., (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1960), 41.

<sup>83</sup> You will recall that Luther desired to extricate marriage from the Church and advocated relegating it to civic authorities.

<sup>84</sup> One might counter that non-heterosexuality is sinful, so I intend to address this in the following paragraph.

once and continuing ever after.”<sup>85</sup> Sexual activity need not dictate the terms of holiness; this role is taken up by the Christian’s continuous baptismal lifestyle.

Luther uses Galatians 3-4 to distinguish piety from holiness, active from passive righteousness, in order to assert Christian identity as adopted sons and co-heirs with Christ and married to God. The fusion of these themes might appear convoluted upon first blush, though my attention to “curative” rape as a baptism by drowning, coerced aversion therapy and sex reassignment surgery as a human-orchestrated resurrection, and same-sex marriage as an *analogia relationis* rather than *analogia entis*, parallels his point: in baptism we are made righteous by being clothed in Christ, who establishes us as adopted co-heirs and is our bridegroom. Luther uses intimate imagery to illustrate this point.<sup>86</sup> He even expresses his affection for the book of Galatians in marital terms – he feels betrothed to it as he was to Katharina von Bora.<sup>87</sup> For him, this text best encapsulates the effects of baptism. The implications for gender and sexuality are that although Luther supports obedience and hierarchy, he is careful to negate the possibility of these actions to acquire salvation:

Thus not matter how diligently a slave performs his duty, obeys his master, and serves faithfully; or if a free man directs and governs either the commonwealth or his private affairs in a praiseworthy way; or whatever a male does as a male, getting married, administering his household well, obeying the magistrate, maintaining honest and decent relations with other; or if a lady lives chastely, obeys her husband, takes good care of the house, and teaches her children well – these truly magnificent and outstanding gifts and works do not avail anything toward righteousness in the sight of God. In other words, whatever laws, ceremonies, forms of worship, righteousness, and works there are in the whole world, even those of the Jews, who

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<sup>85</sup> Martin Luther, Large Catechism IV:65, Robert Kolb and Timothy Wengert, 465.

<sup>86</sup> “Let not the bride send the Groom away from her embrace, but let her always cling to Him; for as long as He is present, there is no danger, but only the sighing (Rom. 8:26), Fatherhood, sonship, and the inheritance,” *Luther’s Works*, vol. 26, *Lectures on Galatians 1535: Chapters 1-4*, Jaroslav Pelikan ed. and trans., (Saint Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1963), 395.

<sup>87</sup> See Jaroslav Pelikan’s introduction in *Lectures on Galatians 1535*, ix.

were the first to have a kingdom and a priesthood that was divinely instituted and ordained, together with its laws, devotion, and form of worship – nevertheless none of these can take away sins or deliver from death or save.<sup>88</sup>

A woman's chastity, submission to her husband, childrearing, and housekeeping are not her righteousness. These works do not have the power to free someone from sin or death; only Christ's righteousness can do that. Because of Luther's adherence to two kingdoms, he maintains that women should ascribe to gender roles for pragmatic purposes but not for salvation: "For if a woman wanted to be a man, if a son wanted to be a father, if a pupil wanted to be a teacher, if a servant wanted to be a master, if a subject wanted to be a magistrate – there would be a disturbance and confusion of all social stations and of everything. In Christ, on the other hand, where there is no Law, there is not distinction among persons at all."<sup>89</sup> He goes on to assert that there is no slavery in Christ, but only sonship.<sup>90</sup> From these assertions one might understand both why the peasants used his theology to revolt (1524-1525) and why Luther infamously chastised them for it.<sup>91</sup> Because he partitions church and state, Luther is able to maintain slavery in the here and now, while also announcing the end of slavery in Christ. To be clear, this is not my argument. I

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<sup>88</sup> Martin Luther, *Lectures on Galatians 1535*, 355.

<sup>89</sup> Martin Luther, *Lectures on Galatians 1535*, 356.

<sup>90</sup> Martin Luther, *Lectures on Galatians 1535*, 390. Note that I use the phrase "adopted co-heirs" as a gender-neutral alternative to "sonship." Within a patriarchal system, the gender language of sonship is important in order to preserve the full meaning. Luther illuminates this in his explanation: "Whoever is a son must be an heir as well. For merely by being born he deserves to be an heir. No work and no merit bring him the inheritance, but only his birth. Thus he obtains the inheritance in a purely passive, not in an active way; that is, just his being born, not his producing or working or worrying, makes him an heir. Therefore just as in society a son becomes an heir merely by being born, so here faith alone makes men sons of God," Martin Luther, *Lectures on Galatians 1535*, 392.

<sup>91</sup> See Martin Luther, "A Sincere Admonition by Martin Luther to All Christians to Guard Against Insurrection and Rebellion, 1522," and "Temporal Authority: To What Extent it Should be Obeyed, 1523" in *Luther's Works*, vol. 45, *The Christian in Society II*, Walther I. Brandt ed., W.A. Lambert and J. J. Schindel trans., (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1962); Martin Luther, "Admonition to Peace, A Reply to the Twelve Article of the Peasants in Swabia, 1525," "Against the Robbing and Murdering Hordes of Peasants, 1525," "An Open Letter on the Harsh Book Against Peasants, 1525," in *Luther's Works*, vol. 46, *The Christian in Society III*, Robert C. Schultz ed., Charles M. Jacobs trans., (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967).

understand Christ's body to open new temporal and spatial relationships such that the work of Christ might direct political aims to social justice. How might the biblical text support the latter position?

### ***5.7 Queering Kinship: Baptism & Galatians 3-4***

If the story of Sodom and Gomorrah cannot be understood without that of the unnamed concubine, and Christ's transfiguration reveals both his identity as God and our adoption into being his co-heirs, then the marriage metaphor in scripture speaks to humans in relationship with God rather than with each other. In this final section I look at Galatians 3-4 for insight into the baptismal formula, which points us to the newness available in and with Christ. It is an identity that does not efface particularity; on the contrary its significance is only comprehensible due to the particularities of bodies, cultures, and spaces. It also resists neoliberal identity politics and the regulating procedures inherent to them. What we find in Christian theology and scripture is a unique liberating vision of discipleship and community.

Christianity as cure is a baptism by drowning and apartheid theology, as discussed in chapter one. What we find in the scriptures and in the activities of South Africans is a glimpse into the eschatological promise of baptism in which Christ acts as contagion. Christ enters as mediator of our relationships, reconfiguring intimate life together. With him we enter into the risk and complexity of community. It is particular, grounded, and embodied. The grace of God introduces something entirely new— a challenge to the world and even the ecclesial orders that put Christ to death. Divine justice embraces the prodigal son. What does the righteousness of Christ mean for sexuality? The Christian mistakenly pursues self-mastery and purity via containment even though we are incapable of achieving or acquiring these without God. Bonhoeffer's insight into epilepsy enables a different vision in which

faith is bodily surrender to Christ and purity is always the work of Christ. Thus we confuse the signifier with the signified when we look to regulate sexuality – be that with rape, therapy, surgery, or marriage – because we miss the activity of Christ. Instead of grasping at an apartheid theology I have put forth a Christological theology of intimate life together, in which baptism embraces Christ as contagion rather than Christianity as cure.

Biblical scholars attuned to the gendered components of the Galatians 3 passage sometimes miss the added dimensions that intersex and trans people offer. For example, Brigitte Kahl's provocative analysis is dampened by rigid sex and gender binaries. First, consider Kahl's invaluable insights: a) Paul stresses the dismantling of hierarchy rather than sex difference, b) he emphasizes egalitarian inclusivity, and c) he dissuades the Galatians from circumcision so as to preserve physical difference in unity.<sup>92</sup> As titillating as Kahl's assertion might be – that Galatians could be perceived as the most phallogocentric book in the New Testament, though articulated in an anti-phallogocentric manner – her contribution would be enriched if she turned to trans theology rather than an inquiry into masculinity.<sup>93</sup> Kahl then turns to the mother and birth terminology in Galatians 4 in order to argue that the language “transgender” Paul, though she seems to misunderstand the meaning of the term, and effectively re-centers the female. In so doing, Kahl presses the question as to whether

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<sup>92</sup> Brigitte Kahl, “No Longer Male: Masculinity Struggles Behind Galatians 3.28?” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 79 (2000): 44-48.

<sup>93</sup> Kahl explains: “Hardly any other New Testament document is so densely populated by the male body-language as this letter: the terms foreskin, circumcision/circumcise, and sperm occur 22 times, including the stunning polemical reference to castration in 5.12. Even the gospel itself is linked to male anatomy, with Paul coining the two rather striking phrases of ‘gospel of the foreskin’ and ‘gospel of the circumcision’ (2.7), which are repeated nowhere else in the New Testament. Whereas the Latin Vulgate still rendered the precise meaning as ‘evangelium praeputii/circumcisionis’ subsequent translations mostly have tried to conceal this ‘naked maleness’ of Paul’s theological language by using more indirect and non-gendered terms like ‘gospel for the Gentiles/Jews’ (NIV, GNB) or at least ‘gospel for the uncircumcised/circumcised’ (NRSV). Unfortunately, they thereby have contributed to making the male body as a major site of theological struggle in Galatians invisible.” “No Longer Male,” 40.

Paul's writing reinforces or subverts a patriarchal notion of male and female: "What at first sight seems to be the voice of patriarchal Pauline rule demanding obedience, in an ironic twist becomes the birth-cry of a woman in labor pains," though, "At a closer look he systematically subverts them in his semantic 'labor' that reflects the messianic subversion of the old age still present by the new creation already decisive"<sup>94</sup> Does not the feminine imagery in the biblical text more closely align with intersex and gender queer experiences than that of womanhood?

Next Kahl argues against colonization's use of Galatians 4:21-31, which contains an allegorical use of Hagar and Sarah, to authorize supersessionism, slavery, racism, violence and excommunication. She turns to the Imperial sanctuary of Aphrodisias for insight into Paul's contemporary context in which Galatia's iconography depicted Jerusalem and Rome as enslaved and free women respectively.<sup>95</sup> Kahl argues that Paul emphasizes all people as children of God, co-heirs, and siblings of Sarah to represent human transformation and reconciliation through love of the Other.<sup>96</sup> She doesn't interrogate the use of two women, Hagar juxtaposed with Sarah, as an allegory. It is necessary to ask how the use of these matriarchs for an allegory is itself problematic. Though Kahl makes an interesting case for the content of Galatians being for all people and undermining heterosexual kinship and inheritance, her analysis would be enriched with attention to trans and intersex theology and hermeneutics. Doing so would challenge how she frames chapters 3 and 4, and further queer Christian kinship. How might these chapters in Galatians be understood when the reader does not presume cisgender heterosexual mothers and fathers? Trans men get pregnant and

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<sup>94</sup> Kahl, "No Longer Male," 45-46.

<sup>95</sup> Bridgitte Kahl, *Galatians Re-imagined: Reading with the Eyes of the Vanquished* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010), 265.

<sup>96</sup> Kahl, *Galatians Re-imagined*, 269.

bear children, for example. To that point, why the emphasis on becoming children of “the barren mother” Sarah rather than to being as adopted children of God? Kahl locates the work of salvation in Sarah’s body rather than Christ’s. How might the latter upend an identity in the free woman over and against the slave woman, because Christ came in the form of a slave and offers new life?

Unlike the baptism by drowning explored in chapter one, where black lesbians and trans men are brutalized in the name of Christ, we find in Galatians the fulcrum upon which the diptych hangs. Baptism holds together Christ’s transfiguration and crucifixion. Baptism by drowning severs the revelation of LGBTIQ people from their bodies, thereby fetishizing corpses. C. Riley Snorton and Jin Haritaworn underscore that, “the lives of trans people of color in the global North and West are celebrated and their deaths memorialized, in ways that serve the white citizenry and mask necropolitical violence waged against gender variant people from the global South and East.”<sup>97</sup> The mutilation and killing of brown, queer Africans must always be engaged in light of what they reveal prior to their deaths; these tragedies are obfuscated when the bodies of LGBTIQ people are not looked to first as sites of contextualized knowledge through which hermeneutics are enriched. Christ as contagion mediates our “together-touching” such that baptism enables costly discipleship and intimate life together.<sup>98</sup> Instead of legibility being a prerequisite for citizenship, and thus rights, Galatians informs us that like Christ our modes of revelation will be misrecognized and

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<sup>97</sup> C. Riley Snorton and Jin Haritaworn, “*Trans Necropolitics*: A Transnational Reflection on Violence, Death, and the Trans of Color Afterlife,” in *Transstudies Reader 2*, ed. Susan Stryker and Aren Z. Aizura (New York: Routledge, 2013), 66-76.

<sup>98</sup> Snorton and Haritaworn argue that, “Rather, it is necessary to interrogate how the uneven institutionalization of women’s, gay, and trans politics produces a transnormative subject, whose universalized trajectory of coming out/transition, visibility, recognition, protection, and self-actualization largely remains uninterrogated in its complications and convergences with biomedical, neoliberal, racist, and imperial projects.” “*Trans Necropolitics*,” 67.

condemned. Contrary to the state, heavenly citizenship cannot be earned or stripped; it is the free gift of Christ. To say that we are neither slave nor free, male nor female, Jew nor Greek is confused for the erasure of embodied difference. Christ incarnate delivers our humanity back to us in particular bodies, times, and places. Like him, we experience our bodies as contested sites of church and state domination. Our gender and sexuality impart to us particular knowledge, not universals. Christ's body opens a space within and beyond us to "together-touch," which cuts against Snorton and Haritaworn's concern. They argue: "Immobilized in life, and barred from spaces designated as white (the good life, the Global North, the gentrifying inner city, the university, the trans community), it is in their death that poor and sex working trans people of color are invited back in; it is in death that they suddenly come to matter."<sup>99</sup> In Christ, LGBTIQ lives matter prior to and in excess of death.

### **5.8 Conclusion**

Even in the midst of performing life-altering miracles for those marginalized in society, Christ weeps at death. His ability to raise someone from the dead does not inhibit his mourning, because he grieves that death indicates our departure from God's desire for us. God is for life abundant, and life takes place in community. Christ makes clear his relationship with the Father and humanity in the section after healing the blind man in John's Gospel, though his audience struggles to discern whether he is in fact the good shepherd or a demon-possessed person (John 9:35-11:44). When Christ healed the sick he did not promise health and prosperity to believers. Rather, these accounts demonstrate the work of Christ to dismantle our partitions between clean and unclean, holy and depraved, able-bodied and afflicted. Christ came between the outcasts and the rulers and collapsed

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<sup>99</sup> Snorton and Haritaworn, "*Trans Necropolitics*," 74.



their distinctions. He serves as a point of connection and kinship for us. It is in this sense that he acts as contagion.

Our need for Christ to mediate all relations does not privilege the Christian.

Although Christ is sometimes treated as a possession to be wielded, he is rightly engaged as a person. In scripture we find that Christ affirms the faith and salvation of outsiders and sinners. The scriptures tell us that God privileges Jews as the chosen people for the sake of all. Time and again Christ blesses those who humbly turn to him. This pattern suggests that, against all logic and propriety, God seeks intimacy with all of humanity. The purpose of God's favor and blessing is to enable all of humanity to love one another.

It might frustrate some Christians that Christ should not be reduced to a principle. Ascribing to an ideology is enticing because it simplifies orthopraxis. In our best efforts to attain holiness we find ourselves sinning against one another. Attempting to adhere to the law and holding it over one another enslaves and burdens us. Because Christ is a person, however, not only are we free from the law, sin, and death, but we are also free to be for God and others. Therefore, God is for us so thoroughly that Christ's righteousness frees us to be for others. With Christ as our mediator we are invited to enjoy intimacy free from our own fearful terms of self-preservation. Relying on Christ's righteousness, we are free from self-interested fear of eternal punishment and hope of reward. We can be truly for one another and focused on God because our salvation does not hang in the balance. Christ's righteousness frees us to be intimate in a manner that is not preoccupied with exploiting or possessing one another.

To be certain, freedom for others is utterly distinct from self-sacrifice. It is not the sort of self-effacing *kenosis*, which lends itself to perpetuating domestic violence.

Relationships mediated by Christ depend on Christ's sacrifice, not the sacrifice of the least of these. Women, children, people of color, LGBTIQ people, and those impoverished are not called to empty themselves and serve their masters with a smile. That is an inversion of the Gospel. It is an anti-Gospel that demands some to be crucified with Christ while others reign as Christ. Neither fulfills what the creature is called to. With Christ as mediator, conversely, all of creation receives itself. When Christ stands between us, all parties are dependent upon him for righteousness and salvation; none are able to boast in their righteousness. We are able to see past the vision of ourselves and into our purpose, which is to be for others. Being for others is not stepping into the role of mammy, servant, or scapegoat. Those are the longings of sinful people that burden our conscience and break our bodies. The sort of love that God calls us to have for one another is intimacy without harm, which is only possible with Christ. It is the kind of orientation that blesses others because we are interrelated, not hierarchical. I am not for you as an individual, but rather, we are for each other only because God was first for us. Being for us, God frees us to be for each other as ourselves, not because we are servants to masters but because we are held together in community. Together we attempt to love one another, with God's help, not making a display of self-denigration or effacement, but as adopted co-heirs.<sup>100</sup> We all occupy the precarious status of needing Christ, and expressions of our love for one another are not characterized by elevating the other over ourselves for we are all equal. In fact, demanding submission or practicing it wrongly characterizes the Christian life. We do not live to reign over one another. Our challenge is to engage in intimacy where Christ draws us together as equally flawed creatures in need of him and God's grace in order to love one another.

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<sup>100</sup> Luther, *LW*, "Thus Christ has made it possible for us, provided we believe in him, to be not only his brethren, co-heirs, and fellow-kings, but also his fellow priests," 355.

As stated in the introduction, this project engages in decolonial thinking at the border of the disciplines and for transformation, as Walter D. Mignolo prescribes, though I integrate critical theory into this process instead of rejecting it as an irredeemably intellectual, bourgeois technology. My work aligns with what he outlines as the two-fold function of decoloniality: first, to expose and delegitimize colonial epistemologies, hermeneutics, politics, and ethics; and second, to construct an alternative utopian vision. For this reason I heed his exhortation to “de-link” from the political left, right, and even liberation theology. Perhaps the first two have been more obvious than the latter in my critiques of progressive policy and Christianity as “cure.” The third, however, is more subtly embedded within my use of Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s theology, which rejects reducing Christ to principles (presumably including passivism, just war, the preferential option for the poor, or a health-wealth gospel), opting instead for a turn to Christ as a person who freely calls us to what is contextually necessary. Certainly this theology is disquieting because it entails great risk and uncertainty. However, stepping into that precarity is precisely the humility inherent to honoring Christ as God above all idols. We desire to cling to our own adjudications of what is right and wrong, and yet, as the unnamed concubine demonstrates, when we do what is right in our own eyes (the refrain of the book of Judges) we commit violent sins against one another. Some readers might object that this theology authorizes individuals to sanctify whatever their heart desires. To this concern I return to our dependence upon community mediated by Christ. It is with Christ as contagion, bringing us together, delivering ourselves to us as co-heirs with him, that we are called to discipleship. Within this context, libertarianism and authoritarianism seek to extricate our mediator Christ from our “together-touching.” In the words of Martin Luther, the freedom of a Christian is not only from sin and death, but to be for God and

others. Because our salvation rests on Christ's righteousness, we are freed from self-interest to joyfully do truly good works oriented towards God and each other.

## 6. Chapter Five: Co-Heirs with Christ: Examples of Activism and Ministry

### 6.1 Introduction: Who/se Am I?

“Who am I and whose am I? That is a fundamental question that we may want to ask ourselves daily...[That’s] what we’re trying to do with SAFFI.”

- Elizabeth Petersen<sup>1</sup>

While incarcerated under the Nazi state, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, once primed to be the next great German theologian, faced his mortality, criminal status, and lack of futurity with a new theological perspective. Unlike his early writings on discipleship and life together, Dietrich’s prison letters and poetry turn to Christ from a position of trauma and crisis. Dietrich witnessed German theology’s failure to resist Hitler. His efforts to redress this resulted in him being severed from society. While imprisoned, Dietrich longed for the company of his dear friend Eberhard Bethge, to whom he wrote consistently and candidly. The questions and incoherence he faced at the end of his life not only illuminate the shortcomings of his theology, but also invite us into re-contextualizing his notion of discipleship and community for intimacy.

In the months before his execution, Dietrich penned the poem, *Wer bin Ich?* (“Who Am I?”). In the poem he describes being told by others that he is “like a squire from his manor,” who will joyfully endure his imprisonment “like someone accustomed to victory.”<sup>2</sup> But Dietrich wonders, “Am I really what others say of me?” He offers a markedly different image of himself: “Restless, yearning, sick, like a caged bird, struggling for life breath, as if I

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<sup>1</sup> Elizabeth Petersen, founder and director of the South African Faith & Family Institute (SAFFI), interviewed by Michelle Wolff, September 2016.

<sup>2</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *DBWE* vol. 8, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, Tegel, summer 1994, “Who Am I?” ed. John W. de Gruchy, trans. Isabel Best, Lisa E. Dahill, Reinhard Krauss, and Nancy Lukens, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010), 3/173, p. 459.

were being strangled.”<sup>3</sup> Adolf von Harnack had trained Dietrich to be a squire in the discipline of theology, but Dietrich found himself reduced to a caged bird. He describes feeling anxiety over his powerlessness and lack of futurity. He is disoriented and uncertain of his identity; is he as a triumphant aristocrat, a “pitiful, whimpering weakling,” or both? In the end, he can only be certain that: “Whoever I am, thou knowest me; O God, I am thine!”<sup>4</sup>

Those who occupy a precarious position in society exist where Dietrich met his end. Elizabeth Petersen is a South African woman of color committed to mitigating gender-based violence and intimate partner violence. She founded the South African Faith and Family Institute (SAFFI) – an interfaith effort to inform religious leaders of their role in harming *and* healing perpetrators and victims of intimate violence. This sprang from her research as a social worker on the role of clergy in exacerbating and mitigating domestic violence.<sup>5</sup> SAFFI guides faith leaders in identifying sacred texts and theologies that exacerbate gender-based violence and intimate partner violence. In addition, SAFFI offers workshops, seminars, and dialogues for religious leaders to develop alternative patterns that counter intimate violence. While Petersen works with a variety of faith groups, for our purposes here I will focus on her work with Christians. At SAFFI, training Christian leaders includes revisiting the Bible and rethinking atonement theology. At the heart of Petersen’s ministry and activism, she encourages people to return to the question: who am I and whose am I?

Having offered a constructive theology, theory, and method in the previous chapter, I turn to Petersen’s theology and work in this chapter as an example of decolonizing sexuality. She grounds my theoretical and theological claims in concrete persons, events, and

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<sup>3</sup> Bonhoeffer, “Who Am I?” 459.

<sup>4</sup> Bonhoeffer, “Who Am I?” 460.

<sup>5</sup> See Elizabeth Petersen, “Addressing Domestic Violence: Challenges Experienced by Anglican Clergy in the Diocese of Cape Town, South Africa,” *Social Work & Christianity: Journal of the North American Association of Christians in Social Work* 36.4 (2009): 449-469.

methods. As a woman of color from the global South, Petersen has a unique perspective and lived experience that speaks boldly to Bonhoeffer's notion of life together. Petersen engages the complexities of Christian communities plagued by gender-based violence, and prescribes an inclusive and intimate alternative. In this chapter I underscore the work Petersen, Johnson, Storey, and Cox are doing in South Africa, and invite readers to examine the scriptures continually, to join in "costly discipleship," and to find intimate community in Christ as contagion.

## **6.2 Elizabeth Petersen**

### **6.2.1 Sacred Authority**

Discipleship and intimate life together, as delineated above, is not limited to an eschatological hope; it takes on flesh and bone in the present day. Instead of blaming one individual or another, Elizabeth Petersen offers workshops and dialogues to deepen the faith. These entail: a) reminding religious leaders of their calling, b) sensitizing leaders to the problem of violence through "walks of witness," c) guided devotions, i.e. community Bible study, and d) asserting the *imago dei* in perpetrators and victims alike. She begins by calling Christians to account for gender-based violence in South Africa. Highlighting the "sacred authority" of religious leaders, faith communities, and institutions, Petersen cautions religious leaders against valorizing submission and forgiveness. She uncovers the power of the pulpit to justify domestic violence and abuse this way:

...the point is really about being mindful about what they preach, what they teach, and who listens to them.

And so we would say to them that [amidst] the people that are sitting in your pews, there's probably a perpetrator that listens to you and *wants* you to preach certain things.

Because that perpetrator will go home and use what you've preached [to justify their abuse].

There's a victim, there's a survivor that's sitting there, that listens to you.

There's children whose faith is being formed, who witnesses what is going on.<sup>6</sup>

Making people of faith aware of their unwitting contribution to domestic violence, Petersen goes on to describe the multiple audiences affected. Perpetrators gain fodder for justifying their abuse from the highest authority – God; victims and survivors hear that they exhibit faithfulness through compliance, and children are formed to understand this cycle as Christian. Unpacking the facets of relationship mediated by the Word of God, Petersen illuminates the preacher's misuse of scripture and Christ's suffering.

While serving as a social worker for abused and homeless women and children in Cape Town, Elizabeth witnessed victims feeling as though they had to “choose between their faith and their safety, their faith and their sanity.”<sup>7</sup> It is a choice that no person should have to make. The problem, she explains, is rooted in two systems of oppression: patriarchy and white supremacy. Petersen dedicates herself to working with people of faith to dismantle theology that perpetuates abuse by turning to their sacred texts. Her activism isn't leveled over and against religion. Because Petersen respects religious people's deep-seated commitments to their faiths, she meets them there to advance social justice.

Pointedly, Petersen challenges religious leaders to recognize their culpability in authorizing gender-based violence as well as their potential to undermine it. When a faith leader claims to not have access to the perpetrator, she presses their conscience:

Actually you do, don't you?

You do have authority and you know that.

And so how about if I say to you that you are selective in terms of how and when you use your authority?

And might there be a resource in looking at Jesus and how Jesus dealt with perpetrators and that interaction. It might be helpful actually if we amplify more how Jesus dealt with perpetrators.

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<sup>6</sup> Elizabeth Petersen, interviewed by Michelle Wolff, July 21, 2015.

<sup>7</sup> Elizabeth Petersen, interviewed by Michelle Wolff, July 21, 2015.



Because there's an approach there – there's an approach that draws on people's humanity.  
But we never organize quick forgiveness at the expense of [victims].<sup>8</sup>

Savvy, Petersen does not flatly chastise religious leaders so much as she reminds them of their agency and resources. What she describes here is known as bystander intervention. It is a concept that expands rape beyond a victim-perpetrator dyad. Instead of ferreting out assailants or blaming survivors, bystander intervention enfolds the whole community into preventing assault. This challenges the fiction that sexuality is a private exchange between two autonomous individuals. Bystander intervention expands the onus of care beyond self-preservation or self-incrimination. It encourages social groups to take preventative action by stopping harassment immediately and ensuring safe passage for others.

What is remarkable about Petersen's suggestion here, however, is not only that she encourages religious leaders to practice bystander intervention, but that she refuses to dehumanize perpetrators on the basis of Christ's example in scripture. Attuned to the social networks in South Africa's townships where economic strains hinder moving to a new location and social life is organized around religious gatherings, Petersen speaks to intimacy with the most vulnerable populations alongside the most threatening. Unlike Dietrich Bonhoeffer's "life together," which was comprised of a homogenous group of privileged white men, many of us experience "life together" as marked by crime, violence, racism, homophobia, and sexism. Obviously these characteristics are more threatening to community members on the receiving end of harassment and hate-crimes. Taking into account the dearth of privileged, autonomous individuals in most societies, bystander intervention effectively dissipates culpability across gatherings of people.

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<sup>8</sup> Elizabeth Petersen, interviewed by Michelle Wolff, July 21, 2015.

Petersen adds to the strategy of bystander intervention a Christian motivation and prescription based on the life of Christ found in the Bible. In so doing, she takes the bystander intervention further because it is not merely about transforming social norms into less harmful interaction, but also about dealing with transgressors differently. In recent years, Christian theologians and ethicists have critiqued the prison industrial complex. Extraordinarily, Petersen makes no mention of just legal punishment. Aware of the shortcomings of law enforcement and the legal system, especially in South Africa's townships, she deals with the common reality – that rapists and murders will remain in the community and even attend church. When space and justice prove scarce, disproportionately effecting those most vulnerable in society, coping with these horrors from a religious perspective is invaluable. Certainly Petersen is not suggesting that one neglect the pursuit of legal action; rather, what is implied is that because due process is elusive, religious communities might make efforts to make a way forward in “life together” with both victims and perpetrators – for the two are inextricable. This process is initiated with the religious leaders due to their positions of sacred authority.

Petersen exposes that offenders are located within sacred spaces, even among clergy, thereby challenging the feasibility of apartheid theocracy, which necessitates segregating the chosen from the damned. Reorienting heterosexual religious leaders in this way, as culpable in perpetuating gender-based violence from the pulpit and sometimes being the perpetrators themselves, Petersen effectively quiets misplaced questions about the faithfulness of LGBTIQ Christians. Petersen recalled a man who, through a SAFFI workshop, came to realize that he was sexually abusing his wife. “We zoom in on people's humanity,” she explains in describing these breakthroughs. Petersen conscientiously resists overtly criticizing religious leaders, relying instead on intimacy to reveal sin and prompt redress. Literally

drawing physical bodies together in a manner that uncovers harm, she achieves what remains evasive for progressive policy – social buy in and new behavior. While having protective laws in place aids her work, without the cooperation of religious groups it can actually intensify hate crimes, as South Africa so tragically demonstrates. Her method is a “together-touching” where Christ mediates relationships. As contagion, he pulls us people together into community rather than purging perpetrators.

Reasserting our universal need for Christ’s righteousness reminds the clergy to be intimate with those whom they fear and condemn. The problem of hate crimes against black lesbians and trans men prompted Petersen to physically bring people into intimate conversation in order to discern a way forward:

When we are having the corrective rape and all the killing of lesbians and there was that scourge and it was just horrible.

And so what we did was, we took religious leaders to go and visit with families whose child has been raped and killed.

It’s a total different dynamic when you just speak about it from a platform or as a topic.

When you actually sit in the same room with a dad whose daughter’s body was found

just a few houses from where they live,  
and the daughter was killed by somebody that they know,  
and that, in fact,

they go to the same church, these two families.

I think for SAFFI we are not about trying to point out how wrong anybody is.

[Rather, we are about] the sacredness of life

– of human life –

and the sacredness of intimate relationships and people;  
we trust people in our intimate spaces.<sup>9</sup>

Petersen describes these events as “walks of witness.” She literally brings the physical bodies of religious leaders into victim’s homes to commune with the families who share their social and religious space with perpetrators. In so doing, Petersen reveals the truth that we are

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<sup>9</sup> Elizabeth Petersen, interviewed by Michelle Wolff, July 21, 2015. Note that although Petersen says “corrective rape” here, she explains in the same interview that: “In our training here there is no such thing as ‘corrective rape.’ I think that needs to be stated.”

often too afraid to confront: perpetrators are not aberrations or excisable. They are our neighbors, friends, and adopted co-heirs. Her compassion for all people must not be confused with cheap grace, however, because these walks of witness illuminate the community's participation in sexual violence. Petersen's aim is to remind religious leaders of their ability to effect change. The primary means by which she accomplishes this is by facilitating "together-touching" and emotional intimacy. She explains, "We ended up being in conversation so religious leaders had a chance to listen [to] what are the experiences of LGBTI people. What are they experiencing in church?"<sup>10</sup> In a later interview she describes the effect of bringing people face to face with one another:

A senior religious leader sits opposite a dad who is in tears,  
who is completely shattered because his daughter was been killed because she's lesbian.  
When he sits and he listens to a mother or sisters,  
it changes things.

It was a way of instead of just having a conversation.  
We took them there and we have no need to tell them what they need to do."<sup>11</sup>

In these meetings Petersen humanizes all parties – the clergy, LGBTIQ people and their families, and perpetrators. Interacting within a shared community, classifications blur and each person can be for one other. Petersen finds that bringing people together to see and hear one another most profoundly interrupts the cycle of religion and violence. These walks of witness reveal perpetrators to be members of the victim's community, both civil and ecclesial. Instead of attempting to extract perpetrators or to ignore the violence, Petersen facilitates humanized intimacy.

Participants glean from listening during "walks of witness" that LGBTIQ Christians don't want to be segregated in "gay" churches. Many are devout in their faith and seek intimacy with their local community. A gay man in a SAFFI workshop explained:

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<sup>10</sup> Elizabeth Petersen, interviewed by Michelle Wolff, July 21, 2015.

<sup>11</sup> Elizabeth Petersen, interviewed by Michelle Wolff, September 2, 2016.

I was very active in the church until I came out of the closet.  
I was treated badly and kicked out of the church and  
I didn't want to go to a gay church;  
I want to go where I grew up with my community.  
How much time do faith leaders need to understand?  
I can't give you more time.  
I want to serve God in my community.”<sup>12</sup>

This man expresses his longstanding desire for intimacy with God and his neighbors. No person or entity, especially the church, should stand between him and these relationships save Christ. Our church walls, ghettos, and state lines alienate and harm us. Apartheid theology quashes godly love and service. It rends asunder what God has brought together. With Christ as contagion, we are free to truly love one another and God.

Finally, Petersen effects change by reminding religious leaders of the big picture – their vocational purpose:

What is your intention when you do pastoral care?  
What's the goal of care?  
To connect, to reconnect with God's purpose for [parishioners"]  
lives uniquely, or  
to reinforce oppressive systems back into straight jackets –  
to conform and comply with patriarchy or  
connect with their true purpose and essence?  
Which is what religion and faith offers – to  
hold space as people connect with God and their purpose, [and] to  
bring union and harmony into intimate relationships and all  
interactions.<sup>13</sup>

Her rhetorical questions cushion her imperative to resist evil, and direct people to intimacy with one another and God. Petersen's tone suggests that she is reminding clergy of what they already know to be true, so she effectively bypasses their tendency to defend their innocence. Hers is an insightful tactic in light of how guilt can overwhelm people so thoroughly that it actually inhibits change. Petersen is able to hold perpetrators and religious leaders accountable while strengthening ecclesial and social bonds.

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<sup>12</sup> Elizabeth Petersen, interviewed by Michelle Wolff, July 21, 2015.

<sup>13</sup> Elizabeth Petersen, interviewed by Michelle Wolff, July 21, 2015.

### 6.2.2. Patriarchy and White Supremacy

Petersen does not limit interventions in intimate partner violence to heterosexual relationships. Committed to an intersectional framework, Petersen links homophobia to racism and sexism.<sup>14</sup> SAFFI serves a wide variety of family structures. It is not only for women, victims of domestic violence, or lesbians because some women are all three of those things. One issue need not take precedence over another. In fact, treating them as distinct social problems misses the big picture of multi-faceted and dynamic nature of social injustices.

We put all these efforts in doing this, and putting all these policies in these legislations, these programs, all these things in place.

What I'm interested in is uprooting the oppressive systems that is really at the bottom – what's fueling this.

The conversation should really be around sex  
and sexuality and faith and religion...

it's like HIV and AIDS, I mean the whole world is like:

of course we don't want people to die.

But at the bottom for me, of all of this, is maybe if we have a conversation around sex and sexuality in our *bodies* and our faith and our religion, there might be answers there!

And in many ways I feel oppressive systems,

like patriarchy and white supremacy,  
keep us busy on the surface so we will be kept [distracted].<sup>15</sup>

Petersen underscores the larger problems of patriarchy and white supremacy that are played out in a variety of ways. These sins adversely affect heterosexual couples, children, all genders, people living with HIV and AIDS, LGBTIQ people, and so on. In other words, Petersen concerns herself broadly with the “powers and principalities” described in Ephesians.

Blaming, punishing, or shunning individuals is ineffective and misguided. She identifies

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<sup>14</sup> Petersen explains, “When we come together with religious leader and we walk about safety and the sacredness of intimate spaces and intimate relationships, we bring into the conversation as we go along same-sex intimacy and same-sex relationships. We don't make it as if that is a whole topic for another day. It's not separate... We are interested in supporting the notion that everybody has the right to be safe in their intimate relationship, whatever that relationship is.” Elizabeth Petersen, interviewed by Michelle Wolff, September 2, 2016.

<sup>15</sup> Elizabeth Petersen, interviewed by Michelle Wolff, September 2, 2016.

patriarchy and white supremacist frameworks as prohibiting holy forms of intimacy among family, friends, neighbors, and nations. Doing so entails that SAFFI serve communities rather than individuals. The organization does not hone in on cisgender, white, heterosexual mothers because Petersen understands the webs of relation that muddy these categories.

Moreover, whiteness and masculinity are not exclusively secular concerns that can be resolved with an ideal civil policy; they are spiritual concerns profoundly rooted in the Christian tradition. Petersen explains that patriarchy and white supremacy direct the funding of resources for those suffering: “What I’m saying is this is patriarchy at work that decides what is the agenda! What is the agenda, where will the resources go, and where will the legislation and everything emphasize itself?” Our best attempts to redress gender-based violence with progressive policy are shot through with sin. To her point, it is quite interesting which activist groups garner the lion’s share of fundraising and support. Independent researcher Lisa Vetten reports that in 2015 funding shifted to preventative care, understood to be changing men’s behavior rather than offering services to women.<sup>16</sup> While notions of masculinity certainly shape relationships between genders, the fact that organizations focused exclusively on women, girls, LGBTIQ people, or HIV and AIDS receive less funds does not go unnoticed. Vetten attributes this flow of resources to neoliberalism reducing sexual violence to economic terms rather than feminist politics. Two of my activist interviewees, one interviewed in 2015 and the other in 2016, espoused similar frustrations. Although Vetten stresses the underpaid and vital need for counseling services, she does not consider the role of religion in preventative or after care.

The root issue, according to Petersen, is religion and sexuality. Therefore, SAFFI considers, “What is our theology of God, what is our theology of ourselves, and what is our

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<sup>16</sup> Lisa Vetten, “Unintended complications: preventing violence against women in South Africa,” *Gender and Development* 24.2 (2016): 291-306.

theology of our bodies and our sexuality and sex?” This starting point addresses all facets of society. Whether a victim of a hate crime, a legislator, or a perpetrator, this inquiry pertains to us. Embedded within Christian theology are assumptions about gender and sexuality:

I'm like, come on,  
we know that God is neither male nor female.  
I mean, you *know* that!  
Don't you?

I ask the religious leaders:  
so why do we insist that God is male?  
We know that male is not white or black,  
and we've created these systems of oppression based on these  
notions that we have of God.  
What is the image of God that we were taught?  
If there is an image,  
it is a white old man  
and hence all of this colonialism and all of this  
“white people must be in charge of black people  
because black people are dark and evil.”  
And the same thing with God now being male.  
He's male. Ok, so we know it's crap.  
As people who are spirit, we know on a deep level that that's crap!  
But yet we act and live our lives on these *lies*.  
And we know God is mystery.<sup>17</sup>

Part of the problem that Petersen identifies here is the dissonance between what we know to be true about God and how we speak about God. She argues that the effects of religious language are immense. It is no small thing, then, to speak of God as male or white; these words directly impact how we relate to one another. More than masculinity, then, Petersen points to the authority religion has to influence intimacy towards exploitation or justice.

### **6.2.3 Ubuntu**

A number of theologians take up the notion of *Ubuntu*, which is particular to Southern Africa, in constructing a theology for life together. Petersen can be counted among such Christians because she asserts that rightly reorienting intimacy can begin with *Ubuntu*.

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<sup>17</sup> Elizabeth Petersen, interviewed by Michelle Wolff, September 2, 2016.



This is a Zulu term for human kindness that translates to a variety of meanings such as “humanity towards others” and a universal bond of sharing that connects all humanity.<sup>18</sup>

John Mbiti translates *Ubuntu* as: “I am, because we are, and since we are, I am.”<sup>19</sup> Petersen explains how *Ubuntu* connects one person to another:

There has got to be a vision;  
what am I going for in my intimate relationship?  
I’m going for *Ubuntu*.  
I want my humanity inextricably bound up in yours.  
When I hurt you hurt, and when you hurt I hurt.  
And when you are free and feel fulfilled, you know, I feel the same.  
You are honored, I am honored, all of that.  
That is what I guess in the long run that is what we are going for.<sup>20</sup>

The strength of Petersen’s incorporation of *Ubuntu* is that it draws upon a concept particular to her geographic location and domestic traditions. In so doing, she trusts in the ability of local wisdom to frame the problem of gender-based violence. *Ubuntu* takes the philosophical form of inter-subjectivity and the political form of socialism and diplomacy. The term directly counters apartheid theocracy by overturning separatism and individualism. Mikki van Zyl also posits *Ubuntu* as the solution for neoliberal identity-based politics, which write LGBTIQ people into legislation but are unable to provide a sense of “belonging.” Like Petersen, van Zyl argues, “The complex interwoven and competing cultural practices and discourses of colonialism/apartheid/postcolonialism in South Africa national politics are steeped in heteropatriarchal values, where dominant masculinities shape the relations in the world.”<sup>21</sup> However, as a humanist concept, *Ubuntu* is not distinctly theological. If Petersen’s assessment described above is correct, then change requires that theologians and religious

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<sup>18</sup> According to Mluleki Mnyaka and Mokgethi Motlhabi, *ubuntu* is found in almost all Southern African languages. Their article, “The African Concept of *Ubuntu/Botho* and its Socio-Moral Significance,” *Black Theology: An International Journal* 3.2 (2005): 215-237, narrates the breadth of the term’s meanings.

<sup>19</sup> John Mbiti, 1969, 109.

<sup>20</sup> Elizabeth Petersen, interviewed by Michelle Wolff, September 2, 2016.

<sup>21</sup> Melissa Steyn and Mikki van Zyl, “Beyond the Constitution: From Sexual Rights to Belonging,” in *The Price and the Prize: Shaping Sexualities in South Africa* (Cape Town: HSRC Press, 2009), 376.

leaders rightly understand and foster intimacy. The very plasticity of *Ubuntu* can prove so nebulous it becomes insufficient. It need not be disregarded, though. Christ as contagion contributes to *Ubuntu* a clearer vision for intimate together.

Some South African theologians utilize *Ubuntu* to forward religious arguments.<sup>22</sup> Jaco Dreyer finds Ubuntu useful for practical theology because it is compatible with virtue, duty, and situation ethics.<sup>23</sup> John Eliastam suggests that, “*ubuntu* resonates with a number of theological motifs, including the *imago Dei*, the church as the body of Christ, instructions to love one’s neighbour, and the practical expression of early Christian fellowship in the book of Acts.”<sup>24</sup> Likewise, Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu asserts the meaning and value of *Ubuntu* as a counter to Enlightenment subjectivity: “a person is a person through other people. It is not ‘I think therefore I am’...I am human because I belong.”<sup>25</sup> While compelling, all these theologies assume that we receive our humanity from other people rather than Christ. Our environment and neighbors shape our sense of self, however only Christ can deliver our humanity to us. My intervention here is not to disregard the rich and helpful resource that *Ubuntu* provides so much as to consider what Christian theology contributes to decolonizing intimacy.

Undoubtedly, *Ubuntu* affords a uniquely African concept for forging democracy in South Africa. However, we cannot rely upon on another to impart our humanity or identity because to do so is to remain captured within sinful systems of exploitation and oppression. Eliastam observes that: “*Ubuntu* does not make all people equal. The cultural system that is

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<sup>22</sup> In addition, theologians from other regions who are engaged in Black Theology do likewise. See Berrisford Lewis, “Fording and Understanding of Black Humanity Through Relationship: An *Ubuntu* Perspective,” *Black Theology* 8.1 (2010): 69-85.

<sup>23</sup> Jaco S. Dreyer, “Ubuntu: A Practical Theological Perspective,” *International Journal of Practical Theology* 19.1 (2015), 189-209.

<sup>24</sup> John L. B. Eliastam, “Exploring *ubuntu* discourse in South Africa: Loss, liminality and hope,” *Verbum et Ecclesia* 36.2 (2015), 1-9.

<sup>25</sup> Desmond Tutu, *No Future Without Forgiveness* (London: Rider, 1999), 34-35.

said to be an expression of *ubuntu* relegates women to a lower social status. This is particularly in the regulation of customary marriage, access to land, and inheritance rights. *Ubuntu* seems to exclude certain groups from the scope of its benefits.”<sup>26</sup> Bernard Matolino and Wenceslaus Kwindigwi similarly argue that *Ubuntu* is a project of the black elite predicated on an essentialized notion of African identity.<sup>27</sup> Because the concept is entrenched within the very sins of paternalism that Petersen criticizes, *Ubuntu* is not a sufficient solution. However, ethical feminists Drucilla Cornell and Karin van Marle argue that *Ubuntu* can be redirected to counter racism, neoliberalism, and sexism.<sup>28</sup> The various uses for *Ubuntu* require further specification and explanation if it is to effectively influence Christian theology and LGBTIQ activism.

*Ubuntu*'s valuable contribution to society could be extended to LGBTIQ life together with the notion of Christ as contagion mediating intimacy. Although *Ubuntu* expresses the impossibility of existence in isolation, intimacy and relation require mediation in order to contend with sin.<sup>29</sup> The horrors of racism, sexism, abuse, rape and homicide are not that persons are too isolated. We might better understand these atrocities as the outpourings of communities, religious and social, that authorize the exploitation and possession of others. In other words, it is sometimes the act of taking another person into deeply intimate space and relationship that is most harmful. Seeing another person as a part of your faith or cultural communities can wrongly entitle someone to discipline that person. *Ubuntu*, therefore, grasps at the significance of relationships, but Christ as contagion rightly orients

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<sup>26</sup> Eliastam, “Exploring *ubuntu* discourse in South Africa,” 3.

<sup>27</sup> Bernard Matolino and Wenceslaus Kwindigwi, “The End of *Ubuntu*,” *South African Journal of Philosophy* 32.2 (2013), 196-204.

<sup>28</sup> Drucilla Cornell and Karin van Marle, “Ubuntu feminism: Tentative reflections,” *Verbum et Ecclesia* 36.2 (2015): 1-8. See also Fainos Mangena’s “The search for an African feminist ethic: a Zimbabwean perspective,” *Journal of International Women’s Studies* 11.2(2009): 18-30.

<sup>29</sup> Wonke Buqua writes, “[Steve] Biko affirms the sentiments expressed by Tutu, namely that *Ubuntu* speaks to the fact that one cannot exist in human isolation,” in “Storying *Ubuntu* as a rainbow nation,” *Verbum et Ecclesia* 36.2 (2015): 4.

those relationships. It is not enough to affirm our connection to one another. We require a new temporality and spatiality, which Christ makes possible. Theology uniquely offers a basis for social critique and transformation because with Christ as contagion we receive our selves and others as gifts. Thus, even self-possession misdirects us from the truth of our precarity. With Christ, conversely, we are reminded of our creaturely status and freed to be for one another.

#### **6.2.4 Life “Together-Touching” Abusers**

No person is beyond the reach of Christ and no souls are unsuitable for Christian community. Two things confirm the limitlessness of intimacy for Petersen: scripture and her experience as a person of color during apartheid. Rather than seeking harsher laws to reform criminals, or suggesting that churches not interfere with politics, Petersen practices an ethic of decolonial intimacy. That is, Petersen brings people before one another’s humanity. She does not isolate perpetrators or victims with physical walls or markers of Christian righteousness. Put plainly, she literally brings them to one another, into their homes, and forthrightly acknowledges their shared places of worship in the midst of harm and violence. Compartmentalizing public and private, religious and secular, perpetrator and victim, belies the confluence in community. Remedying the sins committed against one another, then, requires facing individuals and communities.

Petersen cites Zacchaeus (Luke 19) as a biblical example of Christ having unseemly intimate relationship with sinners. The nineteenth chapter of Luke describes Zacchaeus as wealthy tax collector who climbed a tree just to see Jesus pass by. Christ called Zacchaeus down from the tree and invited himself over to Zacchaeus’ house. The people grumbled that of all people Christ should seek a sinner to host him. We learn that in the presence of Christ, Zacchaeus offered his possessions to the poor and reparations for his wrongdoing. To this

Christ replied that Zacchaeus was family – a son of Abraham – and recipient of salvation. The story concludes with Christ’s mission: the Son of Man came to seek out and save the lost.

Zacchaeus is not merely a symbolic character for contemplating a theoretical community, nor does his story endorse exploitation. On the contrary, the scriptures inform us that intimacy with Christ transforms people. Zacchaeus’ greed was turned to repentance and restitution. Taking Christ, a stranger, into his home changed Zacchaeus’ relationships with others. Christ embraces Zacchaeus as an heir of his chosen people, because Christ’s mission is to embrace all humankind, even, or perhaps especially, despised wrongdoers.

When Petersen was a child, a known rapist and murder lived a few doors down from her. Walking to and from school she felt his eyes on her. She describes him as having an intimidating presence. One day as she approached his neighbor’s door, this man grabbed her by the arm. She shot back: “You have absolutely no right to touch me! The fact that I greet you, the fact that I smile at you, doesn’t actually give you any permission [to touch me].”<sup>30</sup> It was a bold response for a child raised to respect her elders and act decorously. On a different occasion, when Petersen was about 13 or 14 years old, she went to the store at dusk to fetch groceries for her mother. Typically she would not venture out alone at this time of day. The store was closing and the clerk spoke to her through a gate. She recalls,

The next thing, my God,  
I just felt this breath,  
you know here, my back, by my side, greeting me.  
And of course it’s “Chuppies”...  
He had *chuppies*,  
like tattoos,  
that’s obviously where his name comes from,  
he had tattoos all over his body, in his face.  
I knew this was really going to be hectic now.  
It was about the choice I had to make:

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<sup>30</sup> Elizabeth Petersen, interviewed by Michelle Wolff, July 21, 2015 and September 2, 2016.

am I going to succumb to the fear?  
Because he's obviously trying to intimidate me and get me to be  
afraid,  
and of course I'm afraid.  
But then I shifted.  
I realized that whatever I'm going to do, this guy,  
because he was on a bicycle, so he was going to walk with me.  
You know, it's like he's entitled.  
He's giving himself that.<sup>31</sup>

He "came into [her] space" as she headed home, but Petersen composed herself and "created a church conversation" on the 20 minute walk in the midst of feeling frightened and intimidated.<sup>32</sup>

Later Petersen confided in her father and watched his response. It would become the cornerstone for her work with perpetrators of gender-based violence. Peterson is one of nine children. She describes her parents as having little education due to growing up during apartheid as designated non-whites. They struggled with poverty, "But," she explains, "I've never seen my dad shame my mother or anyone of us. Although he was shamed, even in the church context, because he was too dark skinned."<sup>33</sup> Petersen watched her father intently in the days that followed. He always prayed first, she recalls, waiting for inspiration for what to say and do. Then he went to Chuppies and asked if his children were always respectful towards him. Chuppies affirmed. Petersen's father stressed: "You see I'm not always with my children, but God is with them. If you do anything to hurt them, I may not be there, but God is present. If any of that comes to my attention I will not even necessarily report you to the police, but I will report you to God."<sup>34</sup> Reflecting on the interaction, Petersen admires that her father respectfully asserted their identity in Christ so as to humanize both Chuppies

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<sup>31</sup> Elizabeth Petersen, interviewed by Michelle Wolff, September 2, 2016. Petersen later stated, "Perpetrators and men step into this entitlement where they come into your space whether you want them or not."

<sup>32</sup> Elizabeth Petersen, interviewed by Michelle Wolff, July 21, 2015.

<sup>33</sup> Elizabeth Petersen, interviewed by Michelle Wolff, July 21, 2015.

<sup>34</sup> Elizabeth Petersen, interviewed by Michelle Wolff, September 2, 2016.

and her siblings. She notes that her father didn't deal with her as his property. Rather, he reminded Chuppies of their shared relationship to God; God is with his children and God is with Chuppies. Her father will take his grievances to God.

On a different occasion, when Petersen had to go to a high crime subway station alone, Chuppies happened to be there. He greeted her kindly. She exclaimed to me, "No one is out of God's reach into humanity! To support each other we have to have compassion. That goes a long way. Gender-based violence folk blame religious leaders. That changes, and space opens up when people feel respected and heard. We are vulnerable; we are perpetrators, all of us, in different circumstances... We all have potential to be perpetrators in some instance and victims in others. What [will we] do we do with [our] privilege?"<sup>35</sup> From this experience, Petersen internalized that known rapists and convicts, even when they antagonize you, should be met with compassion in community. Her father did not instruct her to avoid Chuppies; he did not ostracize or assault the man. He turned first to God, and then invited God to stand between this man and his children – mediating their relationship as contagion. From this position we receive our humanity and the humanity of others from God, who reveals us to be adopted co-heirs.

With SAFFI, Petersen illuminates the ways in which the church has "groomed" perpetrators and victims of domestic violence with religious scriptures and teachings. White supremacy and patriarchy have "captured" God, she explains, because they say that God created black people to be subordinate to white people, and women to men. God and scripture are used to authorize oppression as the ordained, natural order of things. Today, she observes, that civil institutions claim to be secular and disallow religious conversation. This is a strategy for preserving white supremacy and patriarchy, Petersen argues. Petersen is

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<sup>35</sup> Elizabeth Petersen, interviewed by Michelle Wolff, September 2, 2016.

attuned to the prison industrial complex that benefits from the dehumanization of perpetrators. She identifies a relationship between social death and disposability: “We will slaughter anything that is not white, because black bodies [and] women’s bodies are prone to living in a constant state of social death.”<sup>36</sup> For this reason Petersen resists reducing perpetrators, victims, or herself to identity markers:

Does the church define me?  
Does the legislation of the land define me?  
I’m very careful about putting labels on myself, calling myself  
feminist, activist, because yes there is a very important place and a  
need for these identities.  
When it becomes all consuming, then I think we’ve lost the plot.  
These identities is crucial;  
I cannot live as if I am not a black woman,  
and the atrocities that happens to black bodies,  
I cannot live as if that is not the reality.  
I’ve come to learn and understand that if only I try to define myself  
according to this frame I’ll be in trouble.<sup>37</sup>

We see here that Petersen holds together the particularity of physical bodies without confusing them with personhood. She acknowledges the significance of her black, female body within the contemporary South African context without reducing herself to these features. Her identity isn’t in her blackness, and yet her blackness is inextricable from her lived experience. This “frame” affects her relationships within community, though not in a deterministic manner. Attention to particularity and social context allows her to have compassion in the midst of confronting domestic violence.

Petersen explains the relationship between religion and sexuality as profoundly influencing the nature of our intimacy with one another.

Religion is an important place of power, authority, and privilege  
in terms of sex and sexuality.  
What do we do about it?  
What is politics around our bodies and sex?

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<sup>36</sup> Elizabeth Petersen, interviewed by Michelle Wolff, September 2, 2016.

<sup>37</sup> Elizabeth Petersen, interviewed by Michelle Wolff, September 2, 2016.



It's an area if uncovered and discussed  
– anxiety, fears, and insecurity –  
we will see much less abuse, violation, all of that.  
In many ways we may really be able to learn something from the  
LGBTI sector around sexuality and bodies.  
Women, black folk, [inaudible] we oppress and want them to  
be silent.  
Teaching us about sex, and sexuality, and bodies releases us into  
our potential.  
We have a responsibility to recreate our world institutions  
– the courage to create support –  
or we comply within systems and institutions!  
We have a sacred responsibility  
to transform and recreate institutions so that people can be free.<sup>38</sup>

The transformation of structural injustice, Petersen suggests, entails learning about sexuality and bodies from LGBTIQ people. Instead of competing for limited resources, women and people of color might partner with LGBTIQ South Africans and resist contributing to oppression and harm. Exploring the role of religion in exacerbating and mitigating violence and homicide is part of the Christian calling to find freedom from sinful powers and principalities.

For Petersen, human relationships are inseparable from environmentalism, social justice, and religion. She looks to scripture, asserting that, “The bible is clear that the earth will be in turmoil when there are atrocities where humanity has experienced, the earth can no longer absorb the horror and pain and suffering that has been going on for centuries.”<sup>39</sup> In so doing, Petersen links the trauma of colonized and pillaged lands with the exploitation of people. She asks rhetorically, “How do you colonize people’s land, how do you steal people’s land and possession and expect that it will go well with you? It cannot go well with you.”<sup>40</sup> Here Petersen illuminates the ways in which colonization is bad for the colonizer; it is not

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<sup>38</sup> Elizabeth Petersen, interviewed by Michelle Wolff, September 2, 2016.

<sup>39</sup> Elizabeth Petersen, interviewed by Michelle Wolff, September 2, 2016.

<sup>40</sup> Elizabeth Petersen, interviewed by Michelle Wolff, September 2, 2016.

merely harmful and destructive to the colonized, because colonization introduces harm and sin in our relationships with one another and our environment.

Petersen tells a story about a bishop working on climate change with the E.U. who doesn't address its ties to colonization. In the next breath, she shares a story about being "horrified" when the wife of a close religious leader friend of hers came in for counseling.<sup>41</sup> Her friend was intermittently imprisoned for having battered his wife over the course of twenty years. She tells me that he recently expressed his sorrow:

"You know I really wanted to be a family man.  
I wanted to be a family man!"<sup>42</sup>

Why the disjuncture between his desire and his actions? Petersen understands the problem to be his living into the roles that church and society prescribe. Resistance entails accounting for the relationship between bodies, histories, and God. Didier Fassin argues that more than competing narratives there are, "that of the victors, linear, coherent, completely bent toward its end, and that of the vanquished, fragmentary, uneven, full of trial and error, despair, and expectation."<sup>43</sup> He explains the relationship between bodies and history:

...inscribed within our bodies and makes us think and act as we do. South African's prereflexive view of the social world as run through by a color line, the interactions between men and women in matters of love or sex, the attitudes of employers to employees on the farms or in the mines, the norms of conduct people impose on themselves and their children, in sum what it called racial, gender, class, and generational relations—precisely all those relations through which HIV risk and prevention pass—are caught up in and shaped by particular experience of time.... Inequality, violence, and mobility are the most salient elements of that history. And here what best enables us to read the complex inscription of the past in the present are life stories, the biographies of people who in most cases lived through the different period of apartheid, from its establishment through its decline, and the successive phases of the return of democracy, from

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<sup>41</sup> It was not clear if she was referring to the same person.

<sup>42</sup> Elizabeth Petersen, interviewed by Michelle Wolff, September 2, 2016.

<sup>43</sup> Didier Fassin, *When Bodies Remember: Experiences and Politics of AIDS in South Africa*, trans. Amy Jacobs and Gabrielle Varro (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 168.

transition to disillusionment, each experiencing concrete and specific configurations of these realities.<sup>44</sup>

Petersen is one such individual. She describes the information contained within her body as having been shaped by her family, community, and faith. Rather than limiting oneself to ontological determinism, Petersen speaks about the body as a frame that holds these resources. She reasserts that her friend and his wife are both temples of the Holy Spirit and advocates for reading scriptures and looking to Christ for a way out of these scripts. Christ draws us into a different “space,” Petersen explains, of freedom for all people and from oppression – as oppressor and oppressed. Having been created as different expressions of God, she goes on, we can enter into spaces for sharing our insights – the knowledge contained within our bodily experiences.

Though Petersen’s account of these two religious leaders might appear unrelated, she links them because they share a theme of mistreating God’s creation and dwelling places. To do harm to another person or the earth is to violate sacred bodies. Her logic unveils the pervasive effects of domestic violence; it is not a private, home matter. The beating of women is linked to the commodification of resources because the same narrative of masculine dominance drives both. She reorients the “white man’s burden” in light of Christ:

There is a particular burden on men,  
white men,  
and white people in particular  
who have been privileged over centuries, and they used scriptures.  
There is a burden on them to wake up  
because I think that the world as we know it is going to come to an end.  
So the hope is that those who have always been privileged by these systems  
of oppression that they begin to do their own internal work of  
repentance.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Fassin, *When Bodies Remember*, xix.

<sup>45</sup> Elizabeth Petersen, interviewed by Michelle Wolff, September 2, 2016.

Of course, whiteness and masculinity are not ontologies; they are modes that any one of us can inhabit. When Petersen calls white men to repentance, she calls us all to repentance, but especially Christians who use scripture to authorize oppression. In fact, Petersen understands both the problem and solution to lie within scripture precisely because it is so powerful:

The only people that [Christ] got angry and in their face were the Sadducees and Pharisees, the people in the day who had power, who know the scriptures, you know exactly how to use it,  
but you have literally sent people to hell because you have chosen to use the knowledge and the scriptures selectively.  
Religion, legislation,  
plays a crucial role because the world is in the state it is because of oppressive systems where we have captured God,  
the creator, and said it was ordained by God.  
When we captured the land and did colonialism we used scripture.  
Whether it was some of us.  
We know the liberating power of scripture.  
Because of the liberating power of scripture  
that is why we don't want to bring scripture in  
because if we start to follow the liberating narrative in scripture  
we will have a completely different world  
and create a completely different reality.<sup>46</sup>

Petersen bemoans the reduction of all religion to fundamentalism, which wedges apart religion and politics. She sees profound resources within religion for liberation and abundant life, and calls people of faith to the “sacred responsibility” of initiating change. In other words, Christians are called to costly discipleship in which life together advances the liberation of all people. Redressing the horrors of colonization – in individuals, communities, states, and ecosystems – is the work of Christians.

Petersen continually points to scripture as the resource for political change, and her understanding of the “Word” proves compatible Luther’s capacious notion. A reformer, Luther emphasized the Word in scripture. The Word takes flesh in Christ, and his presence

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<sup>46</sup> Elizabeth Petersen, interviewed by Michelle Wolff, September 2, 2016.

is made pervasive in preaching. Preaching, the words of humans that point to the Gospel – the content of which is Christ – has divine power and the “real presence” of Christ.<sup>47</sup> Luther writes: “For the preaching of the gospel is nothing else than Christ coming to us, or we being brought to him.”<sup>48</sup> Christians participate in bringing Christ to one another through the Word. Provocatively, Petersen asserts that the marginalization and disenfranchisement of any community member limits hermeneutics. Churches fail to recognize all people as God’s creation, with insights into scripture from particular bodies, to their own detriment. Scripture and the church are mutual resources for liberation:

If you are a woman, a person of faith, a Christian, the Bible is there for you to go and discover all of the incredible things:

how you have been living under oppression,  
because scripture has been used selectively.

There are so many other liberating scriptures and teachings right there...

The LGBT folk have some other crucial insights that we will not get for as long as we keep on them on the side.

We put these labels, and decided that God doesn’t speak to them or through them, transgendered people, because that’s your body.

That’s you!

You didn’t create yourself. God created that body. God created people.

Isn’t there something that we ought to learn?

Isn’t there something unique that is probably located in the Bible, but we haven’t gotten there because we’re preserving this one narrative that is heterosexual [and] patriarchal.

In South Africa, this generation of young people have no time for crap, have no time for even those who have been leading the liberation movements in the past to come and manage them. They are angry. They are done.<sup>49</sup>

Again, Petersen underscores the limitation of progressive politics that ignore religion. True liberation is found in Christ, through the preaching of the Word. We must look to one another for insight and revelation. Our spoken words bring Christ to one another. We invite

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<sup>47</sup> “For at its briefest, the gospel is a discourse about Christ, that he is the Son of God and became man for us, that he died and was raised, that he has been established as a Lord over all things” E. Theodore Bachmann and Helmut T. Lehmann, eds., “A Brief Instruction on What to Look for and Expect in the Gospels,” *LW* 35 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1960), 118.

<sup>48</sup> Bachmann and Lehmann, “A Brief Instruction on What to Look for and Expect in the Gospels,” 121.

<sup>49</sup> Elizabeth Petersen, interviewed by Michelle Wolff, September 2, 2016.

Christ to stand between us as contagion; he is the Word found in scripture, the incarnation, and the body we call the church.

### ***6.3 Activists and Clergy Embracing Christ as Contagion***

Petersen is not alone in her efforts. Activists and clergy are making efforts to transgress the boundaries that partition LGBTIQ people from citizenship and salvation. These include the simplest of acts, such as initiating conversations about sexuality, to providing the Eucharist for trans women. Alan Storey and Sharon Cox are two examples of proclaiming the answer to “who/se am I?” Before sharing their insights, I look to Tian Johnson’s perspective to understand the immense task they undertake and to give reason for my method.

Johnson, a “coloured” “trans” consultant to LGBTIQ activists and religious leaders for over 15 years explains that undoing years of patriarchy can’t be accomplished overnight, over weeks, or even a few years. Like Petersen, Johnson begins with humanization:

Helping my brother understand, first of all  
this is who I am as a human being.  
It’s less about what I wear, who I am sleeping with,  
who I am sexually attracted to.  
In a twisted way, there are more commonalities in impoverished  
communities. The emphasis is less about who is gender-fluid or who  
is trans; it’s really about:  
we both don’t have electricity,  
we’re both starving, really bad things.  
It’s an opportunity to realize the commonalities in our humanity  
rather than – penis, vagina, gay, straight.  
Let’s not exacerbate the shit.  
Our real enemy is perhaps the principalities.<sup>50</sup>

Exhausted by reporting to stakeholders on measurable outcomes, Johnson sought funding to guide religious leaders from a variety of faiths in exploring their bodies as sexual. Before speaking about God, sacred texts, or doctrinal commitments, Johnson stresses the sexual

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<sup>50</sup> Tian Johnson, interviewed by Michelle Wolff, August 2016.

politics of bodies. “We asked whose first sexual experience was consensual,” Johnson describes, “and *nobody* raised their hand. Before we got into the politics of sexual pleasure we had to account for the violence of sex.”<sup>51</sup> As with this project, Johnson finds that we put the cart before the horse when we start with articulating sexual ethics. Instead, we must begin with our bodies and the trauma we’ve suffered. The particularity of our bodily and social contexts has left many of us physically and spiritually violated. We must begin with this trauma, but initiating the conversation is itself difficult.

South African Methodist minister Alan Storey takes responsibility for the church’s role in suffocating faithful discourse about sexuality. He initiates frank and respectful conversations. Sexual orientation and consent are issues all people need to explore – gay and straight, married and single, young and old – precisely because of the church’s culpability in misdirecting these conversations. Christians wrongly read the bible in religious terms, Alan explains, to the extent that they miss the economic and political features. Doing so enables the reader to police one others’ sexuality rather than redress their own exploitative economic practices. These distractions prevent Christians from engaging their faith and community on a more profound level, according to Alan. His hope is to celebrate pleasure, consent, respect, beauty, *touch*, and gentleness with his congregation. But he explains the near impossibility of consent within our present context:

One of the reasons some people don’t feel entitled to say no [to sex] is because we don’t even feel entitled to have the conversation.

We’re not having the conversation.

How do you say no to something that you’re not even allowed to speak about?

And the church has overwhelmingly contributed to the silencing of conversation.

Therefore we’re part of the problem.

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<sup>51</sup> Tian Johnson, interviewed by Michelle Wolff, August 2016.

[Christians] want to tell people they're not even allowed to have a discussion, but we need to give people a vocabulary.<sup>52</sup>

In order to overcome the prohibition on open discourse, Alan hosts workshops at his church in which participants develop conversation skills for the heated topic of sexuality. These, and also pre-marital counseling sessions, entail forthright questions. Ultimately Alan guides participants in identifying and accepting their “sexual temperament.” Sexual temperament, he explains, refers to someone’s libido, and accepting it has to do with how one negotiates differing temperaments with sexual partners.<sup>53</sup> A rhetorician, Alan often role plays dialogues to make his theological points. He offers hypothetical scripts that get at the assumptions underlying coercive and abusive sex. Here are two examples:

Can we have that conversation?

So I know that I'm relationship with someone whose sexual temperament is far more extroverted; they like sex once a day or twice a day, I'm once a week, and then there is a negotiation that takes place.

To have conversations [like]:

I don't want your penis inside me today, thank you very much.

I just *don't*.

To be able to say that without your entire sense of self being rejected.

Part of my patriarchal upbringing is you reject my penis, you're rejecting me.

I need to kind of put all that together.

Well then what can I do?

I'm actually turned on; I want to [have sex].

Well then masturbate in front me. I will talk to you, whatever.

Seriously.

But I actually don't want you inside of me for that moment.

Once a week is fine.

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<sup>52</sup> Alan Storey, interviewed by Michelle Wolff, August 30, 2016. Of course, Michel Foucault argues that the Victorians spoke incessantly about the unspeakable. The difference that Alan Storey introduces is sex-positive theology and hermeneutics.

<sup>53</sup> “Do you know you need sex twice a day, do you know your libido only wants to have sex once a month. It's not about right or wrong, it's about who I am and how do I manage that in relation to other people. Those are the conversations we need to have with other people. But we don't. You want to have the right to say no to another person, but we can't even have a conversation between two people who say they love and respect each other. We still don't even know how that conversation works.” Alan Storey, interviewed by Michelle Wolff, August 30, 2016.



Can we even have those conversations?

...A simple question for a man in a relationship:  
are you ever intimate where you don't cum?  
Maybe we should talk about that for a moment.  
Do you ever have intercourse where you know you won't have an  
orgasm, but she wants to have intercourse and so you can just do it  
anyway?  
Guess what? It doesn't have to end in your climax!  
You just put that there on the table for having a conversation.  
But the sense that having intercourse and not having a climax,  
not cumming, not having a feeling,  
where does that conversation come from? It's unbelievable.<sup>54</sup>

Alan is a well-respected clergy person who speaks candidly about Christian sexuality. He has no qualms with critiquing the role of the church in perpetuating and abetting harmful sex. Alternatively he proposes an “amber robot.” In South Africa, a traffic light is called a robot and the color between red and green is called amber. (In other countries it is referred to as yellow or orange.) Alan explains how Christians attempt to simplify sexual ethics with a simple red or green light; only married heterosexual couples get the green light to have sex. About this framework he declares, “That is bizarre, completely and utterly bizarre and I will not be any part of that thing. That is fear based, control based, domination based. I do not find that in the scriptures at all.”<sup>55</sup> Alternatively, Alan stresses the centrality of consent by explaining that the light always begins red, is often amber, and sometimes green. What he means by this is that no one should assume that they have the right to another person's body for sex. There is always a negotiation, even, or perhaps especially, with married couples. Alan understands consensual sex to be genuine intimacy:

When you only have red and green options,  
it comes from a fear that we can't teach one another  
that you can be intimate with one another,  
you can touch one another,  
mutual pleasure,

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<sup>54</sup> Alan Storey, interviewed by Michelle Wolff, August 30, 2016.

<sup>55</sup> Alan Storey, interviewed by Michelle Wolff, August 30, 2016.

masturbation, you name it,  
and you can experience the entirety with orgasm and everything  
without having intercourse.

In fact, it takes more work, more insight, more communication.

We don't go down that route.  
That kind of conversation, there's a deep spirituality around that...

Consent has to be shared and requested *every* single time.  
That is a far more healthy way going forward.

The stuff about no pre-marital sex,  
I don't believe it at all,  
or sex outside of marriage, no.

They are fake categories that prevent us from being honest  
and engaging at a much more profound level.

The rules have not made us more faithful.<sup>56</sup>

Alan views same-sex relationships as a gift to the church because they illuminate Christians' inability to have helpful conversations about sexuality. He's dismayed that the Christian community would make LGBTIQ people feel psychically and spiritually frightened. By initiating open and respectful conversation, Alan sets out to model a skill for the ongoing navigation of sexual intimacy for all people.

When Sharon Cox began working at Triangle Project 18 years ago, she explains, it was white, male, and HIV focused. People phoning into the helpline were often religious and trying to reconcile their Christian faith with their sexuality. Cox is a member of the Metropolitan Community Church, where she offers pastoral care. She founded the Micah Project, which is a Christian ministry aimed at advocating for the LGBTI community. Cox is passionate about interfaith work with LGBTI populations and active in the Global Interfaith Network. In addition to providing health services at Triangle Project, Cox specializes in spiritual support. At workshops Cox, like Petersen, relies on human contact – contagion – to cut through bigotry:

I place myself in the room as a lesbian,  
human being and say:

here I am.

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<sup>56</sup> Alan Storey, interviewed by Michelle Wolff, August 30, 2016.

I am lesbian. I am human.  
And I take nothing away from you being human,  
by me being in the world  
– being human, being a lesbian, a woman, as a person of faith –  
I take nothing away from who you are  
as a straight man, bisexual woman, whatever.<sup>57</sup>

Petersen, Cox, and Storey do not operate in isolation or competition with one another. Cox is quick to praise Storey for advocating for Ecclesia de Lang:

Alan Storey, if you want to see the most progressive, dynamic example of someone who is as close to Jesus, there's your man. He is more radical than any LGBT pastor I know. That man. Right there. Alan Storey...

Three days after David Olyne was murdered, Alan had a banner outside of his church covering the building. It doesn't matter what the Methodist Church does, they throw Ecclesia out, and he shows up in court with his priest collar on.<sup>58</sup>

Storey, de Lang, Petersen and others are part of Inclusive and Affirming Ministries (IAM). IAM advocates for LGBTIQ human rights by fostering inclusive and affirming faith communities. It offers resources and workshops for those interested in advancing this mission. Board members and staff vary in their denominations and roles. Bulelwa Panda, for instance, is the manager of the iThemba Lam (“My Hope”) safe house in the township Gugulethu. Panda’s previous service in her church was discontinued upon the revelation of her same-sex attraction. At the safe house she offers shelter, food, and resources to LTBTIQ community members. This entails referring people to Triangle Project and Gender Dynamix. During my interviews I would ask activists if they had heard of IAM and connected with anyone there. Some in Cape Town, like Cox, had partnered with IAM, but many, especially in Johannesburg, had not. IAM offers free workshops and materials, which activists would benefit from utilizing.

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<sup>57</sup> Sharon Cox, interviewed by Michelle Wolff, August 30, 2016.

<sup>58</sup> Sharon Cox, interviewed by Michelle Wolff, August 30, 2016.

Cox is one such activist who embraces religion and religious people in her advocacy. She travels to the more rural communities dotted along the west coast of South Africa to support LGBTI Christians. These, she explains, are the most religious, conservative, intolerant, and racist locations. It is there that Cox invites Christ to be contagion:

I have this group up the west coast, and all of the group are  
transgender women in this one particular area.  
They're hard to hide, they stand out like sore thumbs.

One or two of them have jobs.

They all share, they are like family with each other.  
Their survival is beyond phenomenal.

And they *love* church.

They *love* church.

The church in that area is just used to them now.

They will sometimes get a homophobic service and they  
sometimes won't.

They persist in going.

They go together so they are hard to throw out.

When I'm up there, we'll get together and we'll have church.

Oh my gosh, there's nothing better!

Because they can sing!

They don't speak my language, and I can speak Afrikaans poorly, but  
by God can they *sing*!

They *sing*!

Do you know they aren't allowed to take communion in their  
church?

This is true of most the groups that I work with.

They've *never* taken communion in their church

because they're not allowed to because of their orientation.

I have got a portable communion bag.

I've got a nice little tablecloth, I've got my cup, and a plate,

and my wafers. I buy some grape juice on the way

and it will be in my car and we will have communion.

Everybody will pose for a photo because that is just what they like to  
do behind the communion table.

We will have communion.

*Always* there will be somebody who has taken communion  
for the first time.

They could be in their 20s or 30s, having gone to church since they  
were young, but will have taken communion for the first time  
because they have been excluded from a table who some  
denomination has claimed to be theirs.

They have excluded somebody from it because  
they happen to be transgender, or gay, or lesbian, or not to their  
liking for whatever damn reason.

Now *those* are *my* people.  
You will know about how to come back from those six “clobber”  
texts,  
and you will know how to stage a walk-out of your own  
in that church, and you will know how to  
organize a meeting in your own community  
with like-minded people  
that will *not* be lesbian or gay, bisexual, or transsexual.  
They might be from a women’s organization,  
they might work with abandoned children,  
but they will be some kind of human rights heart and you will know  
how to connect with them.  
You will know how to organize with them in your church,  
to stage a walk-out or meet with your minister.  
But before you do that, you will share with them how to work with  
those six “clobber” texts and work with that minister.  
If you can’t get through his head, then maybe you never will.  
But you *will* sit in his church  
if you like to be there on a Sunday for the singing.<sup>59</sup>

Cox personally goes to places and spaces where others won’t and she brings Christ’s body and blood with her. She does not promote homogenous groups, but rather empowers groups and individuals to collaborate. Cox reports hearing pastors and churches in urban and rural churches say: “You are evil and you are going to hell.” She interrupts them to announce who/se you are is God’s. In the face of multifaceted proclamations of death and damnation by scripture and community, Cox and others point to Christ and the Bible to announce the good news.

#### **6.4 Conclusion**

In prison, Dietrich stepped into his theology of the Word as person, which meant forfeiting any investment in himself as a messianic figure. As a criminal, he found Christ as his limit. In his final months, Dietrich expressed his faith in God over and against himself and his nation. He went out with a whimper rather than a triumphant declaration of costly grace. Yet he describes this experience as freedom. There is freedom in forfeiting the scripts

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<sup>59</sup> Sharon Cox, interviewed by Michelle Wolff, August 30, 2016.

that society and the church push upon us. When we turn from asking “how,” Dietrich found, to asking “who” – who is Christ and who am I in Christ – we enter into “worldly holiness” and costly discipleship.

Dietrich and Petersen not only demonstrate different subject positions as disciples seeking community; the two share a need for the decolonization of intimacy. Both European white men and women of color in the global South need Christ. We need Christ’s body to open up a new temporality and spatiality that accounts for the sins of the past without reducing us to them. In Christ we are freed from sin and death, to be for God and others. It is unjust to demand that colonized people be for others without redressing histories of oppression and exploitation. Christ does not call us to forget. Christ calls us to repent.

Indigenous Studies scholar Leanne Betasamosake Simpson uses poetry and narratives to express the indelible effects of colonization upon intimacy.<sup>60</sup> The horrors of intrusion and exploitation run through environments and bodies. To pathologize and condemn expressions of this pain is a habit of colonizers. Simpson, like Frantz Fanon, uncovers the depth and breadth of colonization in the psyche.<sup>61</sup> Violence is one expression of this trauma. The weight of our shared histories and sins against one another is crushing. We sense that there is no way out of our complex desires and pleasures entangled with pain and violence. It is overwhelming because it is a work that no human or individual can accomplish, even for oneself.

Scripture and theology point to Christ as contagion. Christ uniquely offers his body as a site for acknowledging all suffering and pain. Christ offers the wound in his side for us to touch. He knows the texture of our intricate lives. Our patterns of longing for intimacy

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<sup>60</sup> Leanne Simpson, *Islands of Decolonial Love* (Winnipeg: ARP Books, 2015).

<sup>61</sup> See Frantz Fanon’s *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans Charles Lam Markmann (New York, Grove Press, 1967). In his later years, Fanon turned from psychoanalysis to activism in *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington (New York: Grove, 1963).

are haunted by returns to fear and harm; but Christ introduces a way out of that repetition. He does not deny our trauma, for he too has suffered emotional and physical torture. His physical body shares in our embodied experience. The Good News that he offers is that he can come between us and mediate our relationships as a contagion. Christ enables us to “together-touch” God and each other. With him and in him we are free from sin and death to be for God and others. It is a freedom unlike the hollow neo-liberal individualism that modernity and progressive politics propose. The freedom of a Christian does not extol the slave for submitting to her master as unto the Lord. Neither does it endow the master with the wisdom to adjudicate the will of God. All people are called to turn to Christ daily. In this precarity we find freedom from oppressive scripts and for decolonial intimacy.

Who/se we are is adopted co-heirs. Being such means that we have no claim on our humanity, as appeals to the *imago dei* suggest. We receive the fullness of our humanity through Christ. This is an ongoing reception. That we are adopted suggests that God does not ascribe to heterosexual coupling and reproduction as the structure for kinship. Grafting us in, Christ restructures kinship and inheritance. We will be like the angels, i.e. not married. In baptism there is no longer male and female. The “other” by which we are distinguished is God, and yet we share in Christ’s riches without merit.

## 7. Conclusion

### *7.1 Introduction*

When Christianity is imagined to “cure” sexuality a pattern emerges: religious communities push out those members who are perceived to threaten the health of the social body. Driven by fear of contagion, and in the name of sexual propriety, people of faith commit some of the most egregious hate crimes against LGBTIQ people. Funeka Soldaat, Sally Gross, Ecclesia de Lange, and many others embody the lethal and spiritual stakes when Christian communities strive after holiness. It is an apartheid theology that multiplies sin. The pursuit of righteousness distorts into defrocking religious leaders, splitting churches, condemning church members, and fueling violence against LGBTIQ people. How is it that our best efforts to practice Christianity prove to be pernicious?

In this project I have argued that despite the church’s culpability in authorizing the mistreatment of LGBTIQ people, progressive policy alone falls short of redressing these offenses. This is not to say that such laws are negligible because activism and advocacy make effective intercessions daily. There is potential for Christian communities to find the basis for confessing our sins within our doctrines, scriptures, and pews. In addition, it is my assertion that in returning to our theology we find a different picture of intimacy that is Christocentric. It is in this sense that what I have laid out is a theological project rather than cultural studies, social history, or critical theory.

The three sites of sexual regulation considered here – hate crimes, aversion therapy, and marriage – exhibit distorted Christian theologies of the body and soteriology. Each presupposes that the LGBTIQ body requires discipline to be made holy and acceptable. Moreover, interventions derive not from God but from abuse, medicine, and institutions.



While the flawed logic of these attempts to impart salvation and citizenship to LGBTIQ Christians might appear overt in South Africa, they persist today in a variety of contexts. The way forward cannot simply be a turn away from religion and towards secular policy. It is from within Christian theology and churches that our notions of the body and sexuality need to be reformed.

The first three chapters narrate how religious communities in South Africa and within stories of scripture misunderstand their calling. “Curatively” raping Soldaat, surgically disambigating Gross, even marrying de Lange, does not shore up Christian piety. Attempts to fortify the boundary between sacred and secular, sickness and health, Christian and queer, become exercises in human depravity. They are entirely self-interested. Where is Christ in the midst of such atrocity? The Gospels tell us that Christ continually redirected the spiritual and political leaders of his day to God. He did not shudder to have his feet caressed by a sex-worker, and sought intimacy with a promiscuous woman.<sup>1</sup> Likewise, Christ communed with the most exploitative politicians and business people. He did not sequester the victims or perpetrators of evil. In Christ, God took on human flesh and literally *touched* us. Christ reached out to and touched the bodies most shamed due to their association with sin, such as the man born blind. As contagion initiating “together-touching,” Christ mediates our relationships so that we can cope with the trauma we suffer in intimate relationships.

Religious leaders condemned his gestures. They accused Christ of breaking the Sabbath and blaspheming. God’s creatures judged the incarnate God wrongly. Pharisees and Sadducees lambasted Christ with sacred texts – the word of God – because their concern was for self. Self-preservation obstructed the fulfillment of their calling. Christ attempts to set us free but we prefer regulation. We would rather police our sexuality than depend upon

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<sup>1</sup> See Matthew 26:6-13; Mark 14:3-9; Luke 7:36-50; John 12:1-8.

his righteousness for salvation. We feel safer adhering to the law than seeking intimacy with others. This is what distinguishes freedom in Christ from neo-liberalism. It is not the freedom of autonomous individuals to serve the market. Here I am disagreeing with Jakobsen that the origins of the European subject and Protestant individualism can be traced to Martin Luther.<sup>2</sup> Luther's theology advocates for radical intimacy in which the Christian devotes her life to joyfully loving others instead of worrying about the reward of paradise or punishment of damnation.<sup>3</sup> The loss of his insights among Protestants motivates this project as distinct from both Catholic theology and secular ethics. What I have laid out is a distinctly Protestant theology for decolonizing intimacy. Despite contributing to harming LGBTIQ people, Christian theology has within it Christ's call to discipleship and intimate life together.

What Christ reveals is not that religious or political leaders are most worthy of praise. God's people are continually humbled by the faithfulness of outsiders and sinners because God extols their eager reliance. Therefore, a Christological theology of intimacy need not alienate or condemn those outside the church. On the contrary, what we find in scripture are accounts of marginalized misfits receiving God's blessing. Which is to say that holy sexuality is not about aligning opposite sex organs for the utilitarian purpose of reproduction. Rather, the holiest sexuality is that mediated by Christ as contagion. And much to our shame, people outside of the church might practice that better.

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<sup>2</sup> Janet R. Jakobsen, "Sex + Freedom = Regulation: Why?" *Social Text* 23.3-4 (2005): 285-308.

<sup>3</sup> In his "Treatise on Good Works," Martin Luther writes: "He who calls on Christ in faith, however, possesses his name, and the Holy Spirit most certainly comes to him. When the Spirit comes, however, look, he makes a pure, free, cheerful, glad and loving heart, a heart which is simply gratuitously righteous, seeking no reward, fearing no punishment. Such a heart is holy for the sake of holiness and righteousness alone and does everything with joy." *LW* American Edition, vol. 44, *The Christian in Society I*, ed. James Atkinson and Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), 241-242.

## 7.2 Particularity

My attention to the township setting in South Africa is particular, though perhaps more relatable to the majority of people globally than the pseudo-universal, “unmarked” life together Bonhoeffer experienced. The strains of timid neighbors, an inept police force, injurious and inequitable trials, followed with disconsolation, are not unique to this place. It is the rare occasion in which justice abounds and communities enjoy intimacy free of harm. Fassin describes this common struggle: “What I have described here of inequality in the face of death, which is first and foremost inequality in life, and of sexual violence, which is also social violence, exemplifies the inequality and violence that affects bodies and afflicts the weak everywhere in the world.”<sup>4</sup> Visions of an ideal community, such as Bonhoeffer’s, is only a utopia available to a narrow demographic of people. His vision for life together is so embedded within masculinity, heterosexuality, homosociality, and whiteness – though unwittingly – that it disallows the full recognition and participation of most Christians. Thus, what has been imagined to be universal and ideal is not so, even for those whom it has been designed to serve. The very procedures of collecting together people of faith belie our shared need for Christ as mediator, center, and periphery. Casting any one out of community is to inhabit an apartheid theology rather than one in which Christ acts as contagion.

Petersen articulates a notion of particularity that neither effaces nor universalizes the significance of embodied life. She doesn’t claim to speak for all women. Petersen recently initiated a “sacred conversation” with white women in South Africa to discuss their experiences of abuse. Unlike her work in the townships with poor black women, this project was questioned. What she found, however, was diversity among white women’s experiences of negotiating intimacy:

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<sup>4</sup> Didier Fassin, *When Bodies Remember: Experiences and Politics of AIDS in South Africa*, trans. Amy Jacobs and Gabrielle Varro (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 274.

In South Africa you have the Afrikaner white woman, and her experience.

You have the English white woman, and her experience.  
You have the German white woman, and her experience.

You have the Jewish white woman, and her experience, etc. ...  
There is something crucial that is missing here when you look at apartheid:

where was women in all of this?

This is part of things that came out.  
Afrikaner women started to talk about the role that they were forced in, in a way.

They had to serve their husband's every need,  
because when he goes out of the house he has to maintain a bold and deepen apartheid, right?

The amount and kinds of atrocities that she had to experience, we will never know if we don't create the safe space.

You have to ask yourself:

how do you live in that context, how do you negotiate safety?

What then becomes the part of you will be the most important part that you will keep safe in this intimate relationship where you are being violated – whether it's spiritually, intellectually, physically?

It would be interesting to have that kind of conversation with women:

what do they negotiate, how do they negotiate their safety,  
what is the primary part of them that they will say:  
that part is fine.

I've heard women say when they are raped consistently by their husbands they check out, disassociate.

For women of faith, living with their abusers in the church there must be something extraordinary about the theological sense making about somebody.<sup>5</sup>

Petersen's exploration into the various dimensions of white womanhood during apartheid reveals a complex negotiation. The role that marital rape played in fortifying apartheid, especially when cast as holy Christian submission, illuminates the dimensionality of intimate life. Our sexuality is tied to our faith and state in oppressive forms, though not to the extent that we consider ourselves inculpable victims.<sup>6</sup> On the contrary, insights such as this grant us the opportunity to confess our sins against one another as deeply embedded within reenacting oppression over and against others – as womanists and black feminists have so

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<sup>5</sup> Elizabeth Petersen, interviewed by Michelle Wolff, September 2, 2016.

<sup>6</sup> I say "ourselves" as a white, English South African person designated female at birth.

clearly demonstrated. White women participated in shoring up apartheid logics and technologies *as* they were raped and abused by their husbands. The two are inseparable. Experiencing harm through the lens of divine sanction inures the subject to dole out and receive it in kind. Sexual trauma propels and maintains docile bodies that serve the webs of power.

Despite the magnitude of entanglement, we are not helpless. Sexual and homicidal violence seek to quiet and destroy insurrection, but Christ makes a way out. His body opens a space for us to claim an identity as adopted co-heirs. Moreover, it is his marked body and ours that frees us. Petersen provocatively explains, “You just tell a perpetrator: stop what you’re doing. Do you understand that this person had been groomed throughout his life? What is the replacement here?”<sup>7</sup> Apartheid theology is enticing. When we pressure the abused person to simply leave their abuser we reduce that person to one moment in time. Petersen broadens our scope: “What did she learn in Sunday school, what did she learn in her youth, what was the messages she received throughout [her life]. By the time she lands in an abusive relationship, it’s not just the action. When you tell somebody to get out of the relationship, do you understand what you are asking?”<sup>8</sup> Likewise, colonization strips Christ of his particularity – his Jewishness, Middle Eastern context, and humanity. Petersen looks to culture as a frame that seeks to capture humanity, but that can be utilized instead as a source of knowledge about God:

I’m not sure we focus enough on the maleness of Jesus,  
because we sit with a different narrative altogether if we focus on the  
maleness.

He was born into his context.

He was part of a family, a particular culture.

In the life and nature of the interactions Jesus had with people you  
see how he navigated his own culture, humanly speaking,

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<sup>7</sup> Elizabeth Petersen, interviewed by Michelle Wolff, September 2, 2016.

<sup>8</sup> Elizabeth Petersen, interviewed by Michelle Wolff, September 2, 2016.

the fact that he was a Jew.  
He was born into this particular family.  
Culture is the frame in which we are captured.  
It is important and significant,  
because there is knowledge that this frame carries  
that is totally different from the knowledge your frame carries.  
We are divine. How do you live out your divinity through the frame  
that you are in?  
Of course there would be certain insights that I have about women  
generally because I am captured in a woman's body.  
At the same time, each woman is different and unique.  
When I think that I can speak for all women decisively  
I miss the mark because I'm bound to not capture fully some or  
many women.<sup>9</sup>

Theologian J. Kameron Carter argues that it is precisely modernity's effacement of Christ's Jewishness that mobilizes a sophisticated racism under the auspices of universality. The unmarking of Christ's body reconstitutes him, and in turn Christianity, into the authorization of exploitation and colonialism.<sup>10</sup> The effects are dire. Petersen ties this to Christ's maleness. Theologians who explore questioning the assumption of his maleness presume alternatives to be liberating. Scholars, such as Tonstad, though, recognize the insidious quality that fluidity belies.<sup>11</sup> Petersen's reverence for marked bodies as contexts through which God reveals God-self avoids essentializing people. Because Christianity has been "captured" by the West, Petersen goes on to explain, people die in the pursuit of sameness: "My hair is its texture, I am black - I'm not white. People die before they even begin to live because of these heresies. The church would look very different when we focus on how Jesus lived as man."<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Elizabeth Petersen, interviewed by Michelle Wolff, September 2, 2016.

<sup>10</sup> J. Kameron Carter, *Race: A Theological Account* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

<sup>11</sup> Linn Tonstad, *God and Difference: The Trinity, Sexuality, and the Transformation of Finitude* (New York: Routledge, 2016).

<sup>12</sup> Elizabeth Petersen, interviewed by Michelle Wolff, September 2, 2016.

### ***7.3 Christ as Contagion***

Although a potentially disquieting alternative, Christ as contagion challenges the Christian and honors the non-Christian. It challenges the Christian to confess and repent of distorting the biblical texts and for segregating people. We in the church have mistakenly attempted to adjudicate who is righteous, forgetting that only Christ can do so. Worst of all, we have turned people away from Christ. Our primary mission is to point each other to Christ daily – not to impose surgery on the flesh, rely on sacraments or institutions, and certainly not to harm one another in the name of God. It is not always a malicious transgression. We sin against our neighbor in our very best efforts to love them. That is what makes the harm unwieldy. In the name of holiness and righteousness we sin against one another, which is why we all need Christ.

Our need for Christ is not to be confused with our desire for guiding principles. When we attempt to reduce Christ to a moral exemplar, we miss Immanuel – God with us. God incarnate stands before us and we needle him with scripture. We combat the Word with the word. We disbelieve in the name of righteousness. Our best efforts to be faithful too often result in turning from Christ. Our response to the living God is to ridicule and execute Christ. We do it because what we are called to do is far more precarious and difficult than adhering to an ideology. God calls us to God-self, daily. Clinging to an opposite sex partner through marriage and reproduction does not guarantee salvation or citizenship. We do not acquire belonging through conforming to these tropes. What we find is that marriage is fragile. Citizenship is slippery. And only God judges rightly. While terrifying, continually looking to Christ is the Christian life.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer makes this plain: “Here it is no longer possible to fit the Word made flesh into the logos classification system. Here all that remains is the question: Who are you?” *DBWE*, vol. 12, *Berlin: 1932-1933*,

When Christ stands between me and myself, I receive my true self and only God can deliver that to us. We are incapable of knowing or loving ourselves without Christ, but Christ as contagion reveals our identity to be one in relationship to God and others as adopted co-heirs. With him we are free from our self-interest to truly love joyfully. As mediator Christ disallows that we possess or exploit one another, for we are God's adopted children. Our identity is not in our notions of gender, race, class or sexuality. Relating to one another through Christ enables a decolonized intimacy because it accounts for the horror while also expressing joy. As contagion Christ confronts our fears of contamination and death. He reminds us that we are mortal creatures and infects us with the gift of our humanity.<sup>14</sup> We receive from him our bodies as sacred vessels fully integrated with our souls.

Christ *as* contagion enables decolonial intimacy. Instead of standing between an LGBTIQ person and the church, we are called to invite Christ to stand between us. Positioned here, he does not offer a partition between holy and impure. Nor does he promise safety or security. As mediator Christ frees us to be for one another that we might love God and our neighbors as ourselves. It is *metanoia*. We are turned away from our self-interest and toward Christ so as to be for others. Impulses to exclude or harm those we pathologize are incompatible with this theology, because, as we learn from reformer Martin Luther, our salvation is in Christ's righteousness. Sanctification takes place during our daily turning from sin and death, towards God in order to be free to love others.

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"Lectures on Christology (Student Notes)," ed. Larry R. Rasmussen, trans. Isabel Best, David Higgines and Douglass W. Scott (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009), 302.

<sup>14</sup> "There are only two possibilities when a human being confronts Jesus: the human being must either die or kill Jesus." Bonhoeffer, *DBWE* vol. 12, "Lectures on Christology," 2/12 p. 307.



## 7.4 *The Task of Theology*

This project disquiets our relationship to theologians and the task of theology because it refuses to posit a sound, secure alternative tradition within the discipline. What I mean to suggest is that my turning to Christ, scripture, and baptism in order to decolonize theologies of sexuality is an invitation into a precarious discipleship and risky community. Instead of pointing to one particular voice or principle as the answer to how we best live into our calling, I have shared my experience of hearing various subjects, sometimes as cacophony and at other times in harmony, account for the complexity of intimate life together. In so doing, my intention is to account for the shortcomings of some theological heroes, not to disparage their contributions but to return to them continually for insight. As mortal creatures, we seek the comfort of an authoritarian figure or ideology to which we can cling. What is difficult about what I am suggesting is that Christian theology necessarily denies us that anchor.

Sarojini Nadar, mentioned in the introduction, displaces scholars such as myself.<sup>15</sup> Instead of wrangling assertions such as Nadar's, what if the theologian accepts her limitations? To do so is not to disengage from dialogue or the task of theology; on the contrary, it is to more thoroughly investigate them. How does my project necessitate the displacement of myself as I do theology? Contrary to disciplinary convention, I find myself compelled to embrace displacement if I am to look to Christ as contagion, mediator, my center and the boundary of my existence. To do so is to recognize my privilege and the injustice of having been mistreated, while also delighting in Nadar's argument that perhaps she and Petersen better account for discipleship, scripture reading, and decolonial intimacy.

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<sup>15</sup> Tonstad might agree, "In theological terms, this is a fantasy of the church as a site of access to the truth of one's identity in its positive, achieved form in Christ, an identity that provides a stable site for action and recognition and can be decisively distinguished from other, non-Christian identities." Tonstad, *God and Difference*, 267.

This displacement of the theologian within the task of theology is perhaps what most thoroughly unnerves theologians and their followers. What is my place and how do I have authority if I do not perform theology in the traditional form? That anxiety is the challenge that Christ as contagion gives to us. Whatever “I” and “we” claim for ourselves should necessarily be reoriented by Christ – our center and periphery. Theologians especially need Christ.

Though Elizabeth Petersen enriches our notion of Bonhoeffer’s discipleship and community, she herself would recoil at anyone trusting in her to show us the way. Petersen believes that only Christ is the way, and thus continually turns to the living God and revelation in scripture and humanity. “At SAFFI,” she explains, “we’re not getting it right; we’re grappling with this.”<sup>16</sup> As demonstrated, Petersen’s humility is not characterized by apathy or indecision. On the contrary, Petersen forcefully articulates her position on sexuality. She readily describes stories from her personal experience as a social worker as informing her calling to effect change in South Africa. Petersen is committed to regular Bible study and community with Christians and non-Christians alike. She looks to God’s multiple forms of revelation in order to better love God and others. Consequently, Petersen acknowledges the fallibility of SAFFI without disengaging from the overwhelming task of mitigating violence. From this perspective, Petersen explains: “What we’re trying to do with SAFFI is to see what it is that we are going for. What do we understand is our call in regards to gender-based violence? It is to support people to get back to: who am I, whose am I, and what is my calling?”<sup>17</sup> The answer to these questions, I have argued, is that we are adopted co-heirs with Christ, who calls us to love and serve God and others freely – without concern for damnation or hope of reward. Petersen asserts, “The quest is do we find alignment; we

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<sup>16</sup> Elizabeth Petersen, interviewed by Michelle Wolff, September 2, 2016.

<sup>17</sup> Elizabeth Petersen, interviewed by Michelle Wolff, September 2, 2016.

negotiate how much we know about this faith and this understanding in relation to *lived* theology.”<sup>18</sup> Hers is not a turbid theology founded upon progressive ideals or lacking orthodox foundations. Petersen’s ministry offers us a glimpse into “a different space” that she calls the “narrow path.” Typical formulations of Christ being the narrow path to God function to collate and separate people groups. Petersen pursues something different altogether, because she understands oppression as enslaving the oppressor. Liberation, then, is from sin and death to be truly for God and others. It is a costly discipleship without confusing Christ for whiteness, masculinity, or heterosexuality.

### **7.5 Joy**

Working within community, whether it’s by sharing a project with another person, or with a larger group, we are able to experience joy in struggle. That joy needs to be documented. For if we only focus on the pain, the difficulties which are surely real in any process of transformation, we only show a partial picture.

- bell hooks<sup>19</sup>

How can one speak of joy in a time such as this? As discussed in the introduction, the theology presented in this project seeks continual discovery, which necessitates confronting horror without disallowing joy. Though the three sit uneasy together, they are bedfellows. Theorist Sara Ahmed exhorts readers to be feminist killjoys, but not in the sense that we reject joy; her argument is that we disturb the fantasy of happiness, which can itself be a joy.<sup>20</sup> She gives the example of the expectation that a bride’s wedding day will be the happiest day of her life, and asserts that failure to appear happy threatens the idea that social norms are goods. “To be oppressed requires that you show signs of happiness,” Ahmed

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<sup>18</sup> Elizabeth Petersen, interviewed by Michelle Wolff, September 2, 2016.

<sup>19</sup> bell hooks, “Love as the Practice of Freedom,” *Outlaw Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 289-298.

<sup>20</sup> “Becoming a feminist can be an alienation from happiness (though not just that, not only that: of the joy of being able to leave the place you were given!),” Sarah Ahmed, “Feminist Killjoys (And Other Willful Subjects),” *The Scholar and Feminist Online* 8.3 (2010), *Polyphonic Feminisms: Acting in Concert*, The Barnard Center for Research on Women.

explains.<sup>21</sup> She offers tropes of the happy housewife, the happy slave, and heterosexual domestic bliss to demonstrate this dynamic. Ahmed then references Alice Walker's definition of womanist as being willful; it is a collective struggle for existence.<sup>22</sup> To be womanist in this way is a political position that undermines the happy heterosexual family. The willfulness to expose injustice is to embrace the risk being confused with killing joy. Joan Morgan argues that black feminist theory has investigated the violence and pain of sexuality to the neglect of exploring pleasure and a healthy erotic.<sup>23</sup> "Pleasure politics," Morgan asserts, are an under-theorized resistance strategy of black women that redefines dominant narratives about health.<sup>24</sup> Although theorists and theologians commenting on sexuality focus their scholarship on desire, pleasure, *jouissance*, love, utopia, or *eros*, here I turn to joy as a capacious Christian notion.<sup>25</sup>

One can have joy despite one's circumstances when Christ introduces a new temporality. Joy in the midst of horror speaks to the present in relation to both the future and the past.<sup>26</sup> My understanding of joy contrasts with theologians like Stanley J. Grenz, who cast our identity in Christ in the future – a proleptic participation in the divine life – because this joy claims eternal truths fully and at all times.<sup>27</sup> Christ's transfiguration revealed his eternal divinity as the second person of the trinity; it speaks to his participation in creation and also redemption. These are not activities bound by time or place. Likewise, being co-

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<sup>21</sup> Ahmed, "Feminist Killjoys."

<sup>22</sup> See Alice Walker's *In Search of Our Mother's Gardens: Womanist Prose* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1983).

<sup>23</sup> Joan Morgan, "Why We Get Off: Moving towards a black feminist politics of pleasure," *The Black Scholar* 45.4 (2015): 36.

<sup>24</sup> Morgan, "Why We Get Off."

<sup>25</sup> See the work of Graham Ward, Sebastian Moore, Virginia Burrus, Mark Jordan, Michel Foucault, José Esteban Muñoz, Gerarg Loughlin, Gilles Deleuze, Jean-Luc Nancy, and others.

<sup>26</sup> Andrea Smith identifies the gendered component to an emphasizing futurity: "politics of futurity sacrifices the lives of women and those who are not gender normative for the indefinitely postponed postcolonial future." Smith, "Queer Theory and Native Studies: The Heteronormativity of Settler Colonialism," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, Duke University Press 16:1-2 (2010): 47.

<sup>27</sup> See Stanley J. Grenz, *The Social and the Relational Self: Trinitarian Theology of the Imago Dei* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001).

heirs with Christ is not a past or future event; it is an eternal truth in Christ, who opens up our relationship to time and space. Joy expresses delight in the eternal truth of this good news in concrete bodies and places, not merely as a future hope for something new; joy announces that one has already been made new despite the forces of evil raging against it. Joy is persistent. It says “no” to sin and death, which desire to consume us. It proclaims our freedom from these to be for others. Joy is the assertion of the Gospel – the good news – precisely when and where we are faced with suffering and mortality. Joy springs up and it cannot be quieted. It takes a plentitude of forms – song, dance, and romance – but it must not be confused with pleasure or happiness. The latter are goods in their own rights, and have been explored in relation to sexuality. This joy makes a unique assertion: you say I am an abomination, but God says I am Christ’s co-heir. Even when the world categorizes and typologizes us, we have the means for resistance. It is joy.

Salamon offers an example. In researching the case of Lawrence King she describes Latisha’s enduring joy. A classmate executed 15 year-old Latisha (formerly known as Larry) in February 2008. Despite having been kicked out of her adoptive parents home, harassed and bullied by classmates, and disciplined by school employees, Latisha did not succumb to gender or sexual regulation. Instead of pathologizing Latisha, Salamon considers the teen’s shamelessness as a therapeutic path to joy.<sup>28</sup> Latisha’s audacity to express joy speaks to its ruddiness. Joy is linked to gender and sexuality, but not confined to either. Black lesbian feminist Audre Lorde writes of the breadth that joy offers:

Another important way in which the erotic connection functions is the open and fearless underlining of my capacity for joy. In the way my body stretches to music and opens into response, hearkening to its deepest rhythms, so every level upon which I sense also opens to the erotically satisfying experience, whether it is dancing, building a

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<sup>28</sup> Gayle Salamon, “Humiliation and Transgender Regulation: Commentary on Paper by Ken Corbett,” *Psychoanalytic Dialogues* 19 (2009): 383-384.

bookcase, writing a poem, examining an idea. / This is one reason why the erotic is so feared, and so often relegated to the bedroom alone, when it is recognized at all. For once we begin to feel deeply all the aspects of our lives, we begin to demand from ourselves and from our lives' pursuits that they feel in accordance with that joy which we ourselves know to be capable of.<sup>29</sup>

Sexual joy need not be reduced to coitus. When we broaden our understanding of joy, we find it to range from radical political resistance to simple, quiet delight. Joy engages the spirit and body, social and particular, silence and uproar. As with sexuality, joy reaches into our most vulnerable and intrepid spaces.

Queer, black feminist writer, performer, and community organizer, Maneo Refiloe Mohale compiled a photo essay of black feminist joy.<sup>30</sup> During production, Mohale listened to black feminists describe how “joy was never meant for us.” Who are the people denied joy in society? Some of the contributors to Mohale’s essay describe their joy as an act of resistance. They find joy in fellowship with activists. Joy is a political practice. According to Jennifer Nash, black feminist queer theorists must suspend their attachment to the present, the hope that activism will redress wrongs, and instead stress futurity.<sup>31</sup> How might Christ’s body offer a new temporality and spatiality for joy?

Theologian Nancy Eisland writes a liberation theology of disability that speaks to this possibility. In concord with the argument put forward here, Eisland traces the association of disability with sin in order to critique the notion of virtuous suffering and segregationist charity.<sup>32</sup> Eisland argues that the body is the center of political struggle.<sup>33</sup> She writes, “The

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<sup>29</sup> Audre Lorde, *Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power*, Out & Out Pamphlet (Freedom, CA: Crossing Press), 1978.

<sup>30</sup> Maneo Mohale, “Black Feminist Joy: A Photo Essay,” December 7, 2016 <https://bitchmedia.org/article/black-feminist-joy-photo-essay> (accessed December 8, 2016).

<sup>31</sup> Jennifer C. Nash, “Practicing Love: Black Feminism, Love-Politics, and Post-Intersectionality,” *Meridians* 2.2: 16.

<sup>32</sup> Nancy L. Eisland argues, “These three themes—sin and disability conflation, virtuous suffering, and segregationist charity—illustrate the theological obstacles encountered by people with disabilities who seek

perception that disability is a private physical and emotional tragedy to be managed by psychological adjustment, rather than a stigmatized social condition to be redressed through attitudinal changes and social commitment to equality of opportunity for people with disabilities is persistent.”<sup>34</sup> With this in mind, she suggests that the Christian practice laying-of-hands has the potential to draw disabled people out of isolation and into the body of Christ. The body of Christ here references both the person Jesus Christ and Christians in community. Through *touch* communities can enter into a temporality and spatiality that reorients our relationships with one another. Eisland argues that, “holding our bodies together denotes attention to our sexuality as a resource for solidarity with one another and with ourselves.”<sup>35</sup> Her turn to sexuality and touch is amplified by Eisland’s assertion that the many people with disabilities experience the Eucharist as a ritual of exclusion and degradation.<sup>36</sup> Theologians often turn to the Eucharist as a sacrament that resolves social injustice, but Eisland’s point is well taken in light of Cox’s interview. The practice of literally laying hands on another, she attests, reveals the sacred worth of the body.

Anthropologist Didier Fassin describes the curious way in which illness can serve as a social resource in South Africa. Of one interview he said, “She had announced her [immanent] death; now she is talking about her rage to live. And it is religion that gives her hope to which she clings.”<sup>37</sup> The inevitability of our mortality, which contagion brings to the fore, need not entail embracing death. Christian theology can inspire a joyful life in the midst of illness. Without glorifying the ravishes of HIV/AIDS, Fassin finds that, “The revelation

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inclusion and justice within the Christian community.” *The Disabled God: Toward a Liberatory Theology of Disability* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), 74.

<sup>33</sup> Eisland, *The Disabled God*, 49.

<sup>34</sup> Eisland, *The Disabled God*, 66.

<sup>35</sup> Eisland, *The Disabled God*, 96.

<sup>36</sup> Eisland, *The Disabled God*, 113.

<sup>37</sup> Fassin, *When Bodies Remember*, 229.

of the illness is their road to Damascus.”<sup>38</sup> By this he means to underscore the relationship between religion and political change. With Christ, South Africans living with HIV/AIDS are able to assert, “I’m the child of God,” as well as, “their attachment to life, not only because it is good, but also because it is dignified to live it.”<sup>39</sup> A dignified, joyous life is possible in the midst of abject illness.

A decolonial theology of sexuality utilizes joy within the historical context of sexual exploitation as a political tool for change. When the church and state sentences someone to death, baptism frees them to joyfully resist that teleology. The audacity to express joy, that shamelessness, runs counter to what oppression seeks to invoke. Christ’s body draws us into a new temporality and spatiality in which the past, present, and future reveal our eternal identity as co-heirs to be eternally true. Christ makes a way for joyful sexuality as a political expression of resistance. But also, as contagion, Christ offers us an infectious joy that can fall upon us. We can give in to the momentum and chaos that joy ignites. It is a joy that might draw us close to those we most despise. As theologian Willie Jennings asserts, too often we enter into joy in segregated spaces.<sup>40</sup> The joy that I am proposing here is precisely counter to apartheid theology; it is the indecency of joy in the midst of communities where perpetrator and victim live on the same street and attend the same church, where LGBTIQ people are not sequestered in “gay” churches, where the poor are not disenfranchised, and the sick are those who Christ came for. It is joy in contagion – “together-touching.” Over and against our fears and condemnations, we are free to inhabit joyous discipleship and intimate life together.

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<sup>38</sup> Fassin, *When Bodies Remember*, 257.

<sup>39</sup> Fassin, *When Bodies Remember*, 257 and 264.

<sup>40</sup> “Theology of Joy: Willie James Jennings with Miroslav Volf,” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1fKD4Msh3rE> (accessed December 14, 2016).



We can ride out joy like a fever that must work through our body.<sup>41</sup> God's joy is the reason for our existence. Joy brought us into being. Christ constitutes joy in the midst of the very people who cause our despair. It can surprise us. We can give in to the richness of joy. Instead of seeking joy in enclosed spaces, we can find joy within our difficult relationships with Christ. Joy can be found in hospital rooms when a loved one passes – an incredible joy connected to sorrow. In scripture we find joy expressed in music, shouts, feasts, and celebrations. It abounds in times of plenty and suffering. Joy comes to us, from us, among us; according to scripture, it withers and abounds. It is costly discipleship and decolonial intimate life together.

I suspect that for many of us around sexuality,  
for many of us the story of sexuality and the journey around  
intimacy, we will find our places of deepest regret also deepest joy,  
deepest sense of failure, shame, guilt, hurt, betrayal...

I remember a woman, she said:

“I'm 29 years old, I'm straight, and I just love sex. I just *love* sex.”

And that's it.

For a black woman of 29 years old in a church group to be able to  
just say that statement, that's power.

There was no judgment on that.

There's no conclusion.

Nothing happened afterwards.

Just for someone to be able to voice [it]; isn't that beautiful?<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Conversation with Willie Jennings December 16, 2016 about my dissertation.

<sup>42</sup> Alan Storey, interviewed by Michelle Wolff, August 30, 2016.

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## **Biography**

Michelle Wolff was born in Johannesburg, South Africa during apartheid. Her family emigrated to the United States of America in 1989. At Westmont College in California she double majored in Religious Studies and Art History (B.A.). Upon graduation she was presented with the Senior Art Award and Kenneth Monroe Award for superior academic achievement and excelling in leadership. She moved to North Carolina, where she earned her M.T.S. and certificate in gender, theology, and ministry at Duke Divinity School. Next, she attended Duke University for her Ph.D. in Christian theology and ethics, and minored in church history and literature. She completed both the certificate in teaching religion and certificate in feminist studies.

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