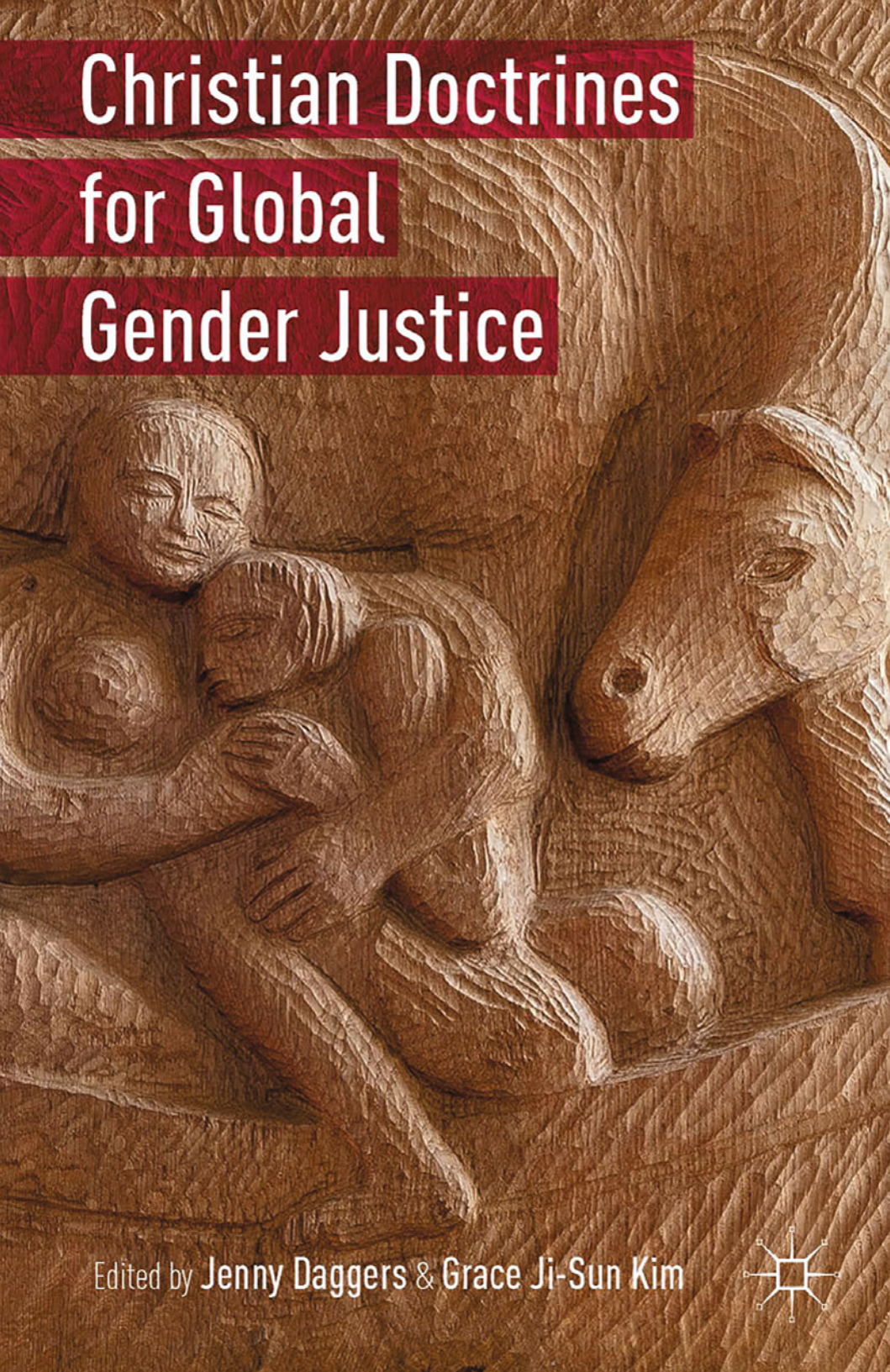
Christian Doctrines for Global Gender Justice



Edited by Jenny Daggers & Grace Ji-Sun Kim

Praise for *Christian Doctrines for Global Gender Justice*

"This creative book pushes the boundaries of theological tradition by placing gender justice at the center of doctrinal reconstruction. The authors write from many different racial, ethnic, and cultural perspectives. *Christian Doctrines for Global Gender Justice* is an invaluable resource for both beginners and more advanced learners in theology."

—Kwok Pui-lan, Episcopal Divinity School, USA, and author of *Postcolonial Imagination and Feminist Theology*

"Daggers and Kim continue to enrich our theological thinking by drawing together the creativity of women theologians from around the globe. They expand our sense of Christian doctrine by placing the deep symbols of Christian faith—God, Christ, the Spirit, crucifixion, hope, and anthropology—in dialogue with the wisdom and suffering of women. This dialogue does not produce a uniform dogma but rather a refreshing sense of the power of these symbols to continually bring good news to the world."

—Wendy Farley, Emory University, USA

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CHRISTIAN DOCTRINES FOR GLOBAL GENDER JUSTICE

Softcover reprint of the hardcover 1st edition 2015 978-1-137-47545-9

First published in 2015 by PALGRAVE MACMILLAN® in the United States—a division of St. Martin's Press LLC, 175 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10010.

Where this book is distributed in the UK, Europe and the rest of the world, this is by Palgrave Macmillan, a division of Macmillan Publishers Limited, registered in England, company number 785998, of Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire RG21 6XS.

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ISBN 978-1-349-50179-3 ISBN 978-1-137-46222-0 (eBook)
DOI 10.1057/9781137462220

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Christian doctrines for global gender justice / edited by Jenny Daggers and Grace Ji-Sun Kim.
pages cm
Includes bibliographical references and index.
1. Women in Christianity. 2. Sex role—Religious aspects—Christianity. 3. Women's rights—Religious aspects—Christianity. 4. Theology. 5. Women's rights. I. Daggers, Jenny, 1950– II. Kim, Grace Ji-Sun, 1969–

BV639.W7C447 2015
230.082—dc23 2014050008

A catalogue record of the book is available from the British Library.

Design by Scribe Inc.

First edition: June 2015

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Jenny Daggers dedicates this book to women ordained in the Church of England or undergoing ordination training, especially Hayley Matthews, our priest at Holy Innocents, Fallowfield, Manchester, and Caroline Hewitt, who is soon to be ordained.

Grace Ji-Sun Kim dedicates this book to the three generations of women in her life: her maternal and paternal grandmothers, who nurtured her as a child; her mother Han Wha Ja, who believed she could do anything in life; and her daughter Elisabeth, in whom we hold much hope for the next generation of women.

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Foreword

Mary McClintock Fulkerson
Professor of Theology, Duke University Divinity School

Doctrine has long been understood in the form of systematics, a way to define what are considered standard beliefs as orderly and coherent. Over the centuries, much of theology has portrayed doctrine as if it were acontextual—as if its authors had no social location. Some would conflate doctrine with dogma, or *the* truth. In contrast, liberation, black, feminist, womanist, *mujerista*, queer, and other ostensibly "marked" theologies foreground the contextual character of all theological work, exposing the marginalizing factors in doctrines and the worldviews that produced them as they reconstruct their liberative potential. Historically and even now, such markers as gender or race have been designated as secondary or "ethical" issues that are not part of the central normative work of Christian doctrine. As Loida I. Martell-Otero puts it in Chapter 2, they are treated as "peripheral 'add-ons'" to ostensibly "regular" theology—that is, theology that is primarily Western and Eurocentric. Daggers and Kim's book makes great progress in presenting so-called marked theology as regular and mainline, "basic" theology. This book creatively enhances the genre of Christian doctrine, displaying the role of gender justice as fundamentally formative for the meaning and relevance of Christian traditions, both to appropriate wisdoms of the past and also to do the crucial work of altering and expanding these wisdoms by taking seriously the unavoidable impact of gendered social structures on any kind of thinking and practice.

Creative expansions of the genre of doctrine as a system are designated here as *inward* and *outward movements*. Thus doctrine per se is a "subfield." This is not to reject its crucial work but to recognize the creativity required by new contexts in this ever more complex global world, a creativity that bursts outside of traditional constraints, a creativity that honors the radical immanence and ongoing lure of God. Different concerns are generated by one's social location. If one is in despair and at risk, the relevant God question is of where God is, not ontological exploration. The God in everyday spaces is what really matters—the God of justice who enhances oppressed women's dignity.

Feminist theologians rightly move beyond ostensibly classic interpretations of doctrine as they also find insightful and potentially rich connotations of many of its themes and symbols with discernment of contemporary wounds and the justice needed to address them. Theological anthropology, for example, is explored not as a separate doctrine but as an inevitably constant implication of any and all theological doctrines, reshaping them in significant ways. Creative reemploying of standard images of the female, such as motherhood, generates illuminative and profound insights from maternal experience. Importantly, this is not the imposition of a Western white maternal experience. It acknowledges differences across the globe even as significant commonalities are provocatively interpreted—provocative because they provide insights for all humanity, not just women. Submissive images of Mary are challenged, for example, and creatively reinterpreted, such that virginity is interpreted as autonomy and agency that is not dependent or defined in relation to a man or as indication of the uncleanness of female sexual bodies. Rather than passive, Mary the Mother of God is a divinized woman. Again, this is not ethics; it is fundamental to good doctrine.

Ecological justice is also endemic to thinking about the divine, about Christology, and about theological anthropology and convictions about creation. The need to acknowledge evil and attempts to correct the historical binary between humanity and nature generates crucial explorations: how to connect Christology to the ecological via wisdom Christology, a kind of cosmic Christology; how to employ the cross as a "green tree" to critique ecological harm; and how to expose images of the cross and nature that can function to stereotype the female as passive, even as the green tree offers alternative liberative images.

Part of the importance of expanding feminist theology is the crucial recognition that we must expand the complicated forms of "othering" that are recognized and addressed. Our imagination is broadened in many ways, from awareness of colonized groups and indigenous peoples' faith, as well as recognition that even "Euro-American" does not get adequately at the cultural identities of noncolonized groups. As the authors take feminist theology further via the importance of globalization, gender, class, culture, and race/ethnicity on the lives, *familias,* and ecology of the world, doctrines can no longer be confined to some classic list but must be innovatively reinterpreted and reordered through these contemporary wounds. Feminist or any marked theology, as the book demonstrates, is clearly for *everybody.*

Preface

What is doctrine? Theologians writing in the twenty-first century are privileged in our ability to approach this question in a new light. Theology today is illuminated by a rich vein of theological thinking that has arisen and continues to arise from "peripheral" contexts. This new vein immeasurably enriches the gifts bequeathed to the theological centers that vest their authority in their direct line of descent from the Catholic and Protestant traditions of European Christendom. The well-used categories of received doctrinal traditions take on a new vibrancy as they are turned toward speaking anew the work of the triune God: the creation and redemption of the world is differently known through the lives of its peripheral peoples. This collection develops a strand of feminist theology that ensures the new riches of peripheral vision inform and are informed by doctrine.

As the language of "center" and "periphery" suggests, power and privilege persists in the processes by which doctrine is defined and its legitimate regulative function is endorsed. The hegemony of the center is under challenge from the particular theologies gathered in the chapters of this book: as each author writes from her own local concerns, the notion that theology can be thought in any other way than locally appears increasingly untenable. Authors who identify as "women of color" develop themes that resonate strongly with one another and bring their particular insights from their enforced peripheral locations. There are overlapping areas of experience and theological insight that are unavailable directly to white feminist theologians. White feminist authors sit in a different location; they draw from their European heritage, including the privileges of whiteness, while simultaneously being "off center" in relation to their received traditions, on account of their gender.

This volume invites a plethora of different readings, as each reader mirrors the book's authors in bringing his or her own particular theological and contextual commitments to the task. Readers new to the evolving spectrum of women's theologies represented here—Latina/*mujerista*, *evangélica*, womanist, Asian American, black feminist, or white feminist—will learn much of each theology in its distinctiveness, as well as of the growing intercultural dialogue

within feminist theology; there is fresh insight also for readers who are already engaged in these distinct yet related theological communities. Chapters written by white feminist authors demonstrate a commitment to learn from women of color while also addressing their own local concerns.

The essays collected here insist that received traditions are converted so that the imperative of the struggle for justice is recognized; we go further in insisting that if this imperative is ignored, the gospel that doctrine seeks to interpret will be misunderstood. Our readers will test how far we have achieved what we set out to do.

One final point here is that the book invites a conversation with the custodians of authorized traditions on the nature of doctrine. For those accustomed to addressing Hegelian distortions of doctrine, a very different challenge emerges here, in the doctrinal imagining of women theologians who expect to encounter the biblical God of history in the everyday neediness of the world's poor women. Doctrine imagined from this starting point deserves to be taken seriously wherever systematic theology is thought.

A fuller discussion of the landscape of doctrinal imagining takes place in Chapter 1, which provides the context for constituent chapters to be introduced in greater depth. We welcome you as reader to engage this collection of women's imaginings with doctrine, which seek to usher in the coming reign.

Acknowledgments

Jenny Daggers and Grace Ji-Sun Kim

It takes a community to write a book, and this particular book is no exception. We want to acknowledge the community of women who came before us to make a space for feminist theologians to think, reflect, and live theologically. Prominent among these forerunners are Dolores Williams, Ivone Gebara, Mercy Amba Oduyoye, Marianne Katoppo, Letty Russell, Rosemary Radford Ruether, and Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza. We are grateful to these women who came before us and paved the way.

We are grateful to the women around us who are collaborating and partnering with us in this field of Christian doctrine. We thank Serene Jones for making the push to define a subfield of feminist theology that engages with received doctrines. This has renewed possibilities of engaging church doctrines for liberative work by feminist theologians.

We are thankful to the contributors of our first volume, *Reimagining with Christian Doctrines*, for their creative contribution to feminist reworking of Christian doctrines. Their thought-provoking writings have led to the possibility of putting this second volume together to address the void of certain doctrines not covered in the first volume. It was also needed so that we can build a larger number of global women's voices on reimagining and reenvisioning Christian doctrines.

We are thankful to each contributor of this volume who wrote from their unique cultural, denominational, and ethnic location. Their thought-provoking chapters will be appreciated by generations of feminist theologians to come. Each contributor was courageous and pushed the boundaries of church doctrine, which resulted in a delightful and insightful contribution to theological discourse. As editors, we appreciate the willingness of contributors to respond to our comments and suggestions and to offer their own feedback to us on our introduction to the book. Working collaboratively in this way has been an enriching experience.

We are deeply thankful to our editor, Burke Gerstenschlager, who welcomed our project and shepherded us through the book process, and to his successor,

Philip Getz, for seeing the project through. Without Burke's enthusiasm and vision for this book, we would not have been able to launch this book project. We are also grateful to Erica Buchmann, who, as editorial assistant at Palgrave, helped with the many ongoing details of the book; the smooth transition to support by her successor, Alexis Nelson, has also been much appreciated.

Our book is much enhanced by the cover image of Caroline Mackenzie's carving *The Good Samaritan*. This work conveys a sense of the love and justice of the coming reign embodied in an act of humanity; it depicts one of the themes that run through the book. We are grateful to Caroline for her permission to include her work in this way and to the photographer Martin Crimpin for his permission to use his photograph of Caroline's work.

We are thankful to our friends and family for their continuous support in our writing project. We know it is not always easy for us to be tied down to a computer when family gatherings or parties are happening. We are grateful for their understanding and their acceptance of the importance of our book.

Grace is grateful to Peter Phan for his continual support and encouragement. She appreciates the Visiting Researcher position at Georgetown University, which allowed her the time to work on this book. She thanks her research assistant Bruce Marold for his faithful work. Grace thanks her sister Karen and her family for their kind support in writing and editing this book. Karen took her on a trip to Bermuda to take a break from writing and the daily domestic task of being a mother. Grace thanks her husband, Perry, who has taken on more of the parenting role so that this book can be finished. Oftentimes, he kept track of the various driving schedules of taking the children to and from soccer, ballet, jazz, basketball, and other activities. Grace is also very grateful to her three children, Theodore, Elisabeth, and Joshua, who do not complain much when she is glued to the computer. Her family's understanding, support, and care have sustained her throughout the writing and editing of this book.

Jenny thanks her colleagues in the department of Theology, Philosophy, and Religious Studies at Liverpool Hope University for their passion for their own research projects and for the interest they show in imagining with Christian doctrines, as well as for their collegiality in creating a vibrant department for and with our students. She thanks her family for sustaining her and appreciates each one for the love of life they show in their different individual ways.

A Note on the Cover

The cover image is of a wood carving titled *The Good Samaritan* by the British artist Caroline Mackenzie. The work is located in St. Helen's Catholic Church, Caerphilly, Wales. Caroline has lived in India, and she reflects this experience in her work. See http://www.carolinemackenzie.co.uk. The photograph was taken by Martin Crimpin, whose work may be viewed at http://www.martincrampin.co.uk.

CHAPTER 1

Surveying the Landscape of Doctrinal Imagining

Jenny Daggers and Grace Ji-Sun Kim

Imagining in Theological and Political/Cultural Context

Christian doctrines and *global gender justice* rarely appear together in the same sentence. The inception of authorized Christian doctrine was hotly contested in the early centuries of Christianity, while the Reformation saw both Protestant reformulation as Lutheran and Calvinist doctrines and an elevation of Scripture over and above doctrine as a source of theology. With radical feminist, womanist, and postcolonial critique, received doctrinal traditions have been subject to a healthy hermeneutic of suspicion: the power relations inherent in the imposition of doctrines by authorized ecclesial authorities have come under scrutiny. As will become clear, the project taken forward in this volume is premised on the conviction that Christian doctrines and global gender justice can indeed appear in the same sentence; in stronger terms, Christian doctrines will necessarily be misunderstood if this connection is broken.

With regard to global gender justice, we write in troubling times. In Syria and Iraq, the hope so recently expressed in the upbeat metaphor of an Arab Spring is currently overshadowed by a grim reality of brutal violence toward civilians, targeting children and women as much as male fighters, while the longstanding Palestinian-Israeli conflict is concurrently inflamed. In Nigeria, young women have been abducted from their place of education to a form of sexual slavery. In these places beset by violence, it is awful to contemplate the day-to-day realities in the lives of children and women, as well as male civilians. In the regimes envisioned by those who fight, the prescribed subordinate position allocated to women is grim.

The social and economic destabilization caused by global climate disruption bears most heavily on the poorest peoples of the world, and particularly on the

poorest women—those who benefit least from the economic and technological practices that accelerate this disruption. In Asia, human trafficking of young poverty-stricken girls is increasing, particularly in Southeast Asia. Many young girls are sold by family members to traffickers who then take them to other countries to be sold into brothels, prostitution rings, or the garment industry or as domestic workers. The demand for young girls is created by structural issues of globalization, colonization, neocolonialism, and militarization.[1] The family members' pressure to sell their girls is in response to increasing poverty as they are driven away from their lands, and so they lack a source of income due to these global economic and structural forces. Many of these young girls will never make enough money either to send back to their families or to return home. This is a contravention of human rights and an inhumane act of violence committed against young girls; the numbers are on the rise. Trafficking is a form of modern-day slavery.

In the United Kingdom, recent revelations in Rotherham, South Yorkshire, about the systematic grooming of young white girls for sexual abuse—affecting an estimated 1,400 young women over a period of 16 years, with the complicity of police and social services[2]—show that the privileges of whiteness are inflected by class and gender. It has subsequently become clear that this is but one instance of a long-standing wider culture of institutional cover-up of child abuse, particularly of the most vulnerable children.[3] In the Rotherham case, the men who perpetrated the abuse were of Asian heritage, while the vulnerable young white British women they targeted were not socially privileged. In this case, the ethnic background of the perpetrators was an additional factor in the reluctance of the authorities to investigate, due to a fear of inflaming community relations; though the majority of girls affected were below the age of sexual consent, they were deemed to have "chosen" their abusers as partners. These women struggle with the legacy of their prolonged experiences of abuse, exacerbated by the effective sanctioning of systematic exploitation by the statutory authorities.

In Ukraine, violent destabilization of the new nation-state poised between Russia and Western Europe raises the specter of a renewed Cold War between East and West, focused on Eastern Europe. In the United States, recent unrest in the city of Ferguson following the shooting of an unarmed black teenager by a white policeman highlights the increasing militarization of the police force; the incident makes clear that the aims of the civil rights movement are far from being fully realized.

Added to these political destabilizations is the self-inflicted economic collapse of 2008, which began in the United States, with the consequent austerity policies in Western nations and their wider reverberations. The comfortable stability enjoyed by the privileged in the postcolonial and post–World War II

world now appears to be under serious threat, except for the superrich minority. For the poor of the world, unreported in the daily news media, routine austerity, insecurity, and violence continue to mark the pattern of daily life.

For those Latina/*mujerista*, *evangélica*, womanist, Asian American, white feminist, and other constructive women theologians who add their prayers for the world to the intercessions of their faith communities week by week, seeking to discern ways of just response, these global issues press on our creative imaginings as we grapple with our received doctrines. Shaped by our past traditions as we in turn imagine their current and future form, we glimpse a Christian gospel of love and justice that has always been among "us"—the current gatherings of Christians throughout the history of our faith—even while Western Christendom and other iterations of Christian faith have as often exacerbated the violence and injustice of the world. This band of constructive theologians keeps company with those who have caught a love of justice throughout Christian history and then used it as the key for understanding their faith. White feminist theology is both enriched and diminished by dialogue with theologies of women of color.[4] Further, constructive theologies including the imaginings of Latina/*mujerista, evangélica*, womanist, and Asian American women deserve attention from all theologians, men as well as women.

From Reimagining with Doctrines as "Subfield" to Inward and Outward Movements in Feminist Theology

The essays collected in this book comprise a sister volume to *Reimagining with Christian Doctrines*.[5] The rationale for this second collection is that there is scope for extending the doctrines engaged in *Reimagining*. Like theology itself, such a project can never be fully realized; there is always room for new imaginings. For readers who encounter this volume before reading *Reimagining*, it will be useful to reiterate a substantial point discussed in the introduction to this earlier volume. Our project began with Serene Jones's reference to a "subfield" of feminist theology that engages with received doctrines.[6] These sister volumes develop this subfield.

This way of describing feminist engagement with doctrine ensures that the broad field of feminist theology is respected. The core concern of feminist theology is the struggle for gender justice in the colonizing and heteropatriarchal Christian traditions of church and theology.[7] Feminist theologians in the current century concentrate on constructive work, as critique is already well articulated.[8] Whereas work in Jones's "subfield" reconstructs by engaging received doctrines, in the broad field of feminist theology, there is a strong impetus for creative reconstructions that are unbound by received doctrine.[9]

Once this point is made—that the subfield does not restrict the scope of the field—in light of essays in these sister volumes, it will be helpful to name in different terms the relation of this venture with the broad field of constructive feminist theology. Instead of "field" and "subfield," we can speak of outward and inward directions of feminist theology: on the one hand, an outward constructive impetus away from the core of regulatory orthodox doctrine in favor of its own unimpeded creative constructions; on the other, an inward trajectory in response to the "pull" exerted by doctrine, through insisting on the orthodoxy of creative imagining with doctrine. The heartbeat of feminist theology is this double outward and inward impetus in relation to received doctrinal traditions.

Contemporary Resonance of the Inward Movement of Feminist Imagining with Doctrine

Reviewing white feminist theology and other constructive theologies of women—such as those of Latina/*mujerista, evangélica*, womanist, and Asian American theologians—in 2015, it is pertinent to bring into view the changed landscape of Christian affiliation within contemporary world Christianity in contrast to the global context in which both "second-wave" and early postcolonial feminist theology arose.[10] Formative Christian influence had shaped those women who cared enough about Christianity to voice twentieth-century feminist critique of church and theology with a view to imagining feminist-compatible and postcolonial versions of Christianity. In our contemporary moment in the twenty-first century, "detraditionalization"[11] in the West and postcolonial critique in and from the continents of Asia, Africa, and Latin America is shrinking the orbit of formative Christian influence within long-established Western Christian denominations in all their diverse global forms. Thus, for different reasons in differing global contexts, the churches that have grappled with reconstructing their gender relations in response to feminist and other women's critique are simultaneously losing their social influence. As post-Christian feminist thealogian[12] Carol Christ has commented, this decline in liberal forms of Christianity means "the home for feminist reimagining is being emptied."[13]

The important point here is that while there was a sizeable constituency of women of Christian subjectivity who shaped the creative outward impetus of twentieth-century feminist theology, there are two constituencies among contemporary Christian women who might find more pertinent the inward impetus represented in this book and its sister volume. The first is the remnant of women and "women-oriented men"[14] within the long-established denominations who are either ordained or receptive to the ordination of women. A refreshed inward movement will be a valuable resource to Christian congregations that

are renewing their received denominational traditions, whether in the Western world or through indigenous leadership in the postcolonial churches. Critique of the colonial Christ opens a way to postcolonial imaginings with doctrine that are able to connect with these long-established traditions of converting Christianity from its colonizing and heteropatriarchal forms.

Ordained ministers in Protestant denominations and women involved in lay leadership are well represented among the authors who contribute to these volumes: as women are increasingly welcomed into diverse leadership and partnership roles within the churches, the time is ripe for renewal of the inward impetus of feminist theology. Protestant denominational affiliations of contributors to this book are themselves a testament to developments within reformed traditions of European heritage. Loida Martell-Otero is ordained within the American Baptist Churches, coeditor Grace Ji-Sun Kim is an ordained minister within the Presbyterian Church (USA),[15] and Linda E. Thomas is ordained within the United Methodist Church. There is also a strong strand of white Lutheran theological imagining in this collection. As a minister within the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Iceland who currently holds a post in the Norwegian Lutheran Church, Sigridur Gudmarsdottir writes from the national church of Iceland—though in a context of growing ecumenical and interreligious diversity. Amy Carr is a member of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America (ELCA), formed by an amalgamation of three major Lutheran denominations in the late 1980s. Hilda P. Koster is a member of the Protestantse Kerk Nederland, which unites the reformed churches: the Netherlands Reformed Church and the Lutheran Church of the Netherlands. Working in the United States, she is currently a member of the ELCA. Jenny Daggers is a lay member of the established (Anglican) Church of England, which has a parallel historical place in English national life.

These are exciting times for Christian theology as the balance tips away from the white Christian heritage of European Christendom toward the growing churches of the postcolonial world. While the Western denominational traditions that derive from European Christendom—including the Catholic Church—face detraditionalization, diasporic Christian churches in Western cities grow in size, in the United States alongside existing African American churches. After all, as James Cone once put it, Asian Americans, Latino/a Americans, and Native Americans are Third World peoples living in the First World.[16] At the same time, Christianity continues to expand in the continents of Africa and Asia—largely through indigenous missions—and the worldwide spread of independent evangelical and Pentecostal Christianity grows apace.[17]

Within this dynamic diversity, "old" traditions are renewed, and "new" traditions are created where—all too often—already-critiqued forms of gender

and colonial relations are reinscribed. The legacy of the colonizing theology of old traditions casts a long shadow. Colonizing theology may be perpetuated in renewal of the "old"; it is also reinscribed in creation of the "new," long after the colonizers have left, whenever colonizing behaviors derived from Western missionaries during the colonial era are perpetuated.

As a consequence, new ways of imagining with Christian doctrines are crucial for the well-being of women within emergent forms of the twenty-first-century global church. So the second potential constituency for an inward movement of feminist theology comes into view: women within the growing forms of independent and Pentecostal Christianity across the globe and "women-oriented men" who also seek to reform gender relations. While male leaders may seek to inoculate their congregations against feminist critique and vision, questions of gender relations will arise intrinsically so that feminist imaginings are likely to find a resonance.

In sum, at this stage in the development of world Christianity, a renewed inward impetus may be more in tune with our times than the confident, creative constructions of twentieth-century women theologians whose Christian—and post-Christian—subjectivity was forged *before* the impact of feminist and postcolonial critique on Christian forms of life. (As was already made clear, contemporary outward-facing feminist constructions are valuable in their own right, but their creativity is also vital for this inward movement.) In church traditions old and new, Christian theology grapples with the meaning and implications for humanity of the triune God incarnate in Jesus Christ, as witnessed by the biblical text and in the diversity of theological traditions.

The Renewal of Doctrinal Theology through "Feminist" and Postcolonial Imaginings

Theology takes a Latina/*mujerista*, *evangélica*, womanist, Asian American, or feminist[18] turn when the depth of misogyny embedded in received traditions and texts is fully recognized not only as gender injustice but also as a kind of false consciousness that obscures the gospel itself. Theology takes a postcolonial—or anticolonial—turn when colonizing logic embedded in received traditions and texts is similarly recognized not only as colonial injustice but also as a form of enduring false consciousness that obscures the gospel. And of course, some work is both feminist *and* postcolonial. Feminist imaginings are therefore necessarily *re*imaginings in that they correct the distortions of heteropatriarchal and colonizing received traditions. But to claim them as "imaginings" is to claim a substantial authority for these theological insights in their own right: they do more than correct errors, as they do what theology has always done—namely, bring

the best of human ingenuity to grapple with the raw material of Christianity in theologians' particular settings. If heteropatriarchal misogyny and the colonial mentality are forms of myopia, then feminist and postcolonial consciousness brings a fresh and penetrating vision capable of unlocking a potential that has been hitherto obstructed and obscured by heteropatriarchal and colonial power relations.

In a broader postcolonial perspective, the mark of European Reformation debates on the primacy of Scripture versus tradition is evident in the received traditions of the postcolonial mission churches. Thus the Vietnamese American theologian Peter Phan, from his Catholic perspective, appropriates patristic doctrine as an *Asian* creation and thus as a fit foundation for contemporary Asian theologies.[19] His strategy keeps an open way between white Catholic imaginings with doctrine and constructive work emerging from postcolonial contexts. Even where newly formed Christian churches are Scripture based, the doctrinal formulations that interpret scriptural references may be brought to bear; the theological history of European Reformation/modernity/postmodernity and American liberalism/fundamentalism/Pentecostalism exerts its continuing influence.

Regarding doctrinal traditions old and new, while the theological traditions of European Christendom, modernity, and postmodernity remain dominant in prestigious Western theological institutions, newer traditions work with their own versions of the raw material of doctrine as well as with the biblical text.[20] Postcolonial critique of received Eurocentric traditions—introduced via the Western missionary movement—opens the way for new constructive inculturations of Christianity that counter the enduring colonized legacy.

Introducing the Chapters of This Book as Intercultural Theology for the Churches

As befits a volume on Christian doctrines, chapters are arranged in a systematic sequence beginning with the doctrine of God in Chapter 2 and ending with theological anthropology in Chapter 10. Chapters 3 and 4 both grapple with ecological issues in relation to a theology of the cross and redemption, respectively. Chapters 5 to 7 imagine with the Holy Spirit, eschatological hope, and Mary. Chapters 8 and 9 consider the *imago Dei* and free will. However, the broader currents discussed in this introduction flow through all the book's pages, and we hope that readers will place chapters written from their very different contexts in dialogue with one another and with the reader's own context and theology.

Black and womanist theologies may be situated as a form of postcolonial critique.[21] The black theology and churches of the United States have their

own long traditions, rooted in slavery, where imposed Protestant Christianity was infused with African spiritual forms to create a form of resistance to white slave-owner religion. African Americans were also cocreators of American Pentecostalism and have developed this tradition.

In this collection, the womanist essay by Linda E. Thomas in Chapter 5 is a powerful statement honoring the theological creativity of enslaved women who drew on African spirituality to sustain them in their struggle, bringing into being new perceptions of the Holy Spirit at work in their world. The theme of theological creativity is further developed by black feminist scholar Elise M. Edwards in Chapter 10. Writing about the contemporary generation as an accomplished architect, Edwards develops theological anthropology with her theological aesthetics that is directly connected with the empowerment of women in the current generation of "Third World peoples in the First World": read in conjunction with Thomas's account, the continuing power of the heritage of enslaved women's creativity is thrown into relief.

When Loida I. Martell-Otero, in her Latina *evangélica* theology from a bicoastal US–Puerto Rican context, points out that African slaves were imported into Puerto Rico, her reader can detect a direct synergy between African American and Latina *evangélica* commitments. Her insight that in this context, "Protestantism did not so much convert as it was converted" might well hold true also for African American black theology. A common theme emerges of strong countertraditions to imposed forms of Christianity, whether the Protestant Christianity of the slavers and slave owners impressed on enslaved Afro-Americans or the Iberian Catholic Christianity enforced throughout Latin America and the Caribbean.

In Chapter 2, Martell-Otero offers a powerful rendition of the doctrine of God informed by the suffering caused by violent oppression of poor Latina women and their steadfast faith in God, who is present with them in the face of these brutalities. She contrasts the *kairotic* question, *where* is God, which is posed by the people of the peripheric spaces—including poor Latina *evangélicas*—with the ontological question, *what* is God, that is posed from the center. Analyzing the transmutation of Iberian Catholicism in its encounter with indigenous and African religion, Martell-Otero argues for the already-mentioned conversion of subsequent Protestantism that followed when it, in turn, encountered this mestizo Catholicism in Puerto Rico and throughout Latin America. The significant formative strength of indigenous roots, prior to the introduction of African traditions, is emphasized in her account both in the shaping of mestizo Catholicism and in subsequent Protestant "conversion."

Here God is *presente* and *presencia*—present and presence: Holy Other rather than the "wholly Other" of Barth and Otto. In Martell-Otero's Latina *evangélica*

perspective, the doctrine of the Trinity is an answer to the question of God's "whereness"; it is a language of familial intimacy, which collapses the inflated significance lent to God as Father in the doctrine of God from the center.

In Chapter 6, Grace Ji-Sun Kim offers a theology of hope from an Asian American perspective arising from the imposed "foreigner" status accorded to Asian Americans on the basis of their ethnicity regardless of the number of generations who have grown up in the United States. Her plea that "othering" be replaced with welcoming by the white American community is undergirded by her theological meditation on the doctrine of hope in the eschatological perspective of the coming Reign of God. Though Kim does not argue in these terms, her reflection can be read as a form of conversion of received theologies, such as Moltmann's theology of hope.

This feminist theological conversion is not only for the purpose of radicalizing women; it is not merely "written by feminist theologians from the academy to feminist theologians from the academy," as one reviewer rather disappointingly said of *Reimagining*.[22] Of course feminist theology *is* for feminist theologians—but the inward impetus toward received traditions should necessarily challenge the wider project of theology. To put it another way, the inward impetus of imagining with doctrine challenges the notion that discrete theological enterprises exist within a hierarchical power relation so that the dominant authorized traditions arising from the heritage of European Christendom—those at the "center"—need not engage other theologies.[23] The theologies of Thomas, Edwards, Martell-Otero, and Kim arise from their distinct contexts, but they are not for these contexts alone. Rather, each essay speaks back and is worthy of attention wherever theology is done.

What rationale could there possibly be for teaching systematic theology or doctrine by reference to (excellent) texts produced by theologians from the center alone?[24] What might be the impact of reading doctrine as it is imagined in these sister volumes in tandem with these centrally authorized teaching materials? I suggest this will be threefold: First, such reading will shrink to its natural size white theology of European heritage, as white theologians would be challenged to curb their Eurocentrism by recognizing the local limits of their theologies. Second, white theologians will thereby come to recognize the imperative to heed voices from the margins *as the only means of interrogating their whiteness and its unacknowledged will to power*. Third, male theologians would see their engagement with feminist imaginings of doctrine as the necessary means of recognizing and addressing perpetuated heteropatriarchal power relations within theology. If we are serious about doctrine, then as Martell-Otero points out, given our claim that there is no space where God is absent, "our dialogue about God, our *theo-logos*, cannot afford to silence the voices from the margins, the

voices of the least of these whom Scripture seems to indicate are the people of God's favor in human history." White feminist theologians might add that to do our received European traditions justice, restorative work is needed to address the gender injustice so deeply embedded in the denominational legacy of Christendom.[25]

This challenge is not addressed to the white male reader alone. Black theology chimes with postcolonial critique in its challenge to all white theologians: to recognize their complicity in forms of Christianity shaped within Christendom that sit all too comfortably with the brutalities of colonial domination and slavery. A serious commitment to gender justice demands that white feminist theologians interrogate their own complicities with these violent histories and contemporary brutalities.

Whereas for Latina/*mujerista*, womanist/black feminist, and Asian American contributors, postcolonialist perspectives are integrated with their own, for white feminist theologians, there is an imperative to triangulate their local white feminist concerns with postcolonial critique in their reimagining with doctrine. Many colonialists were white Europeans who perpetuated white Eurocentric theology and doctrine. In this manner, it has been historically understood that doctrine reinscribes the colonial Christ. As such, there is a postcolonial suspicion of doctrine as always preserving a colonial understanding of Christ, Christianity, and doctrine.

Triangulation is thus required of white feminist theologians and white feminist readers, who are challenged to broaden their view beyond shared local white concerns. The work of Latina *evangélica*, African American womanist, and Asian American feminist theologians appear side by side with white feminist theologies in this volume. White theologians in pursuit of their local white concerns face the challenge of engaging perspectives from the margins without repeating colonizing moves. Women of color can best adjudicate how far this has been achieved. Therefore, it is not possible to engage in theological imaginings of Christian doctrines without including diverse voices of women and importantly the voices of women of color. The problem of reinscribing the colonial Christ is clearly evident. The diversity adds much needed perspective on doctrine, which further deepens our understanding of God and God's world. In short, the alternative of engaging white voices alone is no longer acceptable.

Turning to the remaining, mainly white contributors to the book, Catholic theologians Gina Messina-Dysert and Elizabeth Gandolfo resonate with Peter Phan's strategy in appropriating rich doctrinal elements from their tradition and turning these to their own creative use. In Chapter 7, Messina-Dysert engages with seminal feminist theological work on Mary, Mother of God—notably that of Mary Daly and the constructive Latin American perspective of Ivone Gebara

and María Clara Bingemer—to make a fresh engagement with Mariological doctrine. Her purpose is to liberate Mary as a transgressive symbol that allows us to begin from the female body when considering the divine.

This attention to the female body is continued by Gandolfo in Chapter 8, who weaves together a diversity of maternal voices with insights from the Catholic mystical tradition in order to grapple with the vulnerability of the human condition from a theological perspective. The result is a theological anthropology in which she reflects anew on "the paradoxical unity of invulnerability and vulnerability" of human beings made in God's beloved image.

Though protected from the vulnerabilities and oppression faced by poor women of the Global South, it is noticeable that chapters by white Lutheran contributors strike a somber note, reflecting the widened reach of dark times, as reflected in the opening paragraphs of this chapter. While creative imaginings with doctrine are brought to bear on the darkness, there is a sense that this is our darkness as well as our eschatological hope. We embody and profit from the ecological evils of colonial and heteropatriarchal logics, even as we strive for a better way of human being.

White European American and European contributors articulate ecofeminisms that recognize the ineradicable closeness between human vulnerability to suffering and the plenitude of salvation. Thus, in Chapter 3, Sigridur Gudmarsdottir draws on Bonaventure and the Icelandic poet Pétursson to construct her theology of the "green cross"; this is a green cross of Holy Wisdom that is capable of balancing the red cross of suffering, with its trajectory toward necrophilia.

In Chapter 4, Hilda P. Koster offers an ecofeminist cosmic wisdom Christology that works in and through the vulnerabilities and chaos of life. As a white theologian, she learns from Gebara's ecofeminist passion informed by the strengths, vulnerabilities, and deprivations of the poorest Brazilian women, as well as from insights of white theologians Catherine Keller and Elizabeth Johnson. She moves ecofeminist theology on in her grappling with the realities of evolutionary struggle for life, while providing a clear Christological focus that is lacking in some feminist work. (Koster's theme of vulnerability as a focus for creative theological imagining is repeated in Gandolfo's theological meditation on the intertwining of human vulnerability to harm with the embodied image of Divine Eros.)

In Chapter 9, Amy Carr adds her innovative reflections to the long-standing theological debate on sin, free will, and grace and to the newer strand of writing on "trauma and grace,"[26] where the interweaving of suffering, vulnerability, and harm with the work of redemption is the core of her work. Her categories of receptive Mary, feminist Pelagia, and ecofeminist Stoic, as counter positions to the deceived Eve, are productive in allowing different feminist analyses and

strategies to be mapped: her ecofeminist Stoic reflects the somber tone that we find reflected in this volume. Her aim is not to categorize individual feminist theologians but to spot the shift from a North American feminist mood of Pelagian optimism to one of grappling with "the systemic violence of a still kyriarchical world," which brings ecofeminist stoicism to the fore. Thus, in resonance with the interweaving of harm and salvation already drawn out, Carr finds a possibility that "divine affliction can itself be a locus of divine grace." Her approach allows for "an elusive divine sovereignty over our individual lives and creation as a whole," which is a viable alternative to received notions of divine omnipotence.

It is our hope that new readers of feminist theology may find an inviting entry point in these sister volumes. Seminal work in feminist theology informs all chapters, so newcomers will learn of the twentieth-century heritage of feminist theology, even as they encounter the new theological insights reflected here.

It is our dream that the inward impetus toward received traditions will promote the good health of Christian theology by inspiring further theological contributions from the peripheric people so that these insights may move "from margin to center,"[27] never losing their borderland creativity but always disrupting the hegemony of heteropatriarchal Eurocentrism. The inward movement of feminist and postcolonial imagining with received doctrines thus confuses the homogenizing claims of the unifying and universalizing center: instead, as Wendy Farley has suggested,[28] doctrine is like jazz—to be constantly revisited and reworked by Christian theologians in our wildly diverse human contexts.

Notes

1. See Kwok Pui-lan, *Introducing Asian Feminist Theology* (New York: Continuum, 2000), 20ff. More than two decades earlier, the Indonesian theologian Marianne Katoppo had identified the exploitation of Asian women through sex tourism. See Marianne Katoppo, *Compassionate and Free: An Asian Women's Theology* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1979), extract reprinted in U. King, ed., *Feminist Theology from the Third World: A Reader* (London: SPCK, 1994), 114–18.
2. See Alexis Jay, OBE, "Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Exploitation in Rotherham 1997–2013," Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council, accessed September 21, 2014, http://www.rotherham.gov.uk/downloads/file/1407/independent_inquiry_cse_in_rotherham.
3. See, for example, "Why the Historic Child Abuse Enquiries Are in the News," *BBC News*, November 10, 2014, http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-28189858.
4. In the sense that decolonizing white minds requires shrinking white theology to its natural size—that is, the local concerns of white women theologians, disconnected from a perpetuated colonizing impetus.

5. Grace Ji-Sun Kim and Jenny Daggers, eds., *Reimagining with Christian Doctrines: Responding to Global Gender Injustices* (New York: Palgrave Pivot, 2014).
6. Serene Jones, "Feminist Theology and the Global Imagination," in *The Oxford Handbook of Feminist Theology*, ed. Mary Fulkerson and Sheila Briggs (Oxford: OUP, 2012), 30, cited in Kim and Daggers, 2.
7. We use the term *heteropatriarchal* to indicate that patriarchal order insists on normative heterosexual relations and the control of women's sexuality within this framework. Critical queer theology informed by queer theory points this out. See, for example, Marcella Althaus-Reid, *Queer God* (London: Taylor and Francis, 2003). The risk of recolonizing by white theology is ever present; white feminist theologians, too, need to actively make conscious their imperial attitudes and to meet the challenge of women of color who set this agenda. See, for example, Mukti Barton, "Wrestling with Imperial Patriarchy," *Feminist Theology* 21, no. 1 (2012): 7–25.
8. Of course, it is necessary to update feminist "critique" of Christianity to keep pace with dynamic developments in world Christianity. However, a firm groundwork has already been put in place by feminist theologians in the decades since the 1960s.
9. There is good reason for this approach, given that doctrines are laden with heteropatriarchal and colonial power relations and thus subject to a "hermeneutic of suspicion."
10. Here we use a term—*second-wave* feminism—that makes sense within a Western historiography of feminism. However, we do not subscribe to the view that American feminist theology *preceded* the feminist voices that emerged in Latin America, Africa, and Asia. Women theologians such as Elsa Tamez, Ivone Gebara, Marianne Katoppo, and Mercy Amba Oduyoye came to speech in the same historical moment as feminist theology emerged on the North American scene. Although it is anachronistic to name this work as "postcolonial feminist theology," there is a clear line of descent from these writers to the concerns of contemporary postcolonial theologies. We ask the reader to bear with the ambivalent term, "postcolonial *feminist* theology." (See footnote 18).
11. See, for example, Lieven Boeve, *God Interrupts History: Theology in a Time of Upheaval* (London: Continuum, 2007). The concept of "detraditionalization" better acknowledges the combination of continuing spiritual practice alongside a decline of institutional affiliation to established churches than does the earlier secularization thesis.
12. *Thealogy* is the term coined by Christ and others to describe reflection on the female divine, in reconstructed Goddess religion and more broadly.
13. Carol P. Christ, "Whatever Happened to Goddess and God-She? Why Do Jews and Christians Still Pray to a Male God?," in *Wrestling with God*, ed. Lisa Isherwood et al., *Journal of the European Society of Women in Theological Research* 18 (2010): 52.
14. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, "The Will to Choose or to Reject," in *Feminist Interpretation of the Bible*, ed. Letty M. Russell (Oxford: Blackwell, 1985), 126.
15. Kim grew up in the Presbyterian Church in Canada. Though her parents are both from Buddhist families, many Korean immigrants converted to Christianity for

economic and social gain. The Presbyterian Church of both the United States and Canada sent many missionaries to Korea in the late nineteenth century, and as a result, many Koreans converted to Presbyterian forms of Christianity. When Korean immigrants arrived in North America, many joined the mainline Presbyterian denominations.

16. James H. Cone, "Cross-Fertilization: A Statement from the U.S. Minorities," in *Third World Theologies: Commonalities and Divergences*, ed. K. C. Abraham (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1990), 129–30, cited in José David Rodríguez, "Black Theology's Impact on EATWOT," in *Living Stones in the Household of God*, ed. Linda E. Thomas (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 2004), 101–6.
17. See the growing literature on "fresh expressions" of church in Western detraditioned contexts—for example, Church of England, *Mission-Shaped Church* (London: Church House, 2005); Steven Croft and Ian Mobsby, eds., *Fresh Expressions in the Sacramental Tradition* (London: Canterbury Press, 2009); Andrew Walker and Luke Bretherton, eds., *Remembering Our Future: Explorations in Deep Church* (Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster Press, 2007). For analysis of the growth of Pentecostalism, see Cecil M. Robeck Jr. and Amos Yong, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Pentecostalism* (Cambridge: CUP, 2014); Harvey Cox, *Fire from Heaven: The Rise of Pentecostal Spirituality and the Reshaping of Religion in the Twenty-First Century* (Boston: Da Capo Press, 2001); Walter J. Hollenweger, *Pentecostalism: Origins and Developments Worldwide* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005).
18. We are bequeathed a well-established term, *feminist theology*. As already acknowledged, for women of color, the term has a white inflection—which leads to other chosen namings for projects concerned with gender justice for women within theology, the churches, and more broadly in the world. The list—Latina/*mujerista*, *evangélica*, womanist, Asian American, feminist—is neither complete nor capable of closure. To complicate the picture further, some African American and Asian American women have chosen to identify with the term *feminist* to strengthen the connection between their own work and that of white feminists. As the following discussion takes up a term already in use, we ask the reader to read it in this broader way when it is used without the qualifier *white*—and then to "talk back" to us if any reader finds herself excluded by as yet unconscious acts of "othering" on the part of the authors. (Daggers recognizes that she is more likely to act in this way than Kim, her coeditor.)
19. Peter Phan, "Introduction," in *Christianities in Asia*, ed. Peter Phan (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 1–3.
20. One notable example is the prolific theological writing of the Malaysian American Pentecostalist theologian Amos Yong, who engages with doctrine beyond the pneumatalogical focus of his tradition. See, for example, Amos Yong, *The Future of Evangelical Christianity: Soundings from the Asian American Diaspora* (Westmont, IL: IVP, 2014).
21. See Emmanuel Y. Lartey, *Postcolonializing God: An African Practical Theology* (London: Student Christian Movement, 2013), 35, for an argument that historical and contemporary African American black churches be understood as "postcolonializing" churches.

22. See John Kenyon, review of *Reimagining with Christian Doctrines: Responding to Global Gender Injustices* (ed. Grace Ji-Sun Kim and Jenny Daggers), *Grace Ji-Sun Kim—Loving Life* (blog), May 24, 2014, accessed September 26, 2014, http://gracejisunkim.wordpress.com/2014/05/24/book-review-reimagining-with-christian-doctrines/#more-5417.
23. In contrast, as demonstrated throughout this volume, postcolonial and feminist theologians are well versed in the authorized theological discourse that is systematic theology.
24. See, for example, John Webster, Kathryn Tanner, and Iain Torrance, *The Oxford Handbook of Systematic Theology* (Oxford: OUP, 2007); Richard J. Plantinga, Thomas R. Thompson, and Matthew D. Lundberg, *An Introduction to Christian Theology* (Cambridge: CUP, 2010).
25. See Rachel Muers, "Doing Traditions Justice," in *Gendering Christian Ethics*, ed. Jenny Daggers (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Press, 2012), 7–22.
26. The title of Serene Jones's book, *Trauma and Grace: Theology in a Ruptured World* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2009).
27. bell hooks, *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Centre*, 2nd ed. (London: Pluto Press, 2000).
28. Wendy Farley, "Foreword," in Kim and Daggers, ix.

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CHAPTER 2

Who Do You Say That I Am?

From Incomprehensible *Ousia* to Active *Presencia*: An *Evangélica* Reimagining of the Doctrine of God

Loida I. Martell-Otero

Introduction

What do we mean when we say *God*? This is the question that I faced when a female, Muslim student who had enrolled in my class on Trinity persisted in asking, "What about the Father?" Her question made me stop. It was, after all, a good question. What about the First Person of the Triune God? It is the same question I faced when invited to write this chapter on God. "Oh, you mean a chapter on the Trinity," I pressed, "because to say 'God' is to refer to the Triune God." Indeed, theological discourse had swung on its cogitating pendulum from a time in which God was split between *de Deo uno* and *de Deo trino* to a time in which, at least in the Western Church, the Triune God was considered barely at all. The turn of the twentieth century, particularly with Karl Barth and Karl Rahner, saw a renaissance in Trinitarian theology, and since then there is no lack of material on the subject. Theology, it seems, is back on a tri-theological footing in its talk about God. I wanted to make sure I did not inadvertently go back to the *uno–trino* split. The editors of this collection looked at me, puzzled, and explained that they already had a chapter on Trinity in the first volume of this series. Thus their invitation was for a chapter on the First Person of the Trinity—except that no self-respecting feminist would have invited me to write about "the Father." Indeed, any postmodern, postcolonial, constructive, or contextual theologian worth their salt would probably hesitate to take on this assignment. Most of us feel so much more comfortable writing about Christology or, more recently, pneumatology. Perhaps it is because for many, God is the ineffable, the inexpressible, the invisible, or the One about whom we have no human categories we can use as adequate

descriptors. Further, many of us who claim to be Trinitarian are actually binitarian, for in all honesty we really do not know what to do with this First Person and all this "Father" talk. In an attempt to bridge the inclusive language gap, we refer to this Person as the Parent, but as a Latina, I can assure you that this does not solve the issue for me, given that in Spanish the word for Parent (*Padre*) is the same exact word as for Father.

Therefore, as I began this chapter, I discovered that there seemed to be a bit of a "terminological" ambiguity: more often than not, when Western theologians write about God, they mean "the Godhead"—that is to say, "God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit." Others use *God* to refer to the First Person. So about whom are we talking when we say *God*: the Triune God, the First Person, or both? And if the First Person, what does theology have to say? Those deeply ensconced in Triune discussions often describe the First Person as the one who is Unoriginate and Unbegotten, who begets the Son, and from whom the Spirit proceeds. The more intrepid remind us that God is Creator and thus Source of all. Beyond that, they do not find anything more substantial to say. Any further discussions about God are predicated on a plurality of existence, all divine actions being assigned either to the Triune God as a triunity/whole, to Christ, or to the Spirit. That is to say, if God is indeed inexpressible and ineffable, beyond human categories, then the only way to truly know God, and to be able to engage in theological discourse that does not veer into the superstitious or idolatrous, is to speak about the way God has "irrupted" into human history: through the incarnation of the Son and eschatological proleptic activity of the Spirit.[1] Thus I echo the insistent question of my student: What about the First Person? What about God?

In this chapter, I begin by arguing that we have lost sight of the fact that when Scripture refers to God, it inevitably refers to the One that the Christian tradition has come to identify as the First Person of the Triune God. I specifically want to argue that it is this God, of whom Scripture speaks in various modes, which the First Testament identifies as *YHWH*. I believe that in our press to articulate a doctrine of the Trinity, we somehow reduced the First Person to the nominative of "Father," and in so doing we have lost sight of the nuanced richness of biblical God-language and, more important, lost sight of God's presence in history. I am acutely aware that theology is always a contextual endeavor. The social location and perspective of the theologian, or of any community that critically reflects on its faith, not only influences deeply the answers to the questions posed by theology but in fact impacts the very questions asked. Thus, as a bicoastal Puerto Rican *evangélica*, I also include in this chapter how I believe that Latina Protestant women experience God and how

they tend to articulate that experience. In so doing, I hope to show how *evangélica* theology can contribute to a "reimagining" of the doctrine of God.

For those not familiar with the term, I define *evangélica/o* as a popular Protestantism that includes a pluriform religious worldview of popular Iberian-shaped Catholicism, African and Amerindian spirituality, and a variety of Protestant influences that include both colonizing/missionary efforts as well as autochthonous expressions of faith. Unlike the English cognate, "evangelical," *evangélica/o* does not imply a particular theological, social, or political agenda. It simply translates as "Protestant." In Spanish, it also has the added connotation of "people of the Good News" or "people of the Book" (i.e., of the Bible). In the United States, *evangélica* theology is characterized by its ecumenical spirit and its attentiveness to the cries of the oppressed and marginalized, particularly of poor, voiceless, and disempowered women of color. It is an anticolonial, constructive approach to the theological task that is based in the grassroots communities of faith that birthed it.[2]

Through What Lenses Do We Hear, and with What Crayons Do We Color?

Theology as a "faith that seeks understanding" is always a contextual endeavor.[3] Teresa Sauceda Chavez notes, "Our knowledge and understanding of who God is and how God acts is filtered through multiple lenses of language, culture, history, socioeconomic status, religious tradition, and faith experience."[4] That is to say, our "God-talk" is always hermeneutical in nature, and thus we must be attentive not only to the epistemological tools we use but most particularly to the social location from which we do our theological reflection and construction. While Sallie McFague asserts that our current times require a "deconstruction" as well as "construction" of the doctrine of God, we do well to heed George Zachariah's warning that such constructions are never innocent—never "neutral."[5] Rather, as contextual expressions, much of our theology has been articulated in "social locations of power and domination." Thus Zachariah calls for attentiveness to "the danger of universalization" of such doctrines, or any claim they might make of "purity, neutrality, or innocence" as if they were only "dictated by divine mediations."[6]

Until recent decades, those from the centers of power dominated and thus informed our God-talk.[7] There has been an assumption that their articulations about God define the very nature of theology; they do "theology" as a universal metanarrative, establishing essential principles that transcend time and place. Most people consider constructive or contextual articulations to be peripheral "add-ons" that are not necessarily essential to the theological task. Although postmodernist, poststructuralist, anticolonialist, and other constructive critiques

have slowly eroded this "universalizing" insistence of the Westernized and Eurocentric metanarratives about God, such views still dominate the methodological approach in which we "seek to understand" our beliefs. Thus it seems to me that descriptions of God from such perspectives, for all their insistence on using an apophatic approach, their eschewing "anthropomorphic" language, and their penchant for metaphysical categories, are reminiscent of Albert Schweitzer's description of the eighteenth-century quest for Jesus: in the end, they produce a reflection of their cultural pool.[8] This is not to invalidate their insights or to deny that theology overall has been enriched by their legacies. However, I do insist that privileging one perspective at the cost of others—particularly views from the margins that favor a more kataphatic approach, use anthropomorphisms, or prefer Scriptural narratives to philosophical categories—impoverishes the theological discourse. Rather than being multifaceted, the discourse becomes "flattened." To use Terence E. Fretheim's wonderful metaphor: we reduce our language about God to monochromatic dimensions or an 8-color Crayola box when we could be using a 64-color one, thus losing what could be invaluable insights.[9] If God is the transcendent One that so many claim God to be—that is to say, if the claim is that there is no space in which God is truly absent—then our dialogue about God, our *theo-logos*, cannot afford to silence the voices from the margins, the voices of the least of these whom Scripture seems to indicate are the people of God's favor in human history.

A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Center . . .

So who is God, and of what God are we speaking? The early Christian Church framed this question in *ontological* categories as it struggled to articulate its faith experience such that its expressed monotheism would cohere with its claim that Jesus Christ, who lived, died, and rose on the third day, was foundational for salvation. Over the span of two centuries, the Christian Church eventually articulated its understanding of "God" in the Nicene-Constantinople Creed, which reflected the West's *una substantia, tres personae* and the East's *mia ousia, treis hypostaseis*. Despite the inevitable linguistic wrangling between the East and the West, given the difference of language and cultures, an equivalency between substance and *ousia*, person and *hypostasis* was agreed on. During the process, the world and the church had changed, geographically, sociologically, politically, and theologically; in short, its social location and perspectives were altered. Thus to the question "What is God, Jesus, and Spirit?" came the response, "They are *ousia*." To the question, "What is *ousia*?" came the response, "Unknowable." Over time, this translated to the modern claim that "God is unknowable."

The creeds underscored the view of the First Person as "Father." This was as much due to the influence of early church leaders' scriptural hermeneutics as it was to their cultural and philosophical presuppositions. The Gospel of John was especially influential.[10] The term *Father* was particularly appealing as a subversive way to counter the political hegemony of the Roman imperial power that declared itself to be "*patria potestas*" over the known (and colonized) world, and the emperor to be its "*pater*."[11] Christianity countered with the biblical warrant that God, not Caesar, was the true "*pater*" of all Creation. Nevertheless, one unintended consequence of the Nicene formulation was the reduction of the "64 colors of crayon" of the metaphorical pool of addressing God—as YHWH, el Shaddai, Elohim, as Israel's go'el, as the woman with a tattoo on her palms, as the shepherd who gently carries the newly freshened ewe, as provider, as creator, *ruach*, and so many other scriptural permutations—to almost the singular nominative *Father*. This reduction, in a sense, widened an already apparent conceptual chasm between the God of the First Testament and that of the Second Testament. That is to say, at some point the church began to think less of YHWH and more of the "Father," and with time, less of the One who participated directly in history and more in terms of the cosmic Unoriginate Source of the eternally begotten Son. Thus a conceptual "dehistorization" of God (and Jesus) took place as the context moved from soteriological relations in the world to cosmic notions of the divine. Consequently, *metaphorical* relational language of intimacy somehow eventually became ontic language of gender. God is no longer *like* a Parent but *is* Father. For example, Robert Jenson claims that the *name* of God *is* Father, Son, and Spirit.[12] Jenson is not alone in this claim. Too many others argue for the maleness of God based on Father language.[13] Thus, while claiming that nothing truly can be known about God, who is mystery beyond all human knowledge, there seems to be theological sleight of hand that nevertheless allows the tradition to claim this Unknowable to be primarily gendered male and to be a center of power reminiscent of the centers of power of the privileged.

The Trinitarian formulation had a third unintended consequence: a lack of clarity about whom we were addressing when referencing God, particularly in the economy. This ambiguity was exacerbated with the Augustinian understanding that it is the *ousia* who acts in unity: thus we can claim that the Father, Son, and Spirit create, save, and transform the world. Such thinking culminated in the Thomistic view that any of the Persons could have become incarnate.[14] Under such a construct, the Persons are only distinguishable by their relations of origin.[15] Consequently what distinguishes the First Person is blurred, for what can we say about God other than God's role in begetting and generating? Generally, for those following the Augustinian tradition, such as Barth

and Jenson, *God* refers to the Father-Son-Spirit triunity. In such a case, God is most visible in the saving acts of the Son and the completing work of the Spirit, resulting in a sort of functional "binitarianism": God the First Person is relegated to being a silent and mostly invisible partner of which nothing more can be said, for all is done "in his name" by the Son and Spirit. Terminologically, it then begs the question: when one says *God*, does one mean "the Father" or the "Father-Son-Spirit" or both?

If one indeed refers to the First Person, what do we know about God? When viewed from the center, God is often described as the "inapprehensible," "inexpressible," Invisible One. God is qualitatively distinct from all that is creation and thus should never be considered "an element within a larger world, or part of the whole reality."[16] While God is, on the one hand, our transcendental horizon and supernatural existential, on the other hand, God is also beyond all human modes of apprehension or comprehension, such that we would not even know about God had God not chosen to reveal Godself.[17] The only thing we can know is that God exists and exists in communion.[18] An "ontological and epistemological abyss" exists between God and creation that not even the divine can breach.[19] In Rudolf Otto's now classic description, God is *mysterium tremendum*. God's very nature evokes fear and trembling. We are to be in absolute awe of this God, who is "absolute unapproachability" and "absolute overpoweringness." Standing before such a God, one's being is reduced to "dust and ashes" and "nothingness." One is conscious only that one is "naught," because God is all and "wholly other."[20]

God "outside the Gate"[21]

If theology is a contextual endeavor, then rather than begin with the question of who God is for those at the center, I believe that it is more appropriate to begin by asking what kinds of questions those at the margins pose about God from the liminal spaces of survival. While those at the center often focus their God queries with ontological questions, is that a proper beginning for the marginalized? Who is God for poor Latina *evangélicas* and other women of color who must justify their very existence in what Orlando E. Costas has called the "peripheric" spaces—where daily reality is one of displacement, humiliation, oppression, and powerlessness?[22] It is my contention that for women (and men) at the margins, the primary question about God is not a *what*, not an ontological query, but rather a locative and therefore a *kairotic* one—*where* is God?[23] Where is God when the forces of death seem to overpower and hold sway in the midst of life? Where is God and what of God's promises when this earth seems to be a living hell? A richly complex religious and cultural history undergirds

the theological discourse of Latinas/os in general and *evangélicas* in particular. I begin then with a brief summary of how that history influenced *evangélica* spirituality and consequently their notions of God.

Dios de Mi Presencia *(God of My Presence)*

Latina *evangélica* theology is influenced by three major underlying streams of spiritualities: that which comes from an Iberian Catholicism, quite distinct from a post-Tridentine Catholicism, and is itself influenced by Semitic and Moorish beliefs influential in Spain during its formation as a nation. This *mestizo* Catholicism was transported to the conquered lands that came to be known as the Americas, and it was the Christian God of colonization that was preached to the vanquished indigenous tribes. Eventually what took place was not a straightforward translation, or even a full replacement of one faith for another—notwithstanding the colonial efforts to obliterate all traces of native culture and religious belief—but rather a "transmutation," a confluence of one with the other. Virgilio Elizondo defines this process as *mestizaje*: the encounter of two or more biological or cultural groups that results in a distinctive third that retains characteristics of the parent groups.[24] Such encounters are usually violent.[25] In the conquered areas where indigenous people were almost wiped out due to military incursions, disease, enslavement, and genocidal and oppressive practices, African slaves consequently were imported, introducing a third religious element that came to make up the substratum of Latina/o spirituality. When Protestant variants from North Atlantic nations—who made their own imperial push to gain new wealth and territories—sought to "evangelize" the peoples of the Global South, they encountered a culture whose substratum was deeply rooted in popular Catholicism and indigenous faiths. Protestantism did not so much convert as it was converted. Thus arose the *mestizo popular Protestantism* that I denote as the *evangélica/o* faith.

In Puerto Rico and other Caribbean islands, the indigenous people maintained deities known as *cemís* in their *bohíos* (homes). They believed that the *cemí* contained the spirit of a tree, a rock, or an ancestor. If a tree spoke to them, they would cut it down and carve out a figurine, believing that the *cemí* retained the essential spirit of its original source.[26] In this way, the gods resided in the midst of their homes. Thus *cemís* represented the presence of the divine in the daily spaces of life. For Africans, this presence was embodied in *orishas*. These particular ways of perceiving the divine found resonance, and were transmuted, when Spanish and Portuguese conquistadores imposed their Christian religion on the native peoples, resulting in an intimate *vínculo* (link) between the sacred and the created world.[27] *Vínculo* is a term that can be translated as "ties that bind" and points to the inherent relationality between all creation and

the divine. Life is relational. Thus God suffuses all, permeates all, and is present in all spaces. God is the one who is *presente* (present) and is *presencia* (presence).

God as *presencia* resonates especially with people whose lives are marked by absence. Latinas, particularly the poor and disenfranchised, are often forced to reside in the liminal spaces of the margins. In many communities, they literally reside in the peripheries. They are discounted. Above all, they lack access: to adequate health care, educational facilities, sources of healthy and fresh foods, housing, employment and financial resources for a quality life, and so forth. In the public domain, if one is an immigrant, one not only lacks a "place" and identity; one especially lacks adequate advocacy. To whom shall one turn when exploited, a victim of crime or domestic violence, or in need of emergency care? Even in the religious world, *evangélicas* are often marginalized and voiceless: absent from the pulpit or from the boards that make decisions that impact the communal life of the church. Poor and disenfranchised Latinas lack, in David T. Abalos's wording, "vital connections."[28] Given the fact that theirs is a communal culture, the act of being disconnected from the wider world, and often living in disjointed and broken communities, makes them feel, in effect, like "no-bodies."[29]

The centers of economic, political, and social power in a globalized and colonizing world apparently are "invisible," "unapproachable," and "inaccessible." The process by which they seem to arrive at what appear to be arbitrary decisions is unassailable, a mystery that can only be mediated through convoluted levels of intermediaries—who seem to be more obstructionist than of help. Latinas need to negotiate to survive within the context of such a world, where they often find themselves marginalized as a colonized people. As such, *evangélicas* cannot identify with a god who is mystery, inaccessible, or invisible, nor can they comprehend one that demands of them fear and trembling, requiring them to feel like "dust and ashes"—like nothing. Such a god *no tiene sentido* (makes no sense). After all, this is how the world treats them. The structures of the world rob them of "face," of identity, of their very humanity. God, who for Barth and Otto is "wholly Other," is precisely God for *evangélicas* because God is Holy Other than those of the world.[30] Yet, in being *presente*, as First Person but also as embodied in and through the brown *Jésus sato*, God has affirmed the divine presence among those rejected by the rich and powerful. This is the God of Life, who brings hope of new life to the dying and despairing. This is why this God is not an idol made by colonizing hands.

Presencia does not preclude transcendence, for God is the One who is greater than human powers, human sin, and fallen human structures. It is precisely as this Transcendent One that God is always and immanently *presente*. In God's *presencia*, *evangélicas* are more than no-bodies. They are some-bodies, part of

a larger communal reality, and therefore ultimately fully human. This is why *evangélicas* often testify "*que pueden sentir la presencia de Dios*" (that they can feel the presence of God). *Sentir* is more than a feeling. It is also the root for *sentido* (sense). To "*sentir la presencia*" is to claim that God's presence makes eminent sense—that it gives direction and purpose to their lives. This sense that *presencia* brings is an "awareness of the grace of God that overwhelms" and thus attentiveness to the interconnectedness of community. Awareness of the global community, in turn, raises consciousness about issues of justice in the world.[31]

El Dios de Flor y Canto *(God of Flower and Song)*

Mayans and other Amerindian tribes believed that true theologians are poets; true theological language can only be expressed in *flor y canto* (flower and song).[32] This has certainly been my experience among *evangélicas*. In particular, it is through the sharing of their *testimonios* (witnessing) and singing of *coritos* (musical refrains) that they best give expression to their collective theologies. *Testimonios* are often vehicles of agency for women who would otherwise be silenced by or excluded from ecclesial centers. *Coritos* are autochthonous musical refrains, often based on scriptural texts. The importance of music in worship and theology reflects our indigenous and African roots, in which percussive rhythms and music were central in calling upon the *presencia* of the divine.

As I listened to the *testimonios* and *coritos* of *evangélicas*, what I heard repeatedly was an affirmation about the *presencia* of God, who creates sacred spaces of life and justice in everyday spaces (*en lo cotidiano*), particularly in the face of illness, loss, and injustice. Recently, completing a research project among *evangélicas* in Puerto Rico, I asked questions about their understanding and experiences of God. The women varied from 12 to 70 years of age. They included laywomen, professionals, retired pastors, and one with a doctorate in ministry. I was fascinated by the fact that as they each shared their stories with me, eventually each of them would reach a point in which the only way left for them to best express their theology was through song. *Flor y canto*.

When I pastored in New York City, a mother from my congregation lost her 18-year-old son to gun violence as he sat next to his older sister on the stoop in front of their house. The sister was to be the intended victim, but the shooter missed and hit the boy instead. Suddenly, this mother not only had to face the burial of her son but also had to contemplate leaving the city because of threats made against her family. The Sunday after we buried her son, the mother stood in our congregation and raised her hand and sang, "*Oye oh Dios mi clamor / A mi oración atiende / Desde el cabo de la tierra clamaré a ti cuando mi corazón desmaye*."[33] On another occasion, I heard her sing with fervor and conviction, "*Dios está aquí / Tan cierto como el aire que respiro / Tan cierto como en la mañana*

se levanta el sol / Tan cierto que cuando le hablo Dios me puede oír / Lo puedo sentir cuando está a mi lado / Lo puedo sentir dentro de mi corazón."[34] In the midst of pain, violence, loss, and grief, she could cry out to the Lord and know that God would hear her cry. Why? Because in spite of the tragedy and death that surrounded her, she knew that the response to the question "Where is God?" was that God transcends "the ends of the earth," transcends death: that "God is here, as certain as the air that I breathe." *Presencia*. Another woman witnessed to her congregation that "God is not on a throne but by my side" when she faced a potentially catastrophic illness.[35] For these *evangélicas*, God is not afar but rather is always near to heal, to comfort, and to sustain. This is the God of *presencia*.

Dios Es Amor ***(God Is Love)***

In the book of Habakkuk, the prophet protests the apparent dominance of the powerful and privileged who oppress the poor. Habakkuk thus demands an accounting of God. God's response is to reassure the prophet of God's faithfulness to provide breath (life) for those of straight *nepeš* (i.e., the just) because God is a God of *tsaddiq*. Throughout the First and Second Testaments, a correlation is made between God's love, justice, and life. 1 John 4 assures us that "God is love" but also links love and justice (v. 20).[36] *Evangélicas* give witness to and worship this God who they encounter in the periphery as the God of life in the face of death. This is the God they know to be the God of justice in the face of injustice. Injustice comes in many forms, large and small: humiliation at the hands of those who believe themselves to be better than a brown woman, silencing of their voices, denigration of their beliefs, exclusion from spaces of everyday living, powerlessness, exploitation of their bodies, destruction of their communities, violence against their families, deportations, poverty, and so on. Elsewhere, I have described this as being treated as *sobrajas*, as leftovers: scraped away, as if we were something nasty stuck on the bottom of someone's shoe, or even worse, as if we were not really there at all.[37] It is a daily violence, covert and overt, that eventually numbs the soul and robs one of one's humanity. In witnessing such injustices, one is tempted to climb a tower like the prophet, lift up one's fists to the heavens, and demand, "Why do you see the rejected and are silent . . . ?" *Where* are you, O God?

Yet there is no doubt in the minds and hearts of *evangélicas* that this is the God of *ruach* (life), *hešed* (steadfast love), and *tsadeqah* (justice). This is evident in Elizabeth Conde-Frazier's recounting of a group of *evangélicas* who gathered in the women's lavatory of their church after the worship service to comment on the scriptural passages discussed earlier by their male pastor. The bathroom became a safe space where men could not intrude and where the women could exercise their voice. In one particular instance, they discussed the Lucan text

about the hemorrhagic woman who was healed by Jesus, reading and interpreting the pericope from the perspective of women who had suffered abuse and sexual exploitation. In that bathroom, as they shared their *testimonios* and read the *testimonio* of the hemorrhagic woman, they declared themselves free and cleansed from the bonds of oppression. In that space, they experienced *la presencia de Dios* in ways that made sense to them: in transformative and liberative ways that asserted their voice and agency.[38] In such a place, God was a God of loving justice who overturned the patriarchal structures that oppressed them at home, in society, and in the very womb of the church. God was also Healer and Giver of Life. Elsewhere, Conde-Frazier tells of *evangélicas* gathered for a baby shower. During the celebration, the women declared liberated a woman in their midst who had suffered years of abuse; they did so with the authority and in the name of the living God.[39]

These *testimonios* underscore two important *evangélica* concepts about God. First, God is to be found in *lo cotidiano* (the spaces of the everyday). *Lo cotidiano* is an epistemological and theological tool that points to more than its translation as "daily." It is that which "constitutes the immediate spaces of our lives, the first horizon in which we have our experiences that in turn are constitutive elements of our reality."[40] As such, *lo cotidiano* is the very matrix of life as it is lived by the marginalized and oppressed. It is here that God's grace abounds because it is where the impact of structural sin is mostly keenly visible. The importance of *lo cotidiano* leads to the second implication of Conde-Frazier's narratives: that God is the God who is saving because God has made a space, a place for these women to live with dignity. In Hebrew, one of the words translated as "saved" is *yādā*, which means "to make space." Whether it be in a lavatory, living room, "washeterias," or church pews, God is present in the spaces of the everyday where death, hatred, and injustice abound to create living, breathing sacred spaces of humanization, healing, wholeness, love, and justice that enable community for women through a sense of dignity, hope, and purpose for their lives. *Ahí se siente la presencia d Dios*. Not *what* but *where*.

Habla, Oh Señor, Que Tu Sierva Escucha . . .
(Speak, Oh Lord, for Your Servant Listens . . .)

The *evangélica* notions of God are further undergirded by their readings of Scripture. There they find a God of relationality. This is the God who speaks to a cast-out slave girl named Hagar, through burning bushes, and in gentle winds. As Fretheim points out, "Israel's knowledge of God" is acquired through the context of "personal encounter rather than in some external and impersonal way."[41] This One described as Friend, rather than as *ousia*, is the God of *vínculos* who *evangélicas* claim is found *en lo cotidiano*.[42] This living God—who

in the Second Testament is present through Jesus and the Spirit—heals, liberates, transforms, and, in the words of my African American sisters, "makes a way when there is no way." *Evangélicas*, who believe in Scripture—not because of debates about infallibility but because its narratives resonate with Latinas' experiences—see in the texts an affirmation and confirmation of their experience of the divine: the God who in the past has responded to the cries of the oppressed and forgotten, who has come to save "the least of these," continues to be present to them in their own situations of joy and pain, humiliation and despair, dehumanization and faith.

Evangélicas believe they have the authority and agency to claim that God speaks to them precisely because their faith is confirmed through Scripture and through the experiences of their community. This is not an individualistic or will-to-power-over claim about which I hear scholars in theological forums express concern. Rather, this is the product of a communal process of prayer, theological and prophetic discernment, and Scriptural confirmation. It is the answer to the abiding question of *where* God is in the midst of their circumstances.

Recently, I listened while a male academic criticized people who claimed that God spoke to them. He thought himself quite knowledgeable as he debunked such "unsophisticated" thinking, and he ended his diatribe with a sarcastic, "As if God has a mouth, or ears, or eyes, as if God were human, that God would speak to people!" I stood quietly by, not wishing to enter into a debate with someone who believed himself to be so in the right, surrounded by other like-minded scholars who appeared to mock those who would claim that God spoke to them. Yet, as this group of seemingly knowledgeable, but privileged, scholars derided the beliefs of communities about which they seemed to know little, I thought about Elena's face.

Daisy L. Machado narrates the story of Elena, a Salvadoran woman whose husband, family members, and neighbors were murdered by a paramilitary squad for alleged political insurrection. Elena was beaten and raped, foreign objects inserted into her even though she was pregnant at the time, and her nose cut off in cold blood as a "billboard" to announce to other "political dissenters" what would happen if they protested against the government's policies. Machado met Elena when she sought political asylum in the United States.[43] As I heard the group of scholars mock grassroots beliefs, I wondered, "What good is a God with no mouth to a woman with no nose?" Women at the margins have no use for such a god. If God cannot hear our cries, if God is only the God of the powerful—too busy, too important, too inaccessible for us to speak and listen to—we have no use for such a god. That god only brings us death. "*El Dios de los Señores no es igual*."[44] We seek a God of life, of justice, and of

transformation—One who has arms to embrace us and a heart of compassion to fight for us. We seek the God of the prophet that claimed, "Can a woman forget her nursing child, or show no compassion for the child of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you. See, I have inscribed you on the palms of my hands; your walls are continually before me."[45] For us, any other God is simply an idol who only contributes to the death-dealing powers already at work in our communities.

What those scholars did not realize was that, if their claim that God is wholly unlike us is absolutely true, then the theological claim of *imago Dei* is forfeit, and God's relevance to creation is negated. However, if our tradition can lay claim to the truth that we are somehow made in God's image, if the incarnation reveals something about God and God's relation to the created world, then we can say something about God, if only metaphorically, because, as Justo L. González notes, we are in some way theomorphic.[46] Furthermore, if, as scholars insist, we do not know what God is, then we cannot make absolute judgments about what God is not.

En Familia . . . *(Amid Family . . .)*

One of the salient cultural characteristics of many Latina/o ethnic groups is their sense of community. Before there is an "I," there is a "we." The "I" is, in some sense, defined by the collective "we." This sense of community is part of our indigenous and African cultural legacy. The dynamic between "I" and "we" is reflected in Puerto Rican culture, for example, in the pejorative connotation given to the Spanish *individuo*. Usually, there is an underlying sense that a person referred to in such a way is selfish, arrogant, and uncaring regarding the welfare of others. However, the emphasis on community does not diminish the importance of personhood. Each person is a gift and brings something special to the communal whole.[47]

This sense of community serves as the hermeneutical lens through which *evangélicas* can articulate the doctrine of God in light of the doctrine of the Trinity, while avoiding the medieval *Deo uno–trino* dichotomies. It is to understand that full personhood is expressed and *is* only in community. Given such a hermeneutic, it is not surprising that *evangélica* theologian Zaida Maldonado Pérez couches her discussion of Trinity within the framework of the extended metaphor of *familia*. God is not only *Santa Familia* but also *familial*—thus not a stranger, but always immanently near.[48] *Familia* for Latinas/os does not refer to the nuclear entity often viewed in US American depictions. Rather, *familia* is the extended tribe: *el pueblo* with whom one shares some kind of *vínculo*.[49] It can mean one's immediate family relations—including aunts, uncles, cousins (a few times removed), grandparents, godparents, and all in-laws—but it can

and does also include anyone who is welcomed into one's home. In the context of the United States, *familia* can be a life-giving place of sanctuary. As Maldonado Pérez astutely observes, "The invitation to be *familia* extends to anyone with common experience of *conquista*, marginalization, *lucha*, and especially the desire and need to be in solidarity. One does not need to be a Latino/a to be deemed to be a part of *la familia*. One does, however, need to be in solidarity with its goals for wholeness at all levels of existence."[50] In Puerto Rico, there is an interesting concept called "*hijas/os de crianza*" (literally, daughters/sons by virtue of being raised). If a child is left bereft of a home or family, and a responsible adult takes them in and raises them—regardless of legal foster or adoption processes—that child becomes fully part of the family, with all rights of the other children. *Familia* denotes *vínculos* and therefore *presencia*, because relations always "take place." It is a "where-ness" more than a "what-ness."[51]

God is *familia* and *en familia*. Through perichoretic ties of love, we become part of the extended *familia* of God. To affirm God as *familia* is to acknowledge God's Personhood: God is neither an *individuo* nor *Fathersonholyspirit*. Rather, God is precisely Person because God is Communal. God is *vínculo encarnado*, the God who embodies relations and creates them in the spaces of the everyday. Being *en vínculo*, God is not alone. God is not a solo act. The God of the First Testament, who walked with, spoke, healed, and saved people, continues to do so through the Persons of the divine *familia*. God who is love extends that love to us in and through the *vínculos* of love that are Jesus Christ and Spirit. Together, they are a perichoretic whole. As a perichoretic whole, they are fully Persons. The doctrine of the Trinity, then, is the answer to the question of God's "where-ness" and not God's "what-ness." Where is God? God is to found *en familia*. In this sense, I resonate with Catherine Mowry LaCugna's insight about the language of "immanence."[52] It is not about God's "inner life," as if God can be known absent of God's *vínculos*, or about defining God's *ousia* but rather about God's *presencia* in the spaces of the everyday. It is this understanding to which I believe Richard Twiss refers in his discussions of Trinity: one encounters the Persons as they are *presente* among the colonized, suffering, and marginalized.[53]

This immanent *presencia* of God who is embodied *vínculos* of love is expressed in the ways that *evangélicas* refer to God. I have heard grassroots believers in Puerto Rico and in the United States call God "*Papito*," with the emphasis on the "*-ito*" ending rather than on gender. Something parallel takes place among Mexican and Mexican Americans and other cultures when they call God "*Diosito*." The diminutive in this instance denotes intimacy. Couples in Puerto Rico call each other *papito* and *mamita*, even if they do not have children. Mothers call their children *mamita/papito* as a term of endearment. It

implies a level of comfort and trust. People call God *Papito* or *Diosito* because God is *presente*, because God is trustworthy, because God is *familia*, and because God is as much loved as God is Love itself.

There is another implication to this form of address: while in English, inclusive God-language seeks to redress issues of patriarchy, it does not necessarily address the inherent classism that prevails in many Latin American countries. To address God in language of familial intimacy, no matter how lowly or marginalized we are in the world, is to consider God in "*tu a tu*" (face-to-face) language that subverts classist, ageist, and other socioeconomic and political distinctions.[54]

Conclusion

Terence Fretheim laments in his essay that "an amazing number of traditional words for God stress distance from the life of the world, portraying a God for whom the language of interpersonal relationship seems quite foreign: supernatural, self-sufficient, omnipotent, omniscient, infinite, incorporeal, invisible, impassible, unchangeable, immovable, immutable, transcendent. (Interestingly, very few such technical words are available to speak of the closeness of God, e.g., immanence.)"[55] An *evangélica* reimagining of the doctrine of God shifts the conversation from speculation about the *what-ness* of God to the *where-ness* of God and in doing so helps recover the personhood of the First Person, to rediscover the One known as Friend, Liberator, *hešed* and *tsadeqah* itself, and the Healer of broken communities and bodies. This is the One, as Ivone Gebara notes, to whom poor women cry out "*¡Dios mío!*"—the God who is p*resente* "in tears where there is no bread" and "in the joy of having something to eat."[56] Such a God is not marked by absence, distance, or fear but rather by *presencia*: a transcendence that is immanent presence because it transcends the powers and principalities of death and injustice of the world, to bring life, hope, and dignity where one would least expect it. This God is not faceless but hears and speaks. This is the God who is *dabar*.[57] This God embraces those whom the world has rejected, especially those who are hounded from the borders and left globally homeless. This is the God who "prepares a place" for them.[58] This is the God of life and life abundant. This is the God who makes *mujeres dignas* of those whom the world would treat as *sobrajas*. As Triune God and not isolated deity, this is not "another" god, a "lone ranger." Rather, the God of the First Testament who walked and talked with God's people is the God who continues to speak to and embrace us through the incarnation of Jesus Christ and the outpouring of the Spirit. Thus God continues to be *presente* to us in saving, transformative, and liberating ways. Should a student ever ask me again, "What about the Father?" I believe we will have much to talk about. May it always be so.

Notes

1. This language of "irruption" associated with Gustavo Gutiérrez and other Latin American theologians of liberation is a transliteration of the Spanish *irrumpir* ("break into, interrupt"). However, its similarity to *eruption* is reminiscent of breaking out rather than breaking in. If God is always immanent and transcendent—there being no space or place where God is not present—I have often asked myself why any divine "irruption" into history is necessary. See Gustavo Gutiérrez, *God of Life* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), 27.
2. For more information on Latina *evangélicas*, see Loida I. Martell-Otero, "Introduction: *Abuelita* Theologies," in *Latina Evangélicas: A Theological Survey from the Margins*, by Loida I. Martell-Otero, Zaida Maldonado Pérez, and Elizabeth Conde-Frazier (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2013).
3. See St. Anselm of Canterbury, "Proslogium," in *Basic Writings*, trans. S. N. Deane (LaSalle, IL: Open Court Publishing, 1962), 52–53.
4. Teresa Sauceda Chavez, "Love at the Crossroads: Skipping Stones to a Doctrine of God in Hispanic/Latino Theology," in *Teología en Conjunto: A Collaborative Hispanic Protestant Theology*, ed. José David Rodríguez and Loida I. Martell-Otero (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 22.
5. Sallie McFague, "Falling in Love with God and the World: Some Reflections on the Doctrine of God," *Ecumenical Review* 65, no. 1 (March 2013): 20; George Zachariah, "Re-Imagining God of Life from the Margins," *Ecumenical Review* 65, no. 1 (March 2013): 36.
6. Zachariah, 36–37.
7. Power and privilege are defined differently in different contexts and historical periods. There is a rich corpus of literature on the subject. For more contemporary definitions, see Joseph Barndt, *Understanding and Dismantling Racism: The Twenty-First Century Challenge to White America* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007); Mary Elizabeth Hobgood, *Dismantling Privilege: An Ethics of Accountability*, 2nd ed. (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2009).
8. Albert Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus: A Critical Study of Its Progress from Reimarus to Wrede* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 4.
9. Terence E. Fretheim, "The Color of God: Israel's God-Talk and Life Experience," *Word and World* 6, no. 3 (Summer 1986): 258. For a similar critique, see Karen Baker-Fletcher, *Dancing with God: The Trinity from a Womanist Perspective* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2006), 57–58.
10. Peter Widdicombe, "The Fathers on the Father in the Gospel of John," *Semeia* 85 (1999): 110, 116. For more on the notion of "Father" in the gospels, particularly in the Gospel of John, see Mary Rose D'Angelo, "Intimating Deity in the Gospel of John: Theological Language and 'Father' in 'Prayers of Jesus,'" *Semeia* 85 (1999): 59–82; Marianne Meye Thompson, "The Living Father," *Semeia* 85 (1999): 19–31. Gail R. O'Day argues in "'Show Us the Father, and We Will Be Satisfied' (John 14:8)," *Semeia* 85 (1999): 12–13, that the Church Fathers mistakenly conflated the concepts of God, Father, and Abba.
11. D'Angelo, 60.

12. Robert Jenson, *The Triune Identity: God According to the Gospel* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982), 1–18. See also John D. Zizioulas, "Doctrine of God," in *Lectures in Christian Dogmatics* (London: T&T Clark, 2008), 45.
13. See Paul R. Raabe's argument against "revisionist feminists" and his defense for male-gendered pronouns for God based on God's Fatherhood in "On Feminized God-Language," *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 74, no. 1–2 (2010): 123–38; or Simon Chan's whimsically titled "Father Knows Best," *Christianity Today* (July–August 2013): 49–51, in which he argues that "language of God's fatherhood captures something essential about his nature." For a counterargument, see Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology*, 2nd ed. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1993). See also Baker-Fletcher, 63.
14. St. Augustine, *The Trinity*, trans. Edmund Hill (Brooklyn: New City Press), I:2, sec. 7–8; St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, vol. 4, IIa IIae QQ. 149–89 to IIIa QQ. 1–73, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province, 2nd ed. (Allen, TX: Christian Classics, 1981), 2041. Regarding the debates about Augustinian Tridentine interpretations, see Michael René Barnes, "Augustine in Contemporary Trinitarian Theology," *Theological Studies* 56 (1995): 237–50. My purpose here is not to enter into this debate but to simply point out Augustine's underscoring of the *unitive* activity of the Trinitarian Persons.
15. John Webster, "Trinity and Creation," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 12, no. 1 (January 2010): 11.
16. See Elizabeth A. Johnson's discussion of Karl Rahner's doctrine of God in *Quest for the Living God: Mapping Frontiers in the Theology of God* (New York: Continuum, 2007), 36.
17. Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity*, trans. William V. Dych (New York: Seabury Press, 1978), 126–33; Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 6th ed., trans. Edwyn C. Hoskins (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968), 10; Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 4.2, *The Doctrine of Reconciliation*, trans. G. W. Bromiley, ed. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1958), 65, 379.
18. Zizioulas, "Doctrine of God," 55–57.
19. Alar Laats, *Doctrines of the Trinity in Eastern and Western Thought: A Study with Special Reference to Karl Barth and Vladimir Lossky* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1999), 83.
20. Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, trans. John W. Harvey (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1958), 19–22.
21. Orlando E. Costas, *Christ outside the Gate: Mission beyond Christendom* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1982), 188–94. See Hebrews 13:12 (New Revised Standard Version).
22. Orlando E. Costas, "Evangelism from the Periphery: The Universality of Galilee," *Apuntes* 2, no. 4 (Winter 1982): 77.
23. I refer here to the fact that *kairos* has not only a temporal but also a spatial dimension—to wit, to be at the right place at the right time. See H. C. Hahn, "Kairos," in *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, vol. 3, ed. Colin Brown (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Press, 1986), 833.

24. Virgilio Elizondo, *Galilean Journey: The Mexican-American Promise*, 2nd ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2000), 10.
25. *Mestizaje* has historically been associated with conquest, rape, colonization, and neocolonization/globalization. See Andrea Smith, "Sexual Violence and American Indian Genocide," and Traci C. West, "Spirit-Colonizing Violations: Racism, Sexual Violence and Black American Woman," both in *Remembering Conquest: Feminist/Womanist Perspectives on Religion, Colonization, and Sexual Violence*, ed. Nantawan Boonprasat Lewis and Marie M. Fortune (New York: Hawthorne Pastoral Press, 1999). See also Julia Esquivel, "Conquered and Violated Women," in *1492–1992: The Voice of the Victims*, ed. Leonardo Boff and Virgil Elizondo (London: SCM Press, 1991).
26. Labor Gómez Acevedo and Manuel Ballesteros Gaibrois, *Vida y Cultura Precolombinas de Puerto Rico* (Río Piedras, PR: Editorial Cultural, 1980), 61–62.
27. Orlando O. Espín has elsewhere referred to this as a "sacramental worldview." See "Pentecostalism and Popular Catholicism: The Poor and *Traditio*," *Journal of Hispanic/Latino Theology* 3, no. 2 (November 1995): 27n34.
28. David T. Abalos, *Latinos in the United States: The Sacred and the Political* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1986), 91.
29. I find that this communal worldview, rooted in our indigenous and African legacies, has great resonance with the South African concept of *Ubuntu*. For more, see Mluleki Mnyaka and Mokgeth Motlhabi, "The African Concept of *Ubuntu/Botho* and Its Social-Moral Significance," *Black Theology* 3, no. 2 (July 2005): 215–37. The words are italicized in the original title.
30. Karl Barth, *The Humanity of God*, trans. John Newton Thomas and Thomas Wieser (Richmond, VA: John Knox Press, 1960), 37, 42. Cf., Barth, *Epistle to the Romans*, 10.
31. Elizabeth Conde-Frazier, "Crossing Wilderness and Desert toward Community: The Spirituality of Research and Scholarship," *Perspectivas* (Fall 2000): 14.
32. Virgil Elizondo, *Guadalupe: Mother of the New Creation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997), 34; Jeannette Rodríguez, "*Sangre llama a sangre:* Cultural Memory as a Source of Theological Insight," in *Hispanic/Latino Theology: Challenge and Promise*, ed. Ada María Isasi-Díaz and Fernando F. Segovia (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 124–28.
33. "Hear O Lord, my cry / Be attentive to my prayer / I will cry out to you from the ends of the earth when my heart is faint" (my translation; based on Psalm 61).
34. "God is here / As truly as the air that I breathe / As truly as the sun rises in the morning / As truly as when I speak God hears me / I can feel God when God is at my side / I can feel God in my heart" (my translation).
35. "Dios no está en un trono, sino a mi lado." *Testimonio* by Linda Castro, First Baptist Church of Caguas, Puerto Rico, September 26, 2010. Used with permission.
36. For an extended analysis of Habakkuk 2:4, see Loida I. Martell-Otero, "Liberating News: An Emerging U.S. Hispanic/Latina Soteriology of the Crossroads" (PhD dissertation, Fordham University, 2005), 371–72; Francis I. Andersen, *The Anchor Bible Commentary*, vol. 25, *Habakkuk* (New York: Doubleday, 2001), 198–215. See also Gutiérrez's discussion on the link between life, love, and justice in *God of Life*, 16–28.

37. Loida I. Martell-Otero, "From *Satas* to *Santas*: *Sobrajas* No More—Salvation in the Spaces of the Everyday," in *Latina Evangélicas*, 36. Also, Martell-Otero, "My GPS Does Not Work in Puerto Rico: An *Evangélica* Spirituality," *American Baptist Quarterly* 30, no. 3–4 (Fall–Winter 2011): 266.
38. Elizabeth Conde-Frazier, "Latina Women and Immigration," *Journal of Latin American Theology* 3, no. 2 (2008): 67–74.
39. Elizabeth Conde-Frazier, "Hispanic Protestant Spirituality," in *Teología en Conjunto: A Collaborative Hispanic Protestant Theology*, ed. José David Rodríguez and Loida I. Martell-Otero (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 139–40.
40. Ada María Isasi-Díaz, *La Lucha Continues: Mujerista Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2004), 95.
41. Fretheim, 260.
42. This metaphor of "Friend" also plays a liberating role among Korean women. See Choi Hee An, *Korean Women and God: Experiencing God in a Multi-Religious Colonial Context* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2005), 124–31.
43. Daisy L. Machado, "The Unnamed Woman: Justice, Feminists, and the Undocumented Woman," in *A Reader in Latina Feminist Theology: Religion and Justice*, ed. María Pilar Aquino, Daisy L. Machado, and Jeanette Rodríguez (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002), 166–69. Machado used a fictitious name to protect Elena's identity.
44. "The God of the masters is not the same" (my translation); José María Arguedas, cited by Gustavo Gutiérrez in "Revelación y Anuncio," in *La Fuerza Histórica de los Pobres: Selección de Trabajos* (Lima, Perú: CEP, 1979), 33.
45. Isaiah 49:15–16 (NRSV).
46. Justo L. González, *Mañana: Christian Theology from a Hispanic Perspective* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1992), 92.
47. Laura I. Rendón, *SentiPensante (Sensing/Thinking) Pedagogy: Educating for Wholeness, Social Justice, and Liberation* (Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing, 2009), 67. In Taíno culture, the words *yours* and *mine* do not exist. See José Alcina French, "La Cultura Taína Como Sociedad de Transición," in *La Cultura Taína*, ed. Las Culturas de América en la Época de Descubrimiento (Madrid: Turner Libros, 1989), 70. Note again the resonance with the concept of *Ubuntu* as described by Mnyaka and Motlhabi.
48. Zaida Maldonado Pérez, "The Trinity *Es y Son Familia*," in *Latina Evangélicas*, 52–71.
49. *Pueblo* can be translated as either "town" or "people" (i.e., those who inhabit a place). This demonstrates the conceptual link between place and relationality, as well as between community and personhood.
50. Zaida Maldonado Pérez, "The Trinity," in *Handbook of Latino/a Theologies*, ed. Edwin David Aponte and Miguel de la Torre (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2006), 36.
51. For more on the importance of "place" in Latina culture, see Martell-Otero, "My GPS Does Not Work in Puerto Rico." See also, Roger Friedland and Richard Hecht, "The Power of Place," in *Religion, Violence, Memory, and Place*, ed. Oren Baruch Stier and J. Shawn Landres (Bloomington: Indiana University Press,

2006), 17–36. In a real sense, in the United States, Latinas/os residing in *barrios* become "*hijas/os de crianza*" to each other, particularly so within ecclesial faith communities.

52. Catherine Mowry LaCugna, *God for Us: The Trinity and Christian Life* (Chicago: HarperSanFrancisco, 1992), 211–12, 221–23, 227–28.
53. Richard Twiss, "Living in Transition, Embracing Community, and Envisioning God's Trinitarian Mutuality: Reflections from a Native American Follower of Jesus," in *Remembering Jamestown: Hard Questions about Christian Missions*, ed. Amos Yong and Barbara Brown Zikmund (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2010).
54. In Spanish, there is a formal (*usted*) and an informal (*tu*) *you*, the latter often used for equals or for intimate friends.
55. Fretheim, 257.
56. Ivone Gebara, *Out of the Depths: Women's Experience of Evil and Salvation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), 149.
57. Franz-J Leendhardt, "La signification de la notion de parole dans la pensée chrétienne," *Revue d'histoire et de philosophie religieuses* 35, no. 3 (1955): 267.
58. John 14:1 (NRSV).

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CHAPTER 3

The Green Cross

The Green Tree and the Oppression of Nature

Sigridur Gudmarsdottir

Introduction

Feminist theologians have often asked whether a body on a cross serves as a helpful model to know and understand God.[1] Mary Daly argues that Christianity has turned the ancient fertility symbol of the tree of life into "a torture cross."[2] She criticizes the Christian tradition for "necrophilia" and states that it has more to do with "Christolatry" than Christology. Daly moreover accuses it of fixing women in a "Scapegoat Syndrome" because of their traditional roles of passivity and humility in the Western tradition.[3] Like Daly, many feminist theologians have criticized atonement theories and the Christian insistence on the cross. Grace Jantzen concurs with Daly and writes, "The western intellectual tradition is obsessed with death and other worlds, a violent obsession that is interwoven with masculinist drive for mastery."[4]

If many feminist theologians thus have a limited faith in the cross as a healthy Christian symbol, how should ecotheology and ecofeminist theology approach the cross? These theological perspectives are closely connected to feminist theology, but their particularity lies in reinterpreting the doctrines in light of the environmental challenge to all living beings. If Mary Daly classifies Christolatry as a torturing distortion of the life-giving tree of life, Rita Nakashima Brock offers a different perspective. Brock argues for an alternative Christology to the traditional death symbol, a different cross: "Many Christians today refuse a faith that asks us to be thankful for the torture and murder of Jesus Christ. We are accused of wanting a Pollyanna Christianity without the cross. I ask, what cross? The earliest images of the cross—dating back to the mid fourth century—symbolize resurrection, the tree of life, paradise in this world, and the transfiguration of the world by the Spirit. These crosses are not about sacrifice

or debt repayment."[5] Does Christology have anything to add to the knowledge of self and the oppression of nature? Do Christology and ecological and social justice have anything in common? Does the body dying on a cross in Christian symbolism have any symbolic and religious wisdom to contribute to the fight for the environment? Following the lead of Brock, one might ask whether ecotheology brings new insights to Christology and we thus need to bring back the different crosses. Such crosses must emphasize the "treeness" of the cross—that is to say, the relationship the cross has to actual trees. It must also emphasize the infusion of spirit and the importance of the ecological world we live in. These are the green, blooming crosses of Christianity.

This chapter maintains that ecological theology can bring new and fresh aspects to Christology. The cross as a green cross and the idea of the crucified body as a tree trunk is not new but rather forms an important trope in Christian mysticism. In this chapter, I would like to examine two short texts within the Christian tradition of green cross symbolism. The first of these is the mystical text *The Tree of Life* (*Lignum Vitae*), by the Franciscan Bonaventure (1221–74), which comprises 48 meditations on the life and death of Christ.[6] The second example comes from Hallgrímur Pétursson (1614–74), the most important religious poet of my native country, Iceland, who wrote 50 passion hymns called *Hymns of the Passion* (*Passíusálmar*), of which two hymns use the image of the green cross.[7] This chapter is divided into two sections. First, I would like to give a brief ecotheological discussion of the cross as a green cross. In the second section, I introduce the texts of Bonaventure and Pétursson through the criticism of ecological and feminist theologians discussed in the first section. My method is ecofeminist and ecocritical, and I hope to be able to show that the image of the body on the cross can bring forth important symbolic vocabulary for Christian environmental theology and activism.

Ecotheology: Trees, Wisdom, and Connection to Earth

Stefanie Kaza brings our attention to the twofold crucifixion of Jesus and the tree on which he hung at Golgotha. When faced with the ecocrisis that endangers the planet, Kaza tells her readers about the exhaustion, tiredness, and desperation with which she is often confronted. On a gloomy morning when the environmentalist can hardly get out of her bed, she is comforted by an unlikely ally. Her house comforts her, a house of wood: "The wood ceiling here is supported by two crossbeams and pillars. I look up at these beams often because the shape and design are compelling. They form a cross. I look at this cross of wood and imagine a person suspended, connected to the wood. The image of Jesus with downcast head and pierced hands and feet evokes a powerful response of

compassion. I can't help but identify with the human agony of his experience."[8] Kaza continues:

> But the cross was only a piece of a tree. Why didn't they nail him to a living tree? Perhaps that would have offered too much life force and spiritual strength. But also the tree represents intimacy; a cross speaks of exposure. This central religious story is about a crucifixion of a tree as much as a crucifixion of a person. The curving intimacy of the tree was symbolically replaced by the linear abstraction of the cross. This is the loss I feel—the living tree reduced to objectified pieces, the loss of life as it really is—vivid and unsimplifiable.

For Kaza, the tree symbolizes Jesus's connection to the earth and his fellowship with living beings. She argues that the linear structure into which the tree cross has been forced becomes a model for the environmental problems of today. Kaza's cross is not focused on death but posed as an organic symbol that connects the human body to the living tree. With such an interpretation, life and death are not antitheses but a worldview that holds together creation and destruction. Kaza's cross is not explained by anthropocentric and androcentric symbols, which so often characterize atonement theories (father and son, payer of ransom, the suffering man, the victorious man). Instead, the perspective is biocentric—the idea of one tree that calls forth the memory of other trees.

The connection of the cross to the earth in which it is situated is also dear to Matthew Fox. Fox maintains that the crucified Christ can be seen as a symbol of the crucified mother earth. Fox is no friend to patriarchy: "Patriarchal agendas and cultural presuppositions, patriarchal educational and religious institutions have left us all with maternal blood on our hands: The blood of Mother earth crucified, of mother brain atrophied, of mother wisdom dried up, and of mother church turned devouring parent."[9] Fox maintains that mother earth is innocent of any crime and blesses humans with water, flowers, animals, and other living beings. The resurrection for Fox thus symbolizes a connection to mother earth, which lives and rises in spite of her many wounds. Furthermore, Fox wants to connect Jesus to the image of the mother, because Jesus did so himself when he cried over Jerusalem and her children according to Luke 23:28–31:[10] "Jesus turned and said to them, 'Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me; weep for yourselves and for your children. For the time will come when you will say, "Blessed are the childless women, the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed!" . . . For if people do these things when the tree is green, what will happen when it is dry?'"

The cross of the mother can indeed be seen as a green earth-cross in the fashion of Fox. However, ecofeminists have also been wary of likening mother earth to mothers. They fear that when mothers are connected to earth, both

become portrayed as helpless victim. Instead, many feminists want to stress the agency of women. Stacy Alaimo writes, "Speaking for nature can be yet another form of silencing, as nature is *blanketed in the human voice.* Even a feminist voice is nonetheless human: representing cows as ruminating over the beauty of the mother-child bond no doubt says more about cultural feminism than it does about cows."[11]

Likewise, Chris Cuomo maintains that it is helpful to neither women nor nature to go willingly under the symbolic subjugation of the binary system of the Western tradition.[12] The classical dualism on which Western tradition is raised has femininity usually classified with body, chaos, the oblong, and the natural, whereas masculinity is paired with spirit, order, the straight line, and the cultural. The parallels of the oblong, bodily, and female in binary systems of Western thought go hand in hand with Kaza's earlier discussion of the green trees that have been forced into the linear form of the cross. Going back to the feminist criticism of Christology in the beginning of the article, many ecofeminist theologians are worried that if women who long have identified with the humble, sacrificial, and passive are symbolically nailed to the cross with mother nature, such Christological reconstructions will only serve to make the connections stronger between nature and women as passive, sacrificing, and without agency.[13]

Like Fox, Paula Gunn Allen looks for mother images, but it is not the tortured and suffering mother that is in focus. Allen writes about the connections between the body and mother earth: "The mortal body is a tree; it is holy in whatever condition; it is truth and myth because it has so many potential conditions; because of its possibilities, it is sacred and profane, most of all, it is your most precious talisman, your own connection to her."[14] Allen cites Ecclesiasticus 24:16–17 on the connection of body, divinity, and mother earth:

> I have spread my branches like a terebinth
> and my branches are glorious and graceful.
> I am like a vine putting out graceful shoots,
> my blossoms bear the fruit of glory and wealth.
> Approach me, you who desire me, and take your fill of my fruits.

If Allen has brought together the wisdom literature of the bible and the green cross, Celia Deane-Drummond discusses "deep incarnation," which for her is closely connected to the wisdom tradition. For Deane-Drummond, "deep incarnation" is based on wisdom or Word that became flesh and takes part in the evolution of life. For Deane-Drummond, wisdom suffers and redeems

creation; it is "crucified Wisdom." She connects "crucified Wisdom" to 1 Cor. 3 about the folly of the cross, which is the wisdom of God, and asks,

> What are the implications of considering God's Wisdom as crucified Wisdom? In the first place, as I hinted earlier, it qualifies any sense of our own sense of superiority over and above other creatures. Human wisdom can learn from creatures that are not like us. In the second place, it invites humanity to share in the suffering of the world through imitation of Christ . . .
>
> Crucified wisdom also paradoxically points to the value of all life but also its limitation. In other words, it helps us to face up to creaturely finitude.[15]

If Deane-Drummond has thus argued for "crucified Wisdom" as the folly of the cross that emphasizes finitude as a part of life, Jay McDaniel likewise speaks about Holy Wisdom in relation to two kinds of grace: "green and red grace." He identifies the former as an awareness of the beauty and fertility of earth, of which humans are a part but not the center or master. On the other hand, "red grace" for McDaniel is about acknowledging the pain and injustice that are present in human life because of violence and oppression. For McDaniel, the two kinds of grace need to be in balance:

> A Christian life that emphasizes red grace alone easily becomes morbid and neglectful of the presence of God in the rest of creation; a Christian life that emphasizes green grace alone easily forgets that all of us are in need of a Love that forgives us and loves us even amid our violence, a love that shares the burden of all suffering. Experientially, red grace and green grace balance each other. They are two sides of a grace-filled life, two sides of that wholeness into which each of us, as two-legged creatures on planet Earth, is called by Holy Wisdom.[16]

The balance between creaturely beauty and suffering is important to many liberation theologians. Several liberation theologians published the anthology *Getting the Poor Down from the Cross*, where the cover picture shows poor persons of both genders whom Jesus is helping down from the tree.[17] In the book, José Estermann discusses green crosses: *chakana* in the hills of the Andes, where Christianity and the ancient religion of the Incas go hand in hand. For Estermann, Christ as *chakana* represents a cosmic bridge between heaven and earth: "The cross as a universal *chakana* represented by an endless number of crosses on the tops of the hills, symbolizes one of the most important *theologoumena* of the Christian faith. God himself becomes a human being. Sky and earth are no longer totally separated, the human and the divine touch each other and communicate (in the sense of communion). The cross incarnates this bridge and symbolizes the deepest christological dogma: the integration of separate worlds,

the anticipation of 'cosmic reconciliation' between what which was once disconnected and disarticulated."[18] Estermann's Andean *chakana* points to the importance of the interesting connection of local Christianities to spiritualities of nature and folk religions. Likewise, Marju Kolivupuu has researched crosses that have been cut into ancient trees in Estonia in sacred groves. According to Kolivupuu, the sacred cross groves symbolize an ancient belief in the afterlife, where the souls of the dead live on in the trees. Kolivupuu maintains that the green cross trees in Estonia were systematically cut down under the Communist regime, and this ancient tradition of cutting crosses into trees changed from ancient funeral rites to a wider ritual of religious resistance. Since baptism was forbidden, crosses were cut in sacred groves for newly born children.[19] Thus, if Estermann's *chakanas* point to the contextual theologies of the Andean traditions, Kolivupuu brings our attention to green crosses that serve as important symbols of identity, belonging, folk tradition, and resistance to totalitarianism.

Bonaventure and Hallgrímur Pétursson

Having collected ecotheological wisdom and criticism concerning green crosses and addressed their connections to fundamental dogmas and biblical images, we turn to the texts of Bonaventure and Hallgrímur Pétursson. Both authors comment on Christ's passion according to Luke 13.

One of the most famous and influential works of Bonaventure was *Lignum Vitae*, or *The Tree of Life*.[20] It is based on the life of Christ and built on tree metaphors in the Bible, framed by the trees of the first and last books of the Bible. According to Genesis 1, the Garden of Eden had two significant trees: the tree of knowledge and the tree of life. Four wide rivers watered the garden. In Revelation, the narrator is shown the river of living water in the New Jerusalem. According to Rev. 22:1, the water of life shines as crystal, "flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city." A tree bears 12 kinds of fruits, "and the leaves of the trees are for the healing of the nations" (Rev. 22:2). For Bonaventure, the 12 fruits are symbols of 12 virtues that show aspects of the life and ministry of Jesus. Bonaventure argues that by meditating on the fruits of the tree, which for him represent the gospel stories of Jesus from his eternal begetting to resurrection, one can avoid the fallacy of Adam, who chose the tree of knowledge instead of the tree of life. By looking at the leaves, grace is "poured forth."[21] Bonaventure stresses that the quest for knowledge leads by way of the tree of life, not the other way around. As Ewert Cousins states in the introduction to *The Tree of Life*, "The passage into God is symbolized by the form of the Crucified."[22]

Bonaventure's tree is a body tree, where the suffering body of Jesus and the trunk of the tree are one. The goal of meditating on its fruit is to be nailed to the cross with Jesus—to be one with the body of Jesus in erotic and ecstatic unity described in the Song of Songs: "A bundle of myrrh is my beloved to me / he will linger between my breasts."[23] This tree of life (which is also Jesus) is bathed with fluids. The baby Jesus in Bonaventure's rendering is bathed in milk, circumcised, and washed in the river Jordan.[24] From the fourth fruit onward, the fluids flow from Jesus himself. Tears stream forth from his loving eyes, he gives out his blood and body at the Last Supper, drops of bloody sweat run from his entire body at Gethsemane, and the blood "from his sacred sides" flows down in the flagellation.[25] The only drink he is allowed is filled with bitterness, and finally the "Fountain of Life drie[s] up," when Jesus dies with "a loud cry and tears."[26] After death, he is pierced by a lance: "While blood mixed with water flowed, the price of our salvation was poured forth which gushing from the secret fountain of the heart gave power to the sacraments of the Church." Each fruit in Bonaventure's text is a description of imagery from the events of the life of Jesus. What most of these images have in common is fluidity. Bonaventure continues by stating that the flood of blood and water from the tree is "the river arising from the midst of paradise which divided into four branches and flowing into devout hearts, waters and makes fertile the whole earth."[27] The body was taken down from the cross dripping in blood and lain in a tomb, outside of which Mary Magdalene stood and bathed the tomb with her tears.[28]

According to Bonaventure, the green tree Christ is thus an ongoing crucifixion, which also gives life. This juxtaposition of life and death is formulated through neoplatonic metaphysics of flow, which was prevalent in medieval mystical traditions in the West.[29] Bonaventure's tree of life is a body tree, where the body has leaked into the tree and one can no longer make a distinction between the human and the nonhuman organic. The green, flowing tree of Bonaventure is floating in tears, sweat, and blood and functions as an ambiguous symbol of life and death. According to Bonaventure, the body of Christ needed to wither or dry up like a tree. "This most beautiful flower of the root of Jesse which had blossomed in the incarnation and withered in the passion thus blossomed again in the resurrection so as to become the beauty of all."[30]

Biblical references to the green withering tree can also be found in the most important literary achievement of the Lutheran orthodoxy in Iceland: Hallgrímur Pétursson's *Hymns of the Passion*, fifty hymns arranged to the passion of Christ. Pétursson stands firmly in the Lutheran mystical tradition of Paul Gerhardt and Martin Luther. There is, however, no obvious link between Bonaventure and Pétursson and no indication that Pétursson ever read Bonaventure. Pétursson starts his thirty-second hymn by creating an organic and female view

of the Christic drama. In the original Icelandic, the "noble tree" is portrayed as an oak tree, which takes the feminine gender in Icelandic. This green tree, which is Jesus, thus is referred to as a "she" in Pétursson's original hymn.

> Sweeter than honey to the taste—
> his gracious words and doctrine chaste.[31]

The hymn speaks about the incarnation of Christ as a green, noble, and well-watered oak tree that is loved by God and all living beings. The same metaphysical flow can be seen in Pétursson's noble tree and Bonaventure's *The Tree of Life*. From each branch, fruits of justice and healing leaves grow. Honey-like sap drips from the tree, and the sap is described as a "fluid of grace."[32] Pétursson in fact starts his discussion about the green tree in hymn 31, where Christ preaches to the women about barren wombs and "the breasts that never mothered."[33]

The unsuckled breasts and the withered tree are connected in Pétursson's imagery. Likewise, the fertile womb and the breasts flowing with milk are reminiscent of the watered green tree. Once again we find maternal images connected to the mystical tree: breasts, wombs, flowing nutrition, tears, images of femininity at the heart of Christology. In the fourth verse of hymn 32, things go badly for the green tree. Another tree has popped up on the horizon: a withered, ugly tree that bears the fruits of injustice. In Pétursson's hymn, this tree signifies humanity. The fruits of injustice coming from the tree pollute the earth, and God decides to fell the tree. The green tree asks for mercy for the evil one, so instead the fertile tree is shaken and punished by the angry storm of God. The sap of the healthy tree seems to fall on the withered tree, and thus the human being lives on by borrowed sap, like a child on its mother's milk. "That hapless tree, all parched and dried / revived, when on a tree He died."[34]

In the green atonement of Pétursson, the anthropocentric domestic-violence model of the angry dad and the obedient son is not present. Neither does the economic model of the debtor, the lender, and the ransom show up. Instead we find the storm of the Lutheran Orthodoxy, which blasts and shakes the tree. This botanic image of the atonement is a testimony of rural existence in difficult weather conditions. Like the green crosses of the Andes and the sacred cross groves of Estonia, such images are connected to place. They are rooted in earth, in particular localities, conditions of weather, landscape, culture, and politics. Pétursson's image of the tree that withers so that another tree may live resembles Bonaventure's in *The Tree of Life*. The human body and the trunk of the tree are one, and the "fluid of grace" (the sap nourishing the believer) produces an image that is both motherly and organic.[35]

Conclusion

"What cross?" asks Brock before she calls for the earliest crosses of Christianity, which point to "resurrection, the tree of life, paradise in this world, and the transfiguration of the world by the Spirit." Most ecotheologians are also looking for perspectives of the Christian faith that focus on this life rather than the afterlife. As we have seen, the tree of life is present in many such contemporary ecotheological texts. Mark I. Wallace writes,

> In the Christian story, the cross is green. It is green because Jesus's witness on the cross is to a planet where all of God's children are bearers of life-giving Spirit. It is green because the goodness of creation is God's here-and-now dwelling place where everyday life is charged with sacred presence and power . . . The kingdom of God is in our midst. In the power of the green cross, our task is to realize the gospel truth that this sacred Earth is God's kingdom where the vital needs of all God's children are to be met with compassion and integrity.[36]

In the light of Wallace's claim that the Christian cross is necessarily green because it needs to focus on the needs of God's children, one might also question the mystical crosses of Bonaventure and Pétursson, which I have examined in the preceding section. Do the living trees of Bonaventure and Pétursson signify the same kind of necrophilia that Jantzen and Daly have warned us against? Or is there something important to be had from these trees, floating with water and sap, for a theological perspective attuned to the ecocrises of today? Does the Christian tradition of green trees offer anything more than what Daly calls "Christolatry"?

Bonaventure and Pétursson both draw parallels between biocentric and cosmic relations between the human and the tree. The floating fruits in the mystical texts, which carry the spiritual and bodily nourishment of humans, are symbolically linked to the water on which earth and all life depends. The same can be said about the themes of motherhood in Pétursson and Bonaventure's trees: themes of milk and nourishment that are ambiguous for many ecofeminists. The 12 fruits of Bonaventure's tree are linked to the wisdom tradition of the Bible, which offers many points of contact with ecotheology. The fruit in Bonaventure's rendering reveal the life of Jesus from Nazareth as the book of wisdom: "where the Father has hidden all treasures of wisdom and knowledge." Moreover, this book is not read from pages but rather from the trunk and branches of a tree.

From a more pessimistic point of view, one might say that "the red and green grace" that McDaniel pointed out are seriously unbalanced in both texts. There is tremendous stress on blood, death, sin, and pain in the tree depictions

of Bonaventure and Pétursson. The red grace of suffering outweighs the green grace, which in turn may lead to necrophilia and lack of concern for creation. As Daly and Jantzen remind us in their campaign against necrophilia, the heightened focus on suffering as an ideal runs the risk of losing interest in particularities so that it no longer links to the suffering of women, men, children, animals, and trees. The red grace of crucifixion can thus turn into something given and unchangeable, instead of unmasking the injustice that people should fight against. The point is not that suffering should not be addressed but rather that in some forms of Christology, suffering has lost its reference. Thus, in my view, the mystical texts of Bonaventure and Pétursson bring us important symbolic language, "deep incarnation" in Deane-Drummond words, filled to the brim with biblical imagery and nourished through the mystical traditions of Christian history. However, the incarnate images of medieval mysticism and the Lutheran orthodoxy are also ambiguous and need to be recycled and balanced in red and green grace in a good environmental fashion.

In order for humans to change their ways and save the planet, an enormous change of heart and values needs to take place. The symbols of faith are important factors in helping these transformations to take place, because so many of us use and wrestle with these ancient keys in order to understand and express the world and values that we live by. One such key is the power of the green cross of Holy Wisdom. By reading the medieval mysticism of Bonaventure and the Lutheran orthodox Christology of Pétursson through the lenses of ecotheology, I have begun to draw out some verdant potentials of feminist ecotheological Lutheranism of the green cross. This tree is both old and new; it holds up our ceilings with its cross-structured beams and proclaims the tidings of Ecclesiasticus: "Approach me, you who desire me, and take your fill of my fruits."

Notes

1. See Arnfríður Guðmundsdóttir, *Meeting God on the Cross: Christ, Cross and the Feminist Critique* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), for an overview of feminist criticism of Christology.
2. Mary Daly, *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism, with a New Intergalactic Introduction by the Author* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1990), 79.
3. Mary Daly, *Beyond God the Father: Toward a Philosophy of Women's Liberation, with an Original Reintroduction by the Author* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1985), 60–62, 69–97.
4. Grace, Jantzen, *Becoming Divine: Towards a Feminist Philosophy of Religion* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), 129. See also Joanna Carlson Brown and Rebecca Parker, "For God So Loved the World?" in *Violence against Women and Children: A Christian Theological Sourcebook*, ed. Carol Adams and

Marie M. Fortune (New York: Continuum, 1995), 36–59, for feminist criticism of atonement theories.

5. Rita Nakashima Brock, "The Question of the Cross in 'Good' Friday," *Huffington Post*, June 1, 2010, accessed July 2, 2014, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/rita-nakashima-brock-ph-d/on-good-friday-did-god-us_b_519347.html.
6. Bonaventure, *The Soul's Journey into God, The Tree of Life, The Life of St. Francis*, ed. Ewert Cousins (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1978).
7. Hallgrímur Pétursson, *Hymns of the Passion: Meditations of the Passion of Christ*, trans. Arthur Charles Gook (Reykjavík: Hallgríms Church, 1978).
8. Stephanie Kaza, "House of Wood," in *This Sacred Earth: Religion, Nature, Environment*, ed. Roger S. Gottlieb (London: Routledge, 1996), 42.
9. Matthew Fox, *The Coming of the Cosmic Christ: The Healing of Mother Earth and the Birth of Global Renaissance* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1983), 33–34.
10. Ibid., 145.
11. Cited in Celia Deane-Drummond, *Ecotheology* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 2008), 149.
12. Chris Cuomo, *Feminism and Ecological Communities: An Ethic of Flourishing* (London: Routledge, 1998), 136.
13. See more on ecofeminist criticism equating earth and mothers in Sigridur Gudmarsdottir, "Rapes of Earth and Grapes of Wrath: Steinbeck, Apocalypticism and the Metaphor of Rape," *Feminist Theology: The Journal of the Britain & Ireland School of Feminist Theology*, 18 (January 2010): 206–22.
14. Paula Gunn Allen, "The Woman I Love Is a Planet: The Planet I Love Is a Tree," in *This Sacred Earth*, 367.
15. Celia Deane-Drummond, *Wonder and Wisdom: Conversations in Science, Spirituality and Theology* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 2010), 127, 129.
16. Jay McDaniel, *With Roots and Wings: Christianity in an Age of Ecology and Dialogue* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1995), 58.
17. José Maria Vigil, ed., *Getting the Poor down from the Cross: Christology of Liberation* (International Association of Third World Theologians, EATWOT, 2007), 111, accessed July 4, 2014, http://www.servicioskoinonia.org/LibrosDigitales/LDK/EATWOTGettingThePoorDown.pdf.
18. José Estermann, "Jesus Christ as Chakana: Outline of an Andean Christology of Liberation," in Vigil, 111.
19. Marju Kolivupuu, "Natural Sacred Places in Landscape: An Estonian Model," in *Nature, Space and the Sacred: Transdisciplinary Perspectives*, ed. S. Bergmann et al. (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009).
20. Bonaventure, *The Soul's Journey into God, The Tree of Life, The Life of St. Francis*, ed. Ewert Cousins (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1978).
21. Ibid., 122.
22. Ewert Cousins, "Introduction," in Bonaventure, 35.
23. Bonaventure, 122.
24. Ibid., 129, 133.
25. Ibid., 137, 139, 142, 146.
26. Ibid., 152–53.
27. Ibid., 155.

28. Ibid., 156, 158.
29. See Carolyn Walker Bynum for the symbolic medieval ambiguity of blood as life-giving and life-threatening in *Wonderful Blood: Theology and Practice in Late Medieval Northern Germany and Beyond* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), 153–92.
30. Bonaventure, 160.
31. Pétursson, *Hymns of the Passion*, 138.
32. The designation of the sap as "fluid of grace" comes from the original version of the *Hymns of the Passion* in Icelandic. See Hallgrímur Pétursson, *Passíusálmarnir* (Reykjavík: Hallgrímskirkja, 1991), 180.
33. Pétursson, *Hymns of the Passion*, 135.
34. Ibid., 140.
35. The designation of the sap as "fluid of grace" comes from the original version of the *Hymns of the Passion* in Icelandic, see Hallgrímur Pétursson, *Passíusálmarnir* (Reykjavík: Hallgrímskirkja, 1991), 180.
36. Mark I. Wallace, *Green Christianity: Five Ways to a Sustainable Future* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010), 38–39.

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CHAPTER 4

Ecological Evil, Evolution, and the Wisdom of God

Reimagining Redemption for Ecofeminist Religious Practice in an Age of Global Ecocide

Hilda P. Koster

Over the last thirty years or so, ecofeminist theologians have criticized the hierarchical dualism pervading Western Christian thought as the root of the oppression of both women and nonhuman nature. In order to overcome Christian dualism, these theologians have envisioned an incarnational theology that embraces women, nature, and the body not just as good but as revelatory of the sacred. This shift toward divine immanence is typically accompanied by a this-worldly account of redemption centering on fostering peaceful, just, and sustainable communities between women and men as well as between humans and the rest of nature. Not surprisingly, therefore, ecofeminist theology has not only made a significant contribution to both feminist and ecological theology but also importantly informed "green" religious grassroots women's movements, such as that of the "Green Sisters" in the United States and the women's collective *Con-Spirando* of Latin America.[1]

Yet in spite of its critical, imaginative, and practical appeal, ecofeminist theology has *itself* been criticized by postmodern feminists and environmental ethicists. Postmodern feminists have argued that ecofeminist theology operates with an essentialist notion of gender in so far as it suggests that women are inherently "more natural" than men and that interdependence is a particularity of the feminine psyche.[2] In addition, environmental ethicist Lisa Sideris has blamed ecofeminist theologians for failing to take into account the insights of evolutionary theory. In her widely acclaimed study *Environmental Ethics, Ecological Theology and Natural Selection*, Sideris insists that ecofeminist theologians

operate with a highly romanticized picture of nonhuman nature that downplays the violence and suffering intrinsic to evolutionary processes.[3] In addition, Sideris claims that when ecofeminists acknowledge suffering as part of nature, they tend to extend a love ethic toward nonhuman nature that aims at eliminating suffering and resolving conflict. Unfortunately, such an ethics typically fails to fully appreciate the role of strife and conflict in maintaining the vitality of biotic communities.[4]

Given that many of the green grassroots practices by religious women are inspired by ecofeminist theology, these criticisms are rather serious. After all, if it is the case that women are led by a wrongheaded communitarian ideal that extends love and compassion to nonhuman nature, much of the earth ministry by religious women might be ineffective at best and counterproductive at worst. Moreover, because ecofeminist theology seeks to articulate an earth-centered soteriology that takes physical, embodied existence seriously, accusations of selective use of evolutionary science hurt. In fact, as Heather Eaton has pointed out in her book *Introducing Eco-Feminist Theologies*, ecofeminist theologians *themselves* generally agree that much of the reluctance to address the ecological crisis stems from a prior reluctance among theologians to think about evolution.[5] Such a refusal is symptomatic of Christianity's struggle to accept the finite condition of life—epitomized by its otherworldly notion of redemption—which ecofeminists insist is at the basis of the domination of women and the earth. For this reason, they claim to ground their theology within the earth sciences, with evolutionary theory prominent among them.

This chapter explores the notions of nature, redemption, and ecological evil in ecofeminist theology against the background of these observations and conundrums. It is important to note at the outset, however, that notwithstanding the proclaimed importance of evolution for ecofeminist theology, I do not suggest that developing a theology of evolution or solving theological riddles raised by so called "natural evil" should be the *main* purpose of an ecofeminist theology.[6] Ecofeminist theology seeks to address the myriad ways the exploitation of nature and women are interconnected. Its main focus, therefore, is with the cultural-symbolic and social-economic structures reproducing the dual oppression of nature and women. More specifically, ecofeminist theologians want to *name* the structural injustices of poverty, sexism, racism, colonialism, and environmental degradation as ecological evil.

Moreover, because ecofeminist theology writes itself as part of a cultural-symbolic tradition that has often denied nature ultimate significance—constructing nature in opposition to grace—and identified women and female sexuality with matter, ecofeminist theologians do not want to give up on their matter-affirming construct of nature in the name of evolution.[7] Yet while

embracing nature as revelatory of the sacred is of *strategic* importance to ecofeminist theology, an idealized notion of nature may end up reinforcing Christianity's longstanding ambivalence toward nature and finite existence. For if ecofeminist theologians can embrace nature only when it is purged from its morally ambivalent aspects, ecofeminists are at best embracing nature partially. More specifically, they risk identifying God and the sacred only with those aspects of nature that reflect their idealized account of reality.

This chapter therefore argues in favor of a different, less idealized notion of women and nature, which I believe can be found in the theologies of Ivone Gebara and Catherine Keller and most recently Elizabeth A. Johnson's theological engagement with Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* in her book *Ask the Beasts: Darwin and the God of Love*.[8] I will demonstrate that their respective theologies allow for a soteriology that strikes a balance between the insight that the nonhuman world operates according to laws and powers that often run against human sensibilities—an insight offered by evolutionary science—and an ecofeminist intuition that demonizing the physical vulnerabilities of finite life is at the root of the oppression of women and nature. The purpose of this exercise is to demonstrate that a less idealized notion of nature leads these thinkers to a more inclusive soteriology—a soteriology that is able to affirm the vulnerability and chaos of finite, embodied existence more radically.

Whereas Gebara, Keller, and Johnson all pursue a more tragic vision of reality, only Johnson anchors her soteriology in "high" Christology. Like most other ecofeminist theologians—most notably Rosemary Radford Ruether and Sallie McFague—Gebara and Keller have little use for Christology, in spite of the fact that they do see Jesus's ministry as paradigmatic for the shape of God's redemptive love in the world. It seems to me, however, that in order to draw out the cosmic scope of the incarnation, ecofeminist soteriology cannot do without a Christology that is centered in the assumption of Jesus by the Word. To this end, the final part of my chapter articulates the promise Elizabeth Johnson's work on wisdom Christology holds for an ecofeminist soteriology.[9] Bringing together Johnson's earlier feminist work on wisdom Christology with her more recent writing on evolution and cosmic Christology, I will argue in favor of combining wisdom Christology with a notion of "deep incarnation" as a way of articulating a truly *inclusive* soteriology.[10] Drawing on both "deep incarnation" and the wisdom of the cross, I further suggest that wisdom Christology allows us to envision an *earthly* soteriology that urges us to embrace the finite character of life more fully, finding in it new possibilities for life.

The Case against Ecofeminist Theology

Because Sideris's critique of ecofeminist theology is an important impetus for the arguments developed in this chapter, I will begin by briefly evaluating her case against ecofeminist theology, including the questions it raises about what counts as ecological evil. Concentrating mainly on North American theologians Rosemary Radford Ruether and Sallie McFague, Sideris argues that ecofeminist theologians can accept nature only when either omitting the insights offered by natural selection or rendering natural selection harmless. The latter is the case, she believes, with Ruether's account of nature in her book *Gaia and God: An Ecofeminist Theology of Earth Healing*.[11] Ruether insists that in order to overcome the domination and oppression of nature by human beings, we should model our relationships with each other and the earth after biotic communities. Whereas the human community is characterized by competition and an inclination toward destruction and domination, nonhuman ecological communities are regulated by the laws of interdependence and cooperation. Faced with evolutionary theory's claim that nature is violent and destructive, Ruether chooses to interpret this aspect of nature as "a process aimed at community existence and cooperation."[12] According to Sideris, Ruether thus ends up romanticizing nature: unlike competition in the human community, competition in nature is a form of "cooperation" and serves to maintain the community of life. The potentially unpleasant and (from a human point of view) ethically problematic aspects of nature are modified or deemphasized.[13]

Whereas Ruether renders natural selection harmless, Sideris believes that Sallie McFague ends up eliminating the insights of natural selection altogether, in spite of her own claim that she takes evolution seriously. McFague has argued in favor of a metaphorical theology that seeks to offer nondualistic, nonhierarchal models or metaphors for conceiving the relationship between God, humans, and nature. Most notably, she suggests we view the world as God's body and reenvision nature and its inhabitants as subjects in a subject–subject relationship. It is essential to McFague's theological method, moreover, that the models we use to talk about God and world are commensurate with the picture of reality offered by contemporary science, which she agrees is informed by evolutionary and ecological science. However, as Sideris observes, notwithstanding her own claims, McFague barely integrates the key insights of evolutionary science. Indeed, McFague identifies evolution rather narrowly with the survival of the fittest and insists that this negative picture of nature has now been overruled by an ecological perspective that sees kinship, interdependence, and relationality as the more dominant features of nature.[14]

Like Ruether, then, McFague's theology fails to embrace the fact that conflict, predation, and competition are part of the vitality of nature. While not

completely inaccurate, her account of nature is incomplete at best. For Sideris, this has led to a misguided environmental ethics. Viewing nature as a subject in its own right, McFague extends a love ethics toward nature that aims to secure the physical well-being of each and every creature, especially creatures in need. According to Sideris, however, the ecological community does not aim for the good of each individual within that community. Although a human model of community may entail care for the health and well-being of each individual, nature does not. In nature, the health and wholeness of all beings simply cannot be maintained simultaneously: some beings survive at the expense of others. For this reason, wildlife management often has a "triage approach," directing attention away from the neediest and most imperiled organisms in order to allow limited resources to be applied to preserving species that are more likely to survive.[15]

Soteriological Implications

Sideris's criticism of ecofeminist theology raises important questions about the role of evolutionary theory in ecofeminist theology and what counts as ecological evil. I agree that Ruether and McFague use the insights offered by evolutionary science rather selectively and play up the interdependence and harmony of nature too much. At the same time, it is important to note that wilderness preservation and wildlife management are not the main frame of reference for an ecofeminist theology and ethics. While ecofeminists' grassroots activism does involve tree planting, organic farming, and the preservation of rainforest, ecofeminist involvement with sustainable agriculture and reforestation are borne out of a concern for ecojustice.[16] As ecofeminist theologians of the Global South remind us, ecofeminism is situated in the daily lives of poor women for whom a concern with bodily well-being is not misplaced communitarian romanticism but stems from a daily struggle for survival.[17] Thus Ivone Gebara, who constructs her theology in part from the day-to-day life struggles of poor women in the slums of Recife in Northeastern Brazil, states that "eco-feminism is born of daily life, of day-to-day sharing among people, of enduring together garbage in the streets, bad smells, the absence of sewers and safe drinking water, poor nutrition, and a lack of adequate health care."[18]

As I observed in the introduction to this chapter, moreover, Sideris fails to fully appreciate that ecofeminist theology writes itself as part of a cultural-symbolic tradition that has often depreciated woman, the body, and nature. Indeed, salvation has been seen as a salvation *from* nature, not as salvation *of* nature. This has proven to be detrimental to women, who, because of their role in childbearing, have been identified with the realm of matter and hence as being closer to nature than men. Given this context, ecofeminist theologians

have stressed the radical inclusivity of the incarnation, claiming that the incarnation is not limited to the figure of Jesus of Nazareth, saintly humans, or the church but rather is a paradigm for the way God is present in the world: "in and through *all* bodies, the bodies of the sun and moon, trees, and rivers, animals, and people."[19] An ecofeminist account of the incarnation thus intensifies divine immanence for the purpose of claiming that *all* reality is included in divine redemption. The problem is, however, that in so far as ecofeminist theologians identify God only with those elements that reflect their own idealized notion of nature, their theology jeopardizes the radical immanence of the divine and hence the inclusivity of the incarnation and divine redemption. As the axiom of the early church goes, "What is not included is not redeemed."[20] Ecofeminist theologians further tend to project an eschatological vision that views redemption as the restoration of the entire world to one in which none flourishes at the expense of others.[21] Thus McFague quotes Irenaeus claiming that the glory of God is every creature fully alive.[22] Positively, this account of redemptive hope does include all reality. Yet as long as it hopes for a world in which there is no longer suffering or death as the result of starvation, predation, or parasitism, McFague is simply hoping for a finite world stripped of mortality. Not only is such a world really hard to imagine; it is also difficult to see how it would be truly, fully alive.

The task then is to write theologically of nature and redemptive hope in a way that does not romanticize the suffering and violence in nature nor see it as a problem to be overcome. At this point, Johnson's study *Ask the Beasts* is an important corrective to the account offered by Ruether and McFague. The aim of Johnson's study is to create a constructive dialogue between Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* and the Nicene Creed. Such a dialogue, she believes, is a much needed corrective to a Christian faith that has often been neglectful of nonhumans. Johnson's rendering of Darwin's account of evolution neither romanticizes evolution nor focuses solely on the harsh sides of natural selection. Indeed, although Johnson acknowledges that nature's rich diversity, complexity, and interdependence comes about through struggle, suffering, and death and is often random, wasteful, and cruel, she stresses at the same time that "glorious life arises and is renewed in the midst of its perpetual perishing."[23] To Johnson, the carrying metaphor for Darwin's account of evolution, therefore, is not natural selection or struggle for existence but rather that of the "entangled bank" with which Darwin opens the final paragraph of *On the Origin of Species* and in which he celebrates the ecological richness of a river bank.[24]

Yet while Johnson's engagement with evolution seems to answer Sideris's complaint concerning the lack of serious attention to evolution, hers is not an ecofeminist work in an explicit kind of way. Although Johnson's project

is informed by her feminist and ecological commitments, her study is first and foremost a theology of evolution. Hence, in what follows I will draw out renderings of nature, ecology, and redemption in the writings by Ivone Gebara and Catherine Keller, who, while not writing explicitly about evolution, give two examples of an ecofeminist soteriology that fully embraces nature's contingencies—including its moral ambiguities.

Out of Chaos

Writing as a Brazilian ecofeminist liberationist theologian, Gebara insists that at the root of the environmental crisis is the refusal to accept the finite conditions of life by a privileged minority. Our primal or cardinal sin is not a disobedience that caused us to fall into mortality; our primal sin lies in the effort to transcend the finite conditions of our lives. The latter is a fall into evil in so far as it has allowed a global elite class to dominate and exploit other humans and the earth. Although Gebara agrees that women have been seen as representing man's finite origins and hence have been subject to exploitation, she is adamant that the basic issue for an ecofeminist theology "has nothing much to do with sacralizing the world of nature or the world of women."[25] To her mind, "human beings, animals, and nature in general can be a source of either destruction or creation; in all of them death and life are intertwined in a way that attests to the inseparability of these two poles."[26]

On the one hand, then, Gebara views the human evil of domination and exploitation of humans and the earth by a privileged minority as ecological evil. On the other hand, she recognizes that this evil is part of a larger creative-destructive force that is at the core of the universe. The latter evil, which she calls "cosmic evil," is everywhere: not just in tornados and violent storms but even within ourselves. While this evil is frightening, it does at the same time bear "the extraordinary creative possibilities for the unfolding of our sensitivities and the opening of our inner being to that which is beyond ourselves." In other words, rather than thinking within hierarchical dualisms that pitch good over and against evil, life over and against death, and men over and against women, Gebara portrays *all* reality as made up of "the same energy—an energy that is both positively and negatively charged."[27]

Gebara's nondualistic cosmology critically informs her understanding of redemption. She defends a radical incarnational theology that fuses the triune God with the life-giving energy that is at the core of the universe. Redemption stems from our connectedness with this sustaining, redeeming matrix of cosmic, planetary, and personal life. Like Ruether and McFague, then, Gebara views our connectedness with all other life-forms as redemptive. Yet because

she views the sacred energy of life at the core of cosmos as both positively and negatively charged, she understands that the community of life is fraught with tragedy and death. In so far as this tragedy and death are part and parcel of the vitality of finite existence, they are in and of themselves not a problem in need of redemption; they are included in God, who as the triune God is the immanent source of life. What does need to be overcome, however, is the system of distortion that enables a privileged class to insulate itself from want at the expense of the poor and the earth—isolating both victims and victimizers from the web of life. For this reason, Gebara rejects the myth of a perfect origin without suffering and death as well as an eschatological future where suffering and death are overcome. To her mind, Christian eschatology (even when articulated in historical, this-worldly categories) has often legitimized our culture's escapism of finite vulnerability and hence has blocked our real possibilities.

Gebara's vision of redemption resonates with the poststructural, process theology of Catherine Keller. Writing from a North American context, Keller agrees that the problem underlying the environmental crisis is a fundamental disconnection with the physical reality of life. She also concurs that insulating ourselves from discomfort and vulnerability is a luxury of a privileged minority. Indeed, Keller asks, "Who benefits from a relationship of distance from the rest of creation? Who profits from the so-called transcendence of nature? . . . Who can afford to experience nature as banal, outside of immediate bonds of dependency upon weather conditions?"[28] Accordingly, Keller is skeptical about any form of gender essentialism. Although she agrees that disconnect of nature has translated itself into a fear and even hatred of women and female sexuality, she rejects the notion that women have a greater capacity for relating to nature than men. Indeed, she praises Judith Butler for radically deconstructing "any residual notion of a given gender, of a natural femininity, of a fixed set of heterosexual characteristics."[29] Certain notions of nature simply are not worth rescuing. Yet this is not the same as denying the material base for our signifying practices. While Keller agrees that we access our bodies by way of our cultural significations, we are not the pure products of culture but have some power to resist the cultures that interpret us. The body is not mute: the sick, alienated bodies of the earth—human and nonhuman—do testify to our unjust, unsustainable signifying practices.

Like Gebara, then, Keller agrees that the task before us is neither to deny nor to idealize women's embodied life's experiences but to write of an alternative "nature" altogether. To this end, Keller finds herself inspired by process metaphysics—most notably the process philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead. Process metaphysics sees all reality as fundamentally interconnected: every event is made possible by a complex interconnection of antecedent events.

Yet while there is a basic ecological sensibility to process thought, it does not romanticize nature's interdependence. According to process metaphysics, reality is always in the process of becoming, which involves disorder and hence suffering. Evil and suffering, then, are part and parcel of the world's vitality: discord is what propels reality toward greater complexity, increasing the possibility for good but also for suffering.[30]

Keller's book *Face of the Deep: A Theology of Becoming* builds on this insight of process thought and writes of a creation "out of the watery deep" (*ex profundis*), which embraces chaos and disorder as a prerequisite for novelty.[31] Divine redemption is situated within this creative process, though not as a linear movement that progressively leads to a future *eschaton* but as a *helical* process in which the old is taken up in the new. Keller judges that the linear scheme of salvation history, especially when held in place by an absolute, noncontingent origin—a Creator *ex nihilo*—masks a pervasive cultural fear of the chaos or deep (*tehom*) of Genesis 1:2, for which she has coined the term *tehomophobia*. Indeed, she argues that it is this fear that has energized Western Christianity to demonize the complex messiness of finite existence.[32] For "from the vantage point of the colonizing episteme, the evil is always disorder rather than unjust order, anarchy, rather than control, darkness rather than pallor."[33]

Yet while Keller proposes we retrieve the deep as that from which novelty is born, she does not romanticize chaos or disorder. Rather, she urges us to "bear with the chaos. Not to like it or foster it, but to recognize *there* the unformed future." Keller observes that other than the purified *ex nihilo*, this account of creativity resonates with the Biblical tradition, in which there is both a love and a fear for the deep. At times, the chaos, personified as Leviathan or the sea monster, is slain by God; at other times, God blesses the chaos. Yet even within the chaos-loving tradition, the deep is not uncritically celebrated. Rather, the sea monster gets "poetically rebuked," or held back, so that "any creative work may be wrestled as it must be with all our creations, from chaos."[34]

According to Keller, therefore, the deep of Genesis 1:2 is neither divine nor God-forsaken. Hers is an *apophatic* panentheism that situates the deep *within* God as that which is *not* God. Drawing on the curious fact that Genesis 1:1 uses the plural *Elohim* for the God-name together with the single form of the verb *bara* (create), Keller observes, first of all, that Jewish cosmology allows for a plurality in God. The Creator God appears to be marked by difference. This difference takes the form of a negation: there is "not-God within God."[35] Following medieval Jewish mysticism, most notably the *Zohar*, Keller further suggests that God simultaneously creates and is created from that which is *not* God *within* God. Indeed, this seems to be the significance of the fact that the Hebrew places the verb *before* the noun.[36] Like Whitehead's God, then, the Hebrew God is a

becoming God. Yet while Keller's panentheism situates all becoming in God and God in all becoming, becoming itself is not divine. Instead, she insists that the divine reality is utterly mysterious—always exceeding our comprehension. We can discern this divine mystery in the evolutionary processes of our unfolding world, but we can never fully comprehend it/him/her.

Keller's *apophatic* panentheism thus traces God in the world's becoming without divinizing the world's creative processes. Yet because the deep is within God, all becoming can be said to be enfolded within the divine presence. This has important implications for her soteriology. On the one hand, Keller endorses John Cobb Jr.'s idea of creation as an interactive process between God as the initial aim or lure and the creatures responding to that lure. The divine decision *for* creation is always *in* and *through* us. Within this scheme, redemption is about a God moving in *Eros* (creative love) and moved by *Agape* (responsive love). On the other hand, Keller insists that although we are pressed to respond to the lure and the possibilities it opens up, we will be enfolded in God's loving aim whether or not we choose to actualize it. God's lure graciously opens up new possibilities where we may not have seen any. Redemption, then, is a mystery in process: it is neither something we do on our own nor something that is done for us.

Like Gebara, moreover, Keller agrees that although the natural processes of life are rigged with death, violence, and suffering, they are rich in potentiality for new actualities. As such, they are themselves not in need of redemption. They are, however, included within God's love. Drawing out the wisdom of 2 Corinthians 12:9, Keller argues in favor of "an incarnational vulnerability."[37] The power of the cross is the power of a God who is *in* or *with* all our creaturely sensitivity and pain. Yet while it is this love that lures good from evil wherever and whenever possible, God does not simply call forth "a universe of irrevocable open-ended-ness, indeterminacy, and freedom."[38] If God's power is a power that enables life, this power is recast as "enabling to be."[39] On a cosmic scale, this means that God's love opens up a space of becoming, which is neither rampant disorder nor imposed order. Rather, it takes us to the edge of chaos without plunging us into the abyss.

The Wisdom of God

So far I have sought to demonstrate that Gebara and Keller outline an ecofeminist theology that can embrace finite, physical existence as revelatory of the ultimate meaning of our existence without idealizing nature or giving up on a concern with social-economic justice. Their nuanced exposition of the chaos and vulnerability of finitude opens up the possibility for a truly immanent

theology in which indeed all is included in God and God is in all things. Gebara and Keller are further adamant that the death, violence, and suffering intrinsic to nature as nature are not in need of redemption, though nature does need to be redeemed from anthropogenic destruction. Gebara and Keller do not, however, ground their soteriology in the assumption of Jesus by the Word or the second person of the trinity. This is not to say that Christology is completely irrelevant to them—indeed, both Gebara and Keller refer to the Jesus of the synoptic gospels as a teacher of a subversive wisdom—but rather that they are wary of the way the absolutes of Christological doctrine have often stifled the testimonies to Jesus in the gospels in the lives of poor women struggling for survival and in the cosmos at large.[40] Keller and Gebara do insist, however, that the wisdom revealed in Jesus is paradigmatic for God's way with the world. Thus Gebara suggests that we see Jesus as symbol or "a collective construct representing a way of life of mutual self-giving and life sustaining life."[41] Although revealed in Jesus's life, the wisdom of mutual self-giving is not limited to this particular life but can be found throughout the cosmos. Along similar lines, Keller explains that Jesus teaches the wisdom of the common wealth—the *basileia thou theou*—which is about an abundant life that is generously shared with all, especially with the stranger, the immigrant, and the enemy. Following process theology, Jesus is seen as the perfect embodiment of the divine wisdom or lure. Keller insists, however, that this embodiment is not a metaphysical given: the materialization of the divine becoming takes place "not just in Jesus but always and everywhere."[42]

Yet while Gebara and Keller insist that the incarnation is not limited to Jesus, it is hard to see how their "low" Christology can do the work of drawing out the cosmic implications of the incarnation. I believe, therefore, that their respective soteriological visions would benefit from Johnson's retrieval of wisdom Christology. Drawing on the work done by ecological theologian Denis Edwards, Johnson demonstrates that wisdom Christology is an important route for articulating the cosmic scope of the incarnation. To this end, she suggests we combine wisdom Christology with the idea of "deep incarnation"—an idea first articulated by the Lutheran theologian Niels Gregersen.[43] When viewed in light of the wisdom of the cross, "deep incarnation" allows for an inclusive soteriology that fully affirms the finite character of created existence—including its tragic ambiguity.

First of all, however, it is important to be reminded that within the Hebrew Scriptures, the biblical figure of wisdom (*Hokmah* or *Sophia*) is consistently portrayed as feminine. Indeed, drawing on the rich scholarly research on the wisdom literature of Job, Proverbs, Sirach, and the Wisdom of Salomon, Johnson argues that *Hokmah*/*Sophia* is "a female personification of God's own being

in creative and saving involvement of the world."[44] In other words, rather than a superior type of creature or an attribute of God, *Hokmah/Sophia* is Israel's God in female imagery. From the perspective of a nonandrocentric Christology, it is significant therefore that the early Christian community identified the male Jesus with the divine wisdom of the Hebrew Scriptures. As Johnson explains, "It was the identification between Jesus and Sophia that was to be the bridge whereby the community which believed that God had raised Jesus of Nazareth came to see Jesus as the pre-existent One."[45] The identification of Jesus with the female personification of God thus is at the heart of early Christianity. Accordingly, Johnson and others have convincingly argued that although Jesus's maleness is a constitutive element of his earthly identity, it is not constitutive for his redemptive significance.[46]

Further, for our argument, it is important to see that because the Hebrew Scriptures portray the person of divine wisdom as the One in whom God creates and sustains the universe, wisdom Christology writes itself as a *cosmic* Christology. The latter is especially evident in the letters of Paul and the Gospel of John, which both see Jesus as the personification of wisdom and attribute to him a cosmic role in creation and redemption.[47] Drawing on preexistent hymns, Paul claims that all things were created "in" and "through" Christ (for instance, in 1 Corinthians 8:6 and Colossians 1:16) but also that all things will be transformed in the resurrection of the crucified and that this transformation has already begun.[48]

In the gospels, the most explicit identification of Jesus with the cosmic wisdom of God is in the prologue of the Gospel of John (John 1:1–18). Biblical scholars agree that the main influence at work behind John's *Logos* theology is that of *Hokmah/Sophia*.[49] Like *Hokmah/Sophia*, the *Logos* was with God in the beginning and has been an active agent in creation. Yet while John's gospel is saturated with the wisdom tradition, it is troubling that it has replaced the feminine *Hokmah/Sophia* with the masculine *Logos*, purging wisdom of its femininity. Johnson agrees that this move has led later traditions to project the maleness of the human Jesus onto the preexistent One. While there are several explanations for this masculinizing move—mostly notably the influence of the work of the Hellenistic Jewish historian Philo, who, following the dualistic pattern of Greek thinking, identified the symbol of the female with evil—Johnson argues that wisdom Christology *de facto* blocks an easy identification between the second person of the trinity and the human Jesus. Indeed, the dissonance between the female *Hokmah/Sophia* and the male Jesus simply impedes the literal tendencies of much Son of God language.[50]

Wisdom then writes of a cosmic Christology that makes gender trouble. In her book, *Ask the Beasts*, Johnson, following Edwards, suggests we combine this

Christology with the notion of "deep incarnation." Deep incarnation indicates that by taking on flesh in Jesus of Nazareth, God becomes part of the interconnected ecosystems that support life on earth. Indeed, the notion of deep incarnation allows us to see that as human flesh, Jesus is both the product of an evolving cosmos and interconnected with all other life-forms. As Johnson explains, "'Deep incarnation' understands John 1:14 to be saying that the *sarx* which the Word of God became . . . reaches beyond us to join him to the whole biological world of living creatures and the cosmic dust of which they are composed."[51] When combined with a wisdom Christology, deep incarnation thus radicalizes the cosmic scope and the inclusivity of the incarnation.

A third and final way I believe wisdom Christology is significant for an ecofeminist soteriology is that it allows for a soteriology that does not work to overcome the finite conditions of life but works in and through them. To articulate this aspect of wisdom Christology (which I believe most strongly resonates with both Gebara's and Keller's soteriological vision), Edwards draws on Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, arguing that the loving wisdom at the core of the universe is the wisdom of the cross.[52] This wisdom is not like worldly wisdom and revokes all conventional standards of power. Thus while according to human standards and sensibilities, the natural processes and systems of the world are violent, random, and even void of a deeper significance or purpose, in light of the wisdom of the cross, they are an expression of God's love. At this point, I think it is significant that from the perspective of evolutionary theory, Gregersen insists that Jesus is an "*icon of a loser* in the evolutionary arm race." Not only did Jesus at the cross die the death of "a vital but unsheltered body"; Jesus died as someone "without any genetic offspring" and hence as someone who was "biologically speaking absolutely unfit." Moreover, instead of identifying with those who are physically and socially fit, Jesus encouraged his followers to "pass the gift of life on to the needy and even to the bad."[53] According to Gregersen, the latter does not mean that in Jesus God works to overcome natural selection. Rather, it means that as the One who created this evolutionary world, God is also the One who "follows the losers of cosmic evolution and social competition downward into the very consequence of all that is lost, even bare existence."[54]

In conclusion, the communitarian ideal nurtured by this love is neither romantic nor sentimental. Indeed, God's love is a tough love that is not for the faint of heart: a love that is compassionate toward the victims of evolution and fiercely partial on behalf of those suffering from injustice and ecological destruction.

Notes

1. "Green Sisters" refers to a widespread movement among North American Catholic sisters who interpret their religious vocation in terms of earth care. These sisters are involved in organic farming, the building of alternative housing structures from renewable materials, adopting sustainable energy, and turning their community properties into land trusts with wildlife sanctuaries. A most inspiring ethnographic study of the Green Sisters is Sarah McFarland Taylor's book, *Green Sisters: A Spiritual Ecology* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007). For an account of the ecofeminist movement in Latin America, see Mary Judith Ress, *Ecofeminism from Latin America*, Women from the Margins Series (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2006).
2. For an early criticism of gender essentialism in secular ecofeminist thought, see Janet Biehl, *Rethinking Eco-Feminist Politics* (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1990). For a critical discussion of the critique of essentialism in ecofeminist theology, see Catherine Keller, "Seeking and Sucking: On Relation and Essence in Feminist Theology," in *Horizons in Feminist Theology: Identity, Tradition, and Norms*, ed. Rebecca S. Chopp and Sheila Greeve Daveney (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), 54–78.
3. Lisa H. Sideris, *Environmental Ethics, Ecological Theology and Natural Selection* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003).
4. Ibid., 7.
5. Heather Eaton, *Introducing Eco-Feminist Theologies* (New York: T&T Clark International, 2005), 103–5.
6. While not all theologians would want to call the violence, death, and suffering that are intrinsic to nature "evil," theological tradition has often distinguished between "moral evil" and "natural evil." "Moral evil" refers to the evil perpetrated by human beings, whereas "natural evil" is associated with so-called natural disasters, such as earthquakes, as well as the condition of finitude and limitation. The latter is at times also called "metaphysical evil."
7. While this chapter assumes that the category of nature is a historically constructed idea affected by dynamics of power, privilege, and patriarchy, I define "nature" as the earth's system of living beings and the support systems for them. Although I take it for granted that human beings are an integral part of the earth's system, I also assume that our special capacities allow us to affect the rest of life on earth in ways other species cannot. In order to indicate that humans are an integral part of nature, I use the terms *human nature* and *nonhuman nature*.
8. Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Ask the Beasts: Darwin and the God of Love* (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2014).
9. See Elizabeth A. Johnson, "Jesus the Wisdom of God: A Biblical Basis for a Non-Androcentric Christology," *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses* 61 (1985): 216–94; Johnson, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse* (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1992). Additional groundbreaking work on feminist wisdom Christology has been done by Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza in *Jesus: Miriam's Child, Sophia's Prophet; Critical Issues in Feminist Christology* (New York: Continuum, 1994). For a sophisticated retrieval of wisdom Christology for an intercultural, multifaith feminist Christology, see Grace Ji-Sun Kim, *The*

Grace of Sophia: A Korean North American Women's Christology (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2002). Denis Edwards's book, *Jesus the Wisdom of God: An Ecological Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1995), has been instrumental for articulating the potential wisdom Christology holds for ecological theology.

10. The term *deep incarnation* was first introduced by the Danish theologian Niels Henrik Gregersen and has found wide acceptance in ecological theology as an idea that captures the cosmic scope of the incarnation in and through the uniqueness of Jesus of Nazareth. See Niels Henrik Gregersen, "The Cross of Christ in an Evolutionary World," *Dialog: A Journal of Theology* 4, no. 4 (2001): 200–215.
11. Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Gaia and God: An Ecofeminist Theology of Earth Healing* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1992).
12. Sideris, 50.
13. Ibid., 49.
14. Ibid., 69.
15. Ibid., 81.
16. Ecojustice connects environmental degradation with social justice and racism. The ethicist Cynthia Moe-Lobeda distinguishes two streams in the ecojustice movement: environmental racism and climate injustice. In both instances, ecojustice asks questions concerning "ecological debt" and "environmental space." Ecofeminists are generally most interested in questions concerning environmental space, which is a "rights based and fair share based approach to ecojustice," arguing that "all people have rights to a fair share in the good and services that earth provides for human kind." Cynthia Moe-Lobeda, *Resisting Structural Evil: Love as Ecological-Economic Vocation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013), 40.
17. An early collection of ecofeminist theological essays by women from Asia, Africa, and Latin America is Rosemary Radford Ruether, ed., *Women Healing Earth: Third World Women on Ecology, Feminism and Religion* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996).
18. Ivone Gebara, *Longing for Running Water: Eco-Feminism and Liberation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999), 2.
19. Sallie McFague, *The Body of God: An Ecological Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 133.
20. This teaching traditionally related "the insight that it is essential for the divine self-embodiment in Jesus Christ to encompass all that belongs to the creaturely human condition, or else it is not saved." Johnson, *Ask the Beasts*, 196.
21. The position that pain, suffering, and death are intrinsic to evolution and are not in need of redemption is rather unique to ecofeminist theologians. Most ecological theologians—with the exception of process thinkers—adopt some kind of eschatological account of redemption in which mortality itself is ultimately overcome. For a very fine overview of the different theological positions on accounting for biological suffering and death, see Johnson, *Ask the Beasts*, 187–90.
22. Sallie McFague, *Life Abundant: Rethinking Theology and Economy for a Planet in Peril* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 3.
23. Johnson, *Ask the Beasts*, 182.
24. "It is interesting to contemplate an entangled bank, clothed with many plants of many kinds, with birds singing on the bushes with various insects flitting about,

and with worms crawling through the damp earth, and to reflect that these elaborately constructed forms, so different from each other, and dependent on each other in so complex a manner, have all been produced by laws acting around us." Charles Darwin, *On the Origin of Species: A Facsimile of the First Edition of On the Origin of Species*, annotated by James Costa (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2009); quoted in Johnson, *Ask the Beasts*, xviii.

25. Gebara, 13. While Gebara has been greatly influenced by Ruether, Ruether herself insists that she has been influenced in turn by Gebara's understanding of evil and redemption. Indeed, Ruether does seem to have modified her earlier idealized notion of nonhuman reality in her more recent writings, insisting that we should not be sentimental in our dealings with nature and/or apply a preferential option to the weak to our conservation efforts. Yet she continues to reduce evolution to survival of the fittest and claims that nature seeks "a dynamic balance through a combination of mutual limits and cooperation." Ruether, "Ecofeminism: The Challenge to Theology," in *Christianity and Ecology: Seeking the Well-Being of Earth and Humans*, ed. Dieter T. Hessel and Rosemary Radford Ruether (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), 109.
26. Gebara, 169.
27. Ibid.
28. Catherine Keller, "Postmodern 'Nature,' Feminism and Community," in *Theology for Earth Community: A Field Guide*, ed. Dieter Hessel (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996), 95.
29. Ibid. (emphasis added).
30. See John B. Cobb Jr. and David Ray Griffin, *Process Theology: An Introductory Exposition* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1976).
31. Catherine Keller, *Face of the Deep: A Theology of Becoming* (New York: Routledge, 2003).
32. Keller takes up Irenaeus's use of the famous Pauline notion *recapitulatio* (summing up). According to this idea, salvation is not a disassociation from a "sinful" past but an event by which God "sums all things up in God-self." Yet while Keller likes Irenaeus's use of *recapitulatio*, she blames him for installing the linear salvation scheme of salvation history by way of the *ex nihilo*. She insists that "if *recapitulatio* rather than *ex nihilo* be taken up as the primary trope . . . a helical, *recapitulatory* sense of history begins to arise where the linear time of *ex nihilo* had been installed." Ibid., 55.
33. Ibid., 6.
34. Ibid., 28 (emphasis in the original text).
35. Ibid., 175.
36. Ibid., 178–79.
37. Catherine Keller, *On the Mystery, Discerning God in Process* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008), 85.
38. Ibid., 87.
39. Ibid., 88.
40. Gebara has been especially critical of the messianic myth of liberation theology. Although she thinks the figure of Jesus is wildly appealing as a "collective construct representing a way of life" of mutual self-giving and life-sustaining

love, she believes at the same time that liberation theology has made Jesus into a mythical figure who can find a solution to all problems, which not only reinscribes the patriarchal myth of the lonely hero but also rules out other initiatives. See Gebara, 175–82. Along similar lines, Keller judges that rather than focusing on Jesus's message, Christology has usually been preoccupied with Jesus himself and, hence, loses sight of the radical wisdom of Jesus's teaching in the gospels. See Keller, *On the Mystery*, 135–36.

41. Gebara, 180.
42. Keller, *On the Mystery*, 145.
43. Johnson, *Ask the Beasts*, 194–99; Gregersen, 200–215.
44. Johnson, *She Who Is*, 91.
45. Edwards, *Jesus the Wisdom of God*, 33.
46. Ibid., 164–67; Kim, 134–35.
47. According to biblical scholar Bruce Vawter, the explicit identification of Jesus with divine wisdom in Paul and John can be traced back to preexistent Christian hymns, which are scattered throughout the Christian Scriptures. These hymns include Philippians 2:6–11, Colossians 1:15–20, Ephesians 2:14–16, 1 Timothy 3:16, 1 Peter 3:18–22, Hebrews 1:3, and John 1:1–18. See Bruce Vawter, *This Man Jesus: An Essay toward a New Testament Christology* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1973); quoted in Edwards, 33.
48. Edwards, *Jesus the Wisdom of God*, 69. Johnson, *Ask the Beasts*, 193. I have made a similar argument in my discussion of Kathryn Tanner's *Christ the Key*. See Hilda P. Koster, "Greening the *Imago Dei*," contribution to the book forum on Kathryn Tanner's *Christ the Key* (2010), *Theology Today* 68, no. 3 (2011), 317–23.
49. See Raymond Brown, *The Gospel According to John, I–XII* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966), cxxii–cxxviii; quoted in Edwards, *Jesus the Wisdom of God*, 42.
50. See Johnson, "Jesus the Wisdom of God."
51. Johnson, *Ask the Beasts*, 197.
52. Edwards quotes 1 Cor. 1:21: "For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, God decided through the foolishness of our proclamation, to save those who believe." Edwards, 72.
53. Gregersen, 203 (emphasis is in the original text).
54. Ibid., 104.

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CHAPTER 5

The Holy Spirit and Black Women

A Womanist Perspective

Linda E. Thomas

This chapter discusses the work of the Holy Spirit in the struggles of black women for liberation and the flourishing of life. In this essay, the Holy Spirit includes some Christian ideas that are expanded, enriched, and significantly modified by and through how they are uniquely appropriated by black women. Using a womanist theological anthropology, I will argue that black women have particular insight into the power of the Spirit because their historical radical marginality puts them in the center of myriad realities in which deeply rooted, unacknowledged, and unconventional wisdom dwells.[1]

My argument runs through the following trajectory: First, I will discuss what I mean by "particular insight" into the Spirit and "deeply rooted, unacknowledged, and unconventional wisdom." Next I will describe the unique history of brutalization and enduring strength of women of African descent in the United States, as well as the ways that African cosmology, drawing from western and southern Africa sources, supported enslaved black women in surviving the dreaded state of slavery and having the quality of life most available to them under the circumstances. I will then turn to the ways the Spirit in African American churches fused elements of African cosmologies with white Christianity to form a unique religion with a notion of the Spirit that sits within an orthodox Christian framework with distinctive features. Next I will examine the way this Spirit is present in the suffering and struggle of black women and how it works for their liberation, abetting them to resist evil and move toward freedom. I am ultimately interested in how black women have survived and resisted the daily degradations piled on them by systems of historic oppression. We move now toward an examination of the particular insight black women have into the Spirit and the wisdom tradition it inspires.

Particular Insight and Deeply Rooted, Unacknowledged, and Unconventional Wisdom

The particular insight that black women have into the Spirit arises from the subjugated knowledge present in their experience. On the one hand, insight into the Spirit comes through the enduring ways that black women have called on Jesus and the Holy Spirit to be ever present in their lives. On the other hand, insight comes from African understandings of the Spirit as God present in creation, giving and nourishing all life.

Drawing from Christianity, the Spirit is present within and amid all the personal and political spaces and struggles where black women find themselves. Black women turn to the Bible to inform their understanding of the Spirit.[2] They are aware of biblical texts telling them about the presence of the Spirit: that God's Spirit rekindled dry bones into a living body (Ezekiel 37); that God's Spirit descended when Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist (Matthew 3:16; Mark 1:10; Luke 3:22); that Jesus declares the Spirit was upon him (Luke 4:16–18); that Jesus promises the disciples that the Holy Spirit will come (John 14:15–25); that Jesus tells them that the Spirit will give them power (Acts 1:8); and that at Pentecost, the Spirit came and the church was birthed (Acts 2).

Drawing from African spirituality, particular insight comes from African epistemology of the Spirit.[3] Black women are key figures in connecting African cosmology with Christianity. There are four philosophies from "pre–Middle Passage African cosmology" that guide the fusion of these two traditions: first, the belief that memory is crucially important for the welfare of the community; second, the understanding that the community is the crux of ontology; third, the belief that all creation signifies that which is divine; and fourth, understanding that there is no separation between the sacred and the secular.[4]

Black women come to understand what Zimbabwean theologian Edward Antonio asserts: "The Spirit is always the Spirit of Creation; it is God's breath responsible for giving and sustaining life; it is realized and experienced in community; it is about the health of communities, of individuals, of crops and of animals. The Spirit is the vital force that animates all things and thus gives them life."[5]

Black women are therefore heirs to receive the Spirit from both Christian and African resources as a source of wisdom, the fulfillment of grace, and the active presence of God in their lives as they seek justice from structurally harmful systems. Deeply rooted, unacknowledged, and unconventional wisdom is the result of absolute vulnerability. Such knowledge and wisdom are a consequence of an unshielded, unprotected life that prevails even as black women both capitulate to and fight against structural evil. Vulnerable brokenness is

indeed powerful.[6] The following history of the radical marginality of black women will show why this is the case.

Myriad Realities: History of the Radical Marginality of Black Women

The history of black women in the United States begins in 1619, when a small group of African women and men landed in colonial Jamestown, Virginia. This group and others who followed were part of elaborate cosmologies, stable families, and flourishing communities among the Akan, Fon-Ewe, Fon, Fula, Kongo, Igbo, Jola, Mende, and Yoruba peoples and others in West, Central, East, and Southern Africa.[7] These women and men who had been stolen away from the continent entered a world vastly different from their homeland. While some became indentured servants, and even free people, the majority would be treated as cargo and property, thought to be less than human, and brutally mistreated. The system of white supremacy and male superiority would dominate their lives from 1619 forward. Black women's everyday lives necessitated that they live in two different worlds at the same time: "one White privileged and oppressive, the other Black, exploited, and oppressed."[8] White slaveholders had total control over black women and their offspring. Black women's work was "commoditized," and their "bodies were units of capital."[9] The cosmology and spirituality of their ancestors gave them the ability to survive.[10]

A black woman had children to care for, but she needed to spend "sunup to sundown"[11] in the fields or the big house.[12] The time she had for her family was "sundown to sunup,"[13] which meant that she was exhausted from a long day's work in the field. The slave community depended on the goodwill of black women who often took in children whose parents had been sold or children who had been sold and separated from their parents.[14] Black enslaved women did not have control of their bodies and were raped by slaveholders and coerced into having sex with black men to produce children who would then become the property of slavers. All attempts to regulate and have power over black women's sexuality were joined to a commodity culture whose cardinal aim was to escalate and accelerate the number of offspring enslaved black women birthed.[15] For instance, historian Deborah Gray White records that "slave masters wanted adolescent girls to have children, and to this end they practiced a passive, though insidious kind of breeding."[16] Black women, whether young or mature, were referred to as "stock breeders" for the plantation system.[17] This label marred their roles as mothers.[18] In reference to motherhood and breeding, Wilma King writes, "American slaveholders viewed motherhood as an asset, and they encouraged reproduction for pecuniary reasons alone."[19] White echoes

King's point, writing, "Once slaveholders realized that the reproductive function of the female slave could yield a profit, the manipulation of procreative sexual relations became an integral part of the sexual exploitation of female slaves."[20] Walter Johnson gives a glimpse of Louisiana slave markets where black women's bodies and reproductive potential were literally displayed on stage for those interested in buying: "They palpated breasts and abdomens, searching for hernias and prolapsed organs and trying to massage bodies into revealing their reproductive history."[21] Infertile women were ill-treated and surreptitiously moved from slaveholder to slaveholder.[22] Along with keeping black women breeders of babies, the plantation economy kept them workers in the field or the slaveholder's home, as well as victims of rape at the whim of the sexual appetites of the slaveholder, his sons, or other men on the plantation.[23] Moreover, enslaved black women were repetitively deprived of stable relationships in order to boost the slaveholder's profit; subsequently black women lived with the fear of their families being ripped apart. Their husbands and children could be sold and the family permanently separated from each other.[24] Life in slavery for black women meant being obliged to endow the very system that subjugated and enchained them.

Postslavery, black women could not vote and were not considered equal to any other human being—not white men, black men, or white women, no matter the status of the latter. Black women were solo agents who had to take care of themselves because they had no one to rely on other than themselves. The same configurations of abuse—that of being baby makers and workhands—continued after emancipation.[25]

During the Reconstruction period, black women were poorly paid in whatever work they were employed.[26] During the Great Migration, black women and men went to Northern cities looking for work and better opportunities for themselves and their families. The work they found was menial, and those working in industrial jobs had demeaning work. Because black women constantly worked outside the home in physically taxing jobs, they had little time to be with their children, making it a challenge to find time to pass on the history and culture of black people. Black women had to navigate living in a poor housing system while seeing that their children went to school so they could read and write.[27] Sociologist Bonnie Dill underscores the tension between earning a living wage and raising children: "For African American women the issue was less one of economic equality with husbands and more the adequacy of overall family income. Denying Black men a family wage meant that women continued working and that motherhood as a privatized, female 'occupation' never predominated in the African American communities."[28]

Seventy-five years after emancipation, black women still worked in rural fields. Their labor on white-owned farms consisted of working with their husbands in the field, with the husbands receiving the wages for them as a family unit.[29] Black women also worked as servants in the houses of white people and were subjected to harsh treatment much like that which they endured under slavery.[30] Black women were underpaid for domestic work, and because they worked in homes, they were subjected to sexual abuse.

Today black women are still disadvantaged and tied to systems that trap them in persistent hunger and high unemployment. In the words of Katie Cannon, "Black women are still the victims of the aggravated inequities and the tridimensional phenomenon of race/class/gender oppression."[31]

Enslaved Black Women and the Spirit in African Cosmology

Most of the enslaved Africans who were involuntarily brought to the New World had their own religious consciousness regarding the Spirit; after all, most Africans were adults when they landed in the Americas, and having lived with African religion in their homelands, they had already incorporated notions of the Spirit in their lives. African scholar John Mbiti asserts, "Since African Religion belongs to the people, when Africans migrate in large numbers from one part of the continent to another, or from Africa to other continents, they take religion with them . . . Even if they are converted to another religion like Christianity or Islam, they do not completely abandon their traditional religion immediately: it remains with them for several generations and sometimes centuries."[32]

Historian Lewis Baldwin, speaking of Africans' religious life in the Americas, writes that their religious "notions were blended with Christian conceptions . . . as the number of American-born slaves began to outnumber African-born slaves and as more and more slaves were exposed to white Christian teachings," cosmologies were intertwined.[33] Thus, as stated earlier, black women drew on a dual system of spirituality to deal with their radical marginality and move toward survival and quality of life. On the one hand, there was African cosmology, where freedom or justice is linked to well-being, thriving, good health, and flourishing as the basic goals of the good life.[34] Moreover, there was an understanding that the ancestors of enslaved Africans and the predecessors of contemporary African Americans knew the Spirit in deep and complex ways. Africans from various cultures lived with elaborate cosmologies that included a High God, lesser divinities, and ancestors across the centuries. This cosmology preceded their introduction to the Christian Holy Spirit that they came to know from slaveholders, missionaries, and white preachers on plantations. Renee K. Harrison writes about Africans' sanctity:

> African people's destinies and value were intrinsically linked to God and the world around them. They were deeply religious peoples who had intimate ties to the earth and the spirit world, and viewed all creation as creations from God. Given this, it is inconceivable that prior to Euro-Christian influence they viewed themselves as wretched and valueless. Most societies believed that God was Spirit. God was inside everything and transcended everything. In New World America, destiny and God therefore did not need to be found, nor value bestowed through missionary proselytizing, they each needed only to be tapped into, and reclaimed and remembered.[35]

African spirituality aided black women in their persistent suffering as well as their struggle for fullness of life.

On the other hand, over time, black women drew from the commingling among African cosmologies and white Christianity that gave rise to African American religion. Diverse elements were enfolded in the new religion. Most notably, notions of the Spirit were revealed in the "invisible institution," the hidden reality of enslaved Africans ritualizing their cosmological belief systems from sunset to sunrise in hush harbors out of the view and hearing of slave master culture through song, dance, the shout, and spirituals.

The movement of the various understandings of Spirit among Africans born in Africa and those born in the Americas gave rise to an expression of the Spirit that is now found in African American churches. Theologian Eboni Marshall Turman comments on the intricate nature of African American religion: "The very complex development of African American religion is the result of the confluence and paradoxical intermingling of almost always irreconcilable realities that somehow co-exist."[36] Turman suggests that black religion and womanist pneumatology is "theological creolization in that it allows for organic connections to be made."[37] This allows womanist pneumatology to make the connection between African cosmology and systematic theology, especially since some dogmatics emphasize "both the oneness of the Spirit and its simultaneous multivocality, which is the gift of Pentecost—hearing/experiencing/feeling/inheriting one Spirit in languages that correspond with the hearers."[38] Womanist pneumatology then advances the notion that the Spirit in African cosmology is the same Spirit that came to be known as the Holy Spirit in African American Christianity. This intricate fusion of belief systems enabled black enslaved women and later African American women to survive and navigate the unjustified suffering in their lives.

Having explored the Spirit in African cosmology as well as in African American religion being a means by which black women make a way for survival and quality of life, we turn now to an exploration of the Spirit in African American churches.

The Spirit in African American Churches

Robert Hood gives a depiction of the Spirit in African American life assisting black women and men in their suffering and renewing their lives:

> The Spirit experientially and conceptually exercises a strong influence in black American religion and culture . . . Like the breath of God in Scripture, this power makes the slave song and gospel hymns, the rhetoric of the black preacher and the Black trickster alike, the extemporaneous and unrehearsed prayers of the unsophisticated, and the written liturgical prayers of more sedate congregations. It is the presence of the Spirit—revealed in the sounds and rituals of black churches—that impresses black folk at a service, prayer meeting, Bible class, or a revival. With the Spirit present they can say with great sagacity and joy that they really are a "church" and are in "spirit-filled worship."[39]

Hood's quote gives voice to the cosmic sphere of influence that African cosmology and African American culture have on pneumatology in African American churches. This synthesis of sources produces an essence that African American worshipers claim as the Holy Spirit. It is this Spirit that aids suffering and struggling black women.

The Spirit Is in the Suffering and Struggle of Black Women

Given the intermingling of African cosmology, white Christianity, and African American spirituality, black women embraced the texts of the Christian Scriptures that speak of the Spirit and justice. Deutero Isaiah (42:1–4) gives witness to the connection between the Spirit, the struggle for justice, and suffering.[40] We read in the passage that God gives the Spirit to the servant and pronounces that the servant "will bring justice to every nation"; the servant "will bring lasting justice to all"; the servant "will not lose hope or courage"; the servant "will establish justice on the earth." The work of justice is done in a climate that accentuates continuing struggle, for the servant claims, "I said, 'I have worked but how hopeless it is! I have used my strength, but have accomplished nothing'" (49:4).[41] Like black women who were whipped during slavery, the servant says, "I bared my back to those who beat me. I did not stop them when they insulted me" (50:6). The Holy Spirit dwells with the servant to bring forth justice even when it means living with suffering and struggle.[42] This is the same Spirit from whom suffering and struggling black women will receive justice.

The work of the Holy Spirit is to establish the Reign of God. As John P. Brown says, "It is in the struggle for justice, for fullness of life, for the building of loving community, that we may discern the activity of the Spirit."[43] It is the power of the Spirit that leads black women to seek justice for "survival

and quality of life."[44] The God of Creation working to liberate black women evidences this.

The God of Creation: Working to Liberate Black Women

The Spirit that authorizes black women to fight against hegemonic dynamisms that debase, devalue, and oppress them simultaneously authorizes them to build open and more just communities.[45] This is the same *ruach*[46]—spirit/wind of God—that moved over the magnificently dark waters in Genesis 1. This same Spirit is the ancient power that instills dignity in black women and all other humans. As Brown puts it, "It is the creative power of the Spirit that makes people aware of their own dignity, of the contradiction between what is and what might be, and that enables them to hold those two together in a single empowering vision."[47] This Spirit allows black women to feel their present pain and see a future of liberation.[48] Black women live out of a "memory of the future."[49] Black women's wisdom claims that God's imminent sovereignty is now present in their lives. And since this is the case, this power becomes the power to stand firm against all systems that oppose their dignified life presence.

The Holy Spirit encounters black women at every turn, helping them to see the reality of their lives and at the same time to see their future existence. This revelation rejuvenates and gives strength to black women to claim, "This suffering ought not to be; we shall struggle until we have changed the present reality into the just and free and loving community that we envision."[50]

Black women are able to say "No" to principalities and powers and "Yes" to the Spirit that sustains and renews life for new possibilities.[51] A new way of life becomes achievable as the Spirit calls black women to resist evil.

The Spirit's Creative Power Calls Enslaved Women to Resist Evil

Even though black women were enslaved against their will, there is ample evidence that they used both subtle and overt means to disrupt their circumstances.[52] Their resistance to slavery is an indication of the creative power of the Spirit in their lives. The strategies for resisting were diverse and included such acts as drawing on precolonial African worldviews, fighting in slave revolts, running away from plantations, asking "conjure doctors" for help to change their situation, using indigenous healing rituals along with energetic musical beats, having continuity with the past through African religion, gaining literacy so as to negotiate how they would be treated, and making reproductive decisions that lessened the number of children to be held in bondage.[53] All these measures show how the Spirit's creative energy dwelled within the women and in their circumstances.

Resistance guided by the Spirit can be seen in first-generation enslaved women having African "philosophic worldviews of human purpose, value, and freedom." These virtues derived from the uncompromising starting point of their precolonial West and Central African cultures—"Every person mattered."[54] With this point of departure for human anthropology, Harrison explains the precolonial African template through which enslaved women and men lived their lives:

> At birth, each soul was assigned a guardian spirit(s) to guide her or him toward her or his destiny. The Yoruba, Akan, Ewe, and Igbo peoples believed, as did other pre-colonial West and Central African groups, that a person's destiny—the self-chosen or assigned pattern of a person's life—was chosen before they arrived on the earth. With such a worldview in mind, it is therefore inconceivable that countless indigenous African peoples knelt before their High God and chose or were assigned American slavery and dehumanization as their destiny. It is inconceivable that they chose a life of demoralizing suffering and survival.[55]

Enslaved women lived with a mind-set that they mattered. They were "somebody" because their ancestors carved this into their being. This notion regulated their lives and was a source of spiritual power and continuity with the past, which provided an ethos of resistance even as these women were enslaved.

Another form of resistance used by enslaved women was fighting. Harrison opines that combat was "a constructive pro-life strategy."[56] Black women fought to defend themselves and to keep their self-respect. Having even momentary power over slaveholders and their associates gave enslaved women a feeling of authority and exhibited courageousness to others. Knowing that there would be reprisal for fighting did not deter those who fought: "One day my mistress Lydia called for me to come in the house, but no, I wouldn't go. She walks out and says she is gwine make me go. So she takes and drags me in the house. Then I grabs that white woman and shook her until she begged for mercy. When the master comes in, I wuz given a terrible beating but I didn't care for I give the mistress a good un too."[57] Bondswomen also fought against white slaveholders and overseers. One black woman tells how her mother, Chloe Ann, took on her slaveholder: "My maw. . . . she warn't fraid. Wash Hodges tried to whop her with a cowhide, and she'd knock him down and bloody him up. Then he'd go down to some his neighbor kin and try to git them to come help him whop her. But they'd say, 'I don't want to go up there and let Chloe Ann beat me up.'"[58] The Spirit gave some women the tenacity to fight for their sacred life even if they would suffer repercussions as a result.

Just as some enslaved women chose to fight, others decided to run away from plantations. Harrison captures the ways black women used their deeply rooted and unacknowledged as well as unconventional wisdom to escape:

> The ingenious ways in which countless enslaved women chose to abscond provides evidence of their internal fortitude to think critically under pressure. Under the daily threat of bodily harm, they imagined the possibility of freedom and transformed that possibility into a lived reality. In doing so, they outsmarted those who sought to subjugate and belittle them. Their imaginative spirits and preservation instincts were evident in harrowing acts to escape. Enslaved women impersonated white women, disguised themselves as white male slaveholders, posed as black male soldiers, faked physical and mental illnesses, served as spies, mailed themselves north as cargo, joined others on the Underground Railroad, boarded ships headed to Africa, and committed mercy killings in order to protect their children from slavery.[59]

The resistance strategy of running created a vacuum in the lives of those who were successful in escaping, since loved ones were left behind. Nevertheless, those who lived in freedom did their best to help other enslaved people.[60]

Historians of enslaved women and the art of resistance during the antebellum period have gathered evidence to suggest that some black women used "gendered methods of opposition" to resist having their bodies used as a means of producing "commodities" for sale and profit. The gendered methods of resistance were "reproductive choices."[61]

Many of us cannot believe that any mother would knowingly kill her child. However, the white patriarchal plantation system—with its systematic method of having generation after generation of black girls and women supply babies for plantation culture capital gains—motivated some mothers who knew the future that the children they loved would live to create a "loss" in the economy of slavery. Rather than see their children live under the conditions of chattel slavery, possibly being brutalized or prematurely murdered, these women performed "mercy killings"[62] of their children. This form of resistance, known as infanticide, is documented through primary sources. These sources establish the fact that mothers who committed these acts did so to free their children from the atrocities of slavery.[63]

Abortion was another gendered method of resisting the plantation system that coerced enslaved women to bear children against their will to augment the profit-making enterprise called slavery. Historian Fletcher M. Green's work with primary documents provides evidence that such was the case. He draws his evidence from a journal kept by slaveholders on the Ferry Hill Plantation that records the following: "Daph miscarried two children this morning. Sent for

Mrs. Fry who came, she is quite ill. The two children which Daph miscarried she is supposed to have gone with 4 months[.] Both female. It was an hour or upwards between their birth. It is thought she took medicine to produce their destruction."[64]

Historian Loucynda Jensen provides another piece of evidence from an article written by Dr. John H. Morgan that appeared in *The Nashville Journal of Medicine and Surgery* titled "An Essay on the Causes of the Production of Abortion among Our Negro Population." Morgan opines that while the reason for sterility and abortion were sometimes the physical abuse of pregnant bondswomen, sometimes enslaved women were "willing and even anxious to avail themselves of an opportunity to effect abortion or to derange menstruation." Moreover, he asserts, "the remedies mostly used by the negroes to procure abortion are the infusion or decoction of tansy, rue, roots and seed of the cotton plant, pennyroyal, cedar berries and camphor, either gum or spirits." These items could easily be found in gardens located on or around plantations.[65] Jensen provides evidence from the same article where Morgan speaks of a medical colleague who told him of a case "where a black woman was examined and was found to have deliberately procured an abortion by using mechanical means, and she was successful."[66]

Examining and evaluating the evidence that historians Green, Jensen, and White provide, we can conclude that both infanticide and abortion occurred in antebellum America among slave women for the purpose of claiming agency in enacting resistance to slavery. My womanist consciousness asserts that these acts of resistance were stirred by the Spirit dwelling within black women as well as in the spaces where black women found themselves enslaved with intractable suffering. These reproductive choices are one of many ways slave women fought the plantation system that subjugated them for generations. Vulnerable brokenness is powerful and is a source for claiming the Spirit and living with its grace. This grace made space for a sense of freedom in enslaved women.

The Freedom of the Spirit in Enslaved Women

Black women were enslaved from the shores of the continent of Africa. The enslavement and suffering that their bodies endured during the middle passage and in slavery in America did not destroy their conscious connection to a spiritual force that was part of their worldview in Africa and subsequently in American slavery. The Spirit that African women brought with them in their minds and bodies was transferred to future generations of enslaved Africans and in time comingled with white Christianity's notion of the Holy Spirit. The old

notion of Spirit and the new notion of the Holy Spirit resonated with enslaved women in America and was a source for renewal in their lives.

The freedom of the Spirit challenged enslaved women to resist. It confronted them to use their agency to participate in everyday resistance—sometimes small in nature, other times broad. What is clear is that through the Spirit, some enslaved women found life through death—even in the death of their children. They found an unlikely freedom to live a new way, one that led to survival and quality of life. The creative power of resistance became available when enslaved women were completely honest with themselves and their communities. No longer were some enslaved women willing to sacrifice their children to the horrors of slavery. It was at that moment of recognition of their agency that the Spirit met them to share in their brokenness. In that brokenness, in that vulnerability, there was freedom and power because the Spirit met them and they were renewed to continue the struggle, with God among them.

Black women as heirs of God's grace, and daughters who inherited the cosmology of their ancestors, created for themselves, with the help of the Holy Spirit, a myriad of ways and means to survive oppression and trauma. Lifelong attempts to disempower them through slavery, economics, politics, religion, or any other methods of systemic evil have not caused their demise.

An indwelling Spirit presence gave discernment and guided their decision making even when some decisions led to painful choices. The Spirit empowered black women to stand against anything that sought to dehumanize them in any way. The Spirit was the constant reminder that they were/are "fearfully and wonderfully made; body and soul" (Psalms 139:14). The Spirit regenerated and transformed them as a result of their faith. Freedom came as a result of the Spirit's presence. "The Lord is the spirit, and where the spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom" (2 Cor. 3:17).[67]

Notes

1. I wish to thank the following persons for helping me with this essay: Edward Antonio, Kelly Brown Douglas, Cheryl Kirk Duggan, Barry Hopkins, Ruth Martin, Monique Moultrie, and Eboni Marshall Turman.
2. In this essay, I discuss only black Christian women and black female adherents of African religions.
3. While it is of utmost importance to consider specific examples of how Africans think about the role of the Spirit, there are places where the notions are similar.
4. Elizabeth J. West, *African Spirituality in Black Women's Fiction: Threaded Visions of Memory, Community, Nature and Being* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2011), 11.
5. Edward Antonio, personal correspondence, July 31, 2014.

6. John P. Brown, "The Holy Spirit in the Struggles of People for Liberation and Fullness of Life," *International Review of Mission* 79, no. 315 (July1990): 275.
7. See Albert J. Raboteau, *Slave Religion: The "Invisible Institution" in the Antebellum South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 7, for more about the Atlantic trade of African peoples.
8. Katie Cannon, "The Emergence of Black Feminist Consciousness," in *Katie's Canon: Womanism and the Soul of the Black Community* (New York: Continuum: 2003), 47.
9. Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 51.
10. See Renee K. Harrison, *Enslaved Women and the Art of Resistance in Antebellum America* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 153.
11. See Dwight N. Hopkins, *Down, Up, and Over: Slave Religion and Black Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 51.
12. The "big house" is the slaveholder's house.
13. Hopkins, 107.
14. See Solomon Northup, *Twelve Years a Slave* (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 1970); See also Cannon, 48.
15. Collins, 51.
16. Deborah Gray White, *Ar'n't I a Woman? Female Slaves in the Plantation South* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1985), 98.
17. Cannon, 48; Walter Johnson, *Soul by Soul: Life inside the Antebellum Slave Market* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999).
18. Angela Davis, *Woman, Race, and Class* (New York: Random House, 1981), 6–7.
19. Wilma King, "Suffer with Them Till Death: Slave Women and Their Children in Nineteenth-Century America," cited in Loucynda Jensen, "Searching the Silence: Finding Black Women's Resistance to Slavery in Antebellum U.S. History," *PSU McNair Scholars Online Journal* 2, no. 1 (2006) Article 1–27.
20. White, 68.
21. Johnson, 83–144, cited in Jensen, 9.
22. Collins, 51.
23. See Margaret Walker, *Jubilee*, 1st ed. (New York: Mariner Books, 1999), a historical novel of her family's life under slavery.
24. Cannon, 49.
25. Ibid.
26. Ibid., 51.
27. Ibid., 53.
28. Bonnie Thornton Dill, "Our Mothers' Grief: Racial Ethnic Women and the Maintenance of Families," *Journal of Family History* 13, no. 4 (1988): 415–31, cited in Collins, 53.
29. Ibid.
30. Ibid., 54.
31. Cannon, 56.
32. John Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion* (Oxford: Heinemann Educational Publishers, 1991), 14, 15.

33. Lewis V. Baldwin, "'A Home in Dat Rock': Afro-American Folk Sources and Slave Visions of Heaven and Hell," *Journal of Religious Thought* 41, no. 1 (Spring–Summer 1984): 39.
34. Antonio, personal correspondence, July 31, 2014.
35. Ibid.
36. Eboni Marshall Turman, personal correspondence, June 30, 2014.
37. Ibid.
38. Ibid.
39. Robert E. Hood, quoted in Diana Hayes, "Slain in the Spirit: Black Americans and the Holy Spirit," *The Journal of the Interdenominational Theological Center* 20, no. 1–2 (1992–93): 96–115.
40. Brown, 273.
41. Ibid., 273–74.
42. Ibid., 274.
43. Ibid.
44. Delores S. Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness* (New York: Orbis, 1993), 20.
45. See Karen Baker-Fletcher, *Dancing with God: The Trinity from a Womanist Perspective* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2006), 163–69.
46. See Veli-Matti Karkkainen, *Pneumatology: The Holy Spirit, in Ecumenical, International, and Contextual Perspective* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002), 26, for differing interpretations of *ruach*.
47. Brown, 274.
48. John V. Taylor, *The Go-Between God* (London: SCM, 1980), 26.
49. Brown, 274.
50. Ibid., 275.
51. Walter Brueggemann, *Prophetic Imagination* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978), cited in Brown, 275.
52. See Raymond Bauer and Alice H. Bauer, "Day to Day Resistance to Slavery," *The Journal of Negro History* 27 (1942): 388–419, for more documentation of black women and resistance.
53. Harrison, 149; Jensen, 2.
54. Harrison, 153.
55. Ibid.
56. Ibid., 159.
57. Dorothy Sterling, ed., *We Are Your Sisters: Black Women in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1984), 57.
58. Lulu Wilson, "Narratives," in *Bullwhip Days: The Slaves Remember: An Oral History*, ed. James Mellon, 322–27 (New York: Grove Press, 1988), 324, cited in Harrison, 160.
59. Harrison, 170.
60. Ibid., 173.
61. Jensen, 1.
62. Harrison, 170.
63. See White, 88, for four cases of infanticide by enslaved mothers. Two cases indicate that the mother refused to let her child endure the horrors of slavery.

64. John Blackford, *Ferry Hill Plantation Journal, January 4, 1838—January 15, 1839*, ed. Fletcher Melvin Green (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1961), cited in Jensen, 24.
65. Jensen, 25.
66. John H. Morgan, "An Essay On the Causes of the Production of Abortion Among Our Negro Population," *Nashville Journal of Medicine and Surgery* 19 (1860): 117–23, cited in Jensen, 25.
67. *The Holy Bible*, New Revised Standard Version (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1989).

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CHAPTER 6

An Asian American Theology of Hope

Foreign Women and the Reign of God[1]

Grace Ji-Sun Kim

Introduction

In North America, one's "Asianness" signifies to the white dominant group that he or she is a foreigner and consequently a second-class citizen. Asian American women have been perceived as perpetual foreigners. The understanding of the foreigner within the book of Ezra brings to light how foreign women were treated, excluded, and forced to move away. As more immigrants come into North America, we need to learn ways to welcome them fully and not as second-class citizens or the Other. As they struggle to become accepted into the dominant culture, the Asian Americans who are Christians turn to their Christian faith to make sense of their context, in which the identity of foreigner is thrust upon them. Major constraints that these women are emerging from within Asia are the subordination and sexual exploitation of women.[2]

During times of despair and difficulty, it is the Christian doctrine of hope that sustains and nourishes such women. Hope is based on the resurrection of Jesus Christ; in his resurrection, they find that they also can become resurrected. For Asian American women, in addition to the resurrection, hope is also based on the reign of God and the reign that is yet to come. It is our current hope in eschatology. It is the hope that is already embodied in the way Asian Americans live in the face of this imposed identity as the Other and as perpetual foreigners. Thus, in many ways, hope has become an important aspect that has helped women to overcome their adversity and become active participants as agents of change.

This chapter will examine Asian American women's identity as the perpetual foreigner. Viewing their predicament through the lens of the book of Ezra, the chapter will study the similarities between the lives of the foreign women who

were cast away in this biblical account and the lives of contemporary Asian American women. Because of the difficulties that Asian Americans face, the understanding of the doctrine of hope can help shed light on the discrimination that Asian American women face and their resilience to live on and advocate for change.

The Perpetual Foreigner

Asian American women deal with issues of being viewed as perpetual foreigners. If one looks "Asian," it does not matter how many years or generations one has lived in the United States; that person is perceived to be a foreigner. It is not because Asians have different foods, different cultural practices, diverse religious heritages, or because they can speak multiple languages. Segments of the dominant white culture, such as those of Irish, Italian, Russian, or Swedish ancestry, also possess these same characteristics in different ways. Rather, it is because Asians look different from members of what is considered to be the white dominant culture. Underlying this is racism and prejudice aimed toward Asian Americans.

As Joseph Cheah writes, "Asian Americans have been depicted as 'perpetual foreigners,' 'unassimilable' and other stereotypes that reveal historic and persistent racism experienced by this racial/ethnic group." Many have been asked, "Where are you really from?" This question differs from the usual one, "Where are you from?" "The really-question figuratively and literally ejects the Asian American respondent to Asia because the assumption behind the question, even if the questioner is oblivious to it, is that Asian Americans cannot be 'real' Americans. Asian Americans, even if they are descendants of railroad workers, are assumed to be foreigners, whereas the white questioners, even if they are descendants of first generation immigrants, center themselves as 'true' Americans." Generally, there is no intention of offense on the part of a white questioner whose American identity would never be called into question. Nonetheless, the person who is asking the "really" question brings to mind all the epithets that our racialized society heaps on Asian Americans: foreigner, unassimilable, not American, someone who simply does not belong in American society. "In most instances, no offense is intended, but the questioners who pose the really-question embody the values and ideology of white supremacy that permeates our racialized society."[3] Therefore, if interracial marriage does not occur, Asians will continue to look like Asians no matter how many hundreds of years they live in North America. This appearance of "Asianness" will override their citizenship, their country of birth, and their country of allegiance; in other words, they will always be the foreigner. For the white

dominant culture, Asianness cannot be accepted as part of the North American racial norm.

Asian Americans live in a perplexing world, as they are estranged from Anglo-Americans for being too Asian and not fully assimilated to the white dominant culture and also estranged from Asians for being too Americanized and cut off from their cultural roots.[4] This has placed Asian Americans in the "in-between" world where they do not fit in either the Asian culture or the white culture. This nonacceptance has left Asian Americans in the margins of society, not knowing where they belong exactly. This leaves them as foreigners in their own land.

Therefore, one's "Asianness" signifies to the white dominant group that he or she is a foreigner. On the other hand, a white European immigrant looks "American." From such blatant expressions of being the Other, Asian Americans are identified as the "perpetual foreigner," which can further marginalize one's social location. For Asian American women, it is even more complex: she has to endure both the patriarchal attitudes of her Asian ethnicity and those of her US context.[5] Asian American women often find themselves marginalized and subjugated to male dominant norms and white racialized culture. Since an Asian American women's appearance makes them look different from the white dominant culture, they are always treated as the foreigner or the Other. This is an ongoing problem that needs to be wrestled with as America engages in life with people from all parts of the world here in North America.

Women as the Other

French existentialist philosopher Simone de Beauvoir's theorizing of woman as "Other" is helpful in illuminating the position of contemporary Asian American women. Women are often viewed as the "Other," but having a different ethnicity from the dominant culture further subordinates them to second-class citizens. This form of othering was existent during biblical times when foreign women were mistreated and even cast away from the community. It is necessary to examine and understand this process of othering and how it had become an acceptable way of life during the biblical times and remains so even in our present context. This process of othering needs to be eliminated, as second-class citizenship of women places a tremendous burden on their ability to work, flourish, and become the full human beings all are created to be.

When a man views a woman as the Other, he may then expect her to accept this label and thus to manifest deep-seated tendencies toward complicity. Because she lacks definite resources, because she feels the necessary bond that ties her to the man regardless of reciprocity, and because she is often very well pleased with her role as the Other, she will fail to lay claim to her rightful

status.[6] She may simply resign herself to accept that designation, as it is easier than fighting back. Furthermore, some women may find contentment and protection from those in power and desire to be in that subordinate role. However, being the Other is problematic when a person is viewed as an object of contention; physical and metaphysical understanding is denied to the Other, as these are in the domain of the Subject.

Women are the Other to men. Some men enjoy their false sense of superiority, which is founded on the absolute and the eternal, providing an unarguable right of their own supremacy.[7] It must be understood that this only works if both parties accept this reality; so far, it has worked within the patriarchal understanding of the Christian religion, in which it is understood that men are divinely appointed to carry on the work of God here on earth. In this line of thought, the coming of God's child Jesus in a male body reinforces this notion of male supremacy and absolutism.

There is an otherness attached to the image of the female body. In Scripture, the Levitical purity and holiness system vividly reinscribes this primordial repudiation of the feminine.[8] A gendered vocabulary is used to denote the community's holiness ("the holy seed"; Ezra 9:2) and the threatening contaminant ("[menstrual] impurity"; Ezra 9:11). The former is an unmistakably male emblem of purity, the latter a specifically female pollution. This language unavoidably positions women as signifiers of the stranger within. The female body represents the surplus[9] (hopeless, miserable) bodily fluids—that which must be expelled.[10] In this manner, women's bodies become imperfect commodities and can be easily disposed of when not necessary. This is the plight of the foreign women in the book of Ezra.

Our personal identity and how society perceives us is an important factor in how we understand ourselves. When we are continuously perceived as the Other or the foreigner, it has devastating effects on our self-perception, behavior, and acceptance in society. A negative identity prevents achievement of our full human potential and thereby our flourishing and contributing fully to the wider society. Instead, a woman gains acceptance in the secondary contexts most easily open to her—that is, as the consort, the decoration, the assistant, and the homemaker.

In the North American context, there is a resonance here with *The Scarlet Letter*. For those perceived to be the perpetual foreigner, like Asian American women, there are many inhibitions, as if they were branded with a totem of guilt and difference.[11] The negative consequences have long-lasting effects. One feels like a stranger in her own land. There is a high price paid in the sense of nonbelonging and loss of self-identity, part of neither this dominant North American society nor her own ethnic ancestry. This was the rationale behind

the Nazi insistence that the Jews wear a yellow Star of David. The reverse effect was achieved when in 1873 in San Francisco it was made law that Chinese men must cut off their queues (braided pigtails). This is a difficult line to maneuver and something that needs to be confronted so that Asian American women can be fully accepted in this society rather than being the perpetual foreigner.

In American society, foreigners are often the scapegoat for societal problems. People will often say to foreigners, "Go back home," even though their home is in the United States and perhaps has been for many generations. This understanding and perception of foreign women has had negative consequences on women immigrants and women of color within the United States. In Scripture, foreigners were blamed for many of the problems that the Israelites faced as a community; the understanding that women in particular are foreign and should be cast away or forced to leave a marriage and community is articulated in the book of Ezra.

Foreign Women in Ezra

The phrase "foreign women" occurs 12 times in the Old Testament, always in the plural. The first usage of this phrase is significant for understanding what Ezra intended. In 1 Kings 11:1, the author states that Solomon loved many foreign women, identified as "Moabite, Ammonite, Edomite, Sidonian, and Hittite women." The only other non-Ezra occurrences are in Nehemiah 13:26–27, and they allude to Solomon as well. When Nehemiah chastised the Jews who had married foreign women, he reminded them that Solomon's foreign wives turned his heart away from the Lord and caused him to sin despite the great favor he received from God. Thus the evidence surrounding this phrase strongly suggests that the foreign women were evil and idolatrous non-Jewish women,[12] who led their husbands astray.

The *golah* community of Ezra considered ethnic pollution to be a primary cause of the exilic experience, and because of this, the community was preoccupied with the notion of ethnic purity.[13] The term *impure* denotes a state of cultic disability and is the antonym of *pure*. The term *holy* denotes that which has been consecrated and thus belongs to God and is the antonym of *profane*. If a pure, profane object becomes defiled, its purity can be restored by a ritual of purification. However, holy entities should never be defiled.[14] The question of sacred and secular arises and what the differences are between them. Ezra-Nehemiah advocates ethnic purity and prohibits intermarriage in order to sustain group identity.[15]

The strong emphasis on purity goes against the postcolonial notion of hybridity and offers a false sense that things can remain pure and pristine. The

reality is that everything is in a state of flux and nothing remains the same or pure. Ezra insists that membership belongs only to those who can trace their descent back to the exiles who returned from Babylonia.[16] They are the true and loyal people of God. The ones who stayed behind and intermarried have lost some of their Israelite identity. The *am haaretz* were viewed unfavorably by the *golah*.

A question arises that if the *golah* men married foreign wives, the *golah* women must have also married foreign men, who may have been chosen for them for political or economic reasons. If so, why are the foreign men not expelled or divorced? Is this just the result of patriarchy? The women can be simply disposed of, but not the men. The foreign men are still allowed to stay and remain in the company of the *golah*. Within a patriarchal society, it becomes easier to dispose of foreign women.

Intermarriage

The case against intermarriage was made so that the people would not fall away from God. However, this is scapegoating a problem that the *golah* people kept experiencing. By going against intermarriage, it was a way for them to blame others for their falling away from God and not blame themselves for it.

"They have mingled the holy seed with the peoples of the lands" (Ezra 9:2). The phrase "holy seed" reflects the racially exclusivist mentality of the returnees. Exogamous marriage, or marriage to anyone other than a Jew, defiled the purity of the nation. Perhaps Ezra viewed intermarriage as profaning the holy status God conferred on Israel at Sinai. Mosaic prohibitions of intermarriage were intended to safeguard Israel from idolatry, but Ezra forbade intermarriages to all Gentiles because they are "unholy." Focusing on the word "seed," Ezra's primary concern was the preservation of the messianic line. In his view, "the holy seed" is a reference to the line of the Messiah, established when God promised Abraham that through his seed all the nations of the earth would be blessed.[17] This viewpoint perpetuates the notion of one race that is better than all others. This has resulted in ethnic cleansing, holocaust, slavery, subordination, and subjugation. These results outweigh the benefits of a "holy seed."

"Holy seed" is an extreme and rare term that elicits extensive criticism among readers of the Bible who are sensitive to ideas of racism. According to its literal meaning, this phrase implies opposition to racial-biological mixing, but some people attempt to soften this impression by understanding it as a means of preserving the purity of the religion and its practices. This notion of preserving the purity of religion is unreasonably hard to maintain or imagine, as the beginning of religious practice included hybridity and syncretism. The combination of the

idea of "holy people" with the understanding of "seed" in the sense of a physical remnant is a unique innovation of the text under discussion.[18]

When we study the birth of Christianity, there was nothing pure about it. It emerged from a Greco-Roman empire, which heavily influenced Christian practices, thoughts, and beliefs. Christianity has been prejudiced by Greek philosophy and in particular the understanding of dualism, which has resulted in problematic understanding of God and the world. It is not only Christianity that has emerged in syncretistic or nonpure ways, as other major religions are in the same situation. Nothing is pure, and we need to move away from this understanding that things can emerge out of purity or even remain pure.[19] We need to keep this in mind when imagining with Christian doctrine.

Separation and holiness are motifs in these events. Yet in order to understand what Ezra intended to communicate about holiness in chapters 9–10, it is necessary first to understand what took place. The text presents what seems to be a fairly simple case: prophetic prohibitions against intermarriage with pagan Canaanites had been violated, jeopardizing the continued existence of the community. As a result, the Jews were to separate themselves from the peoples of the land and send away their foreign wives. However, neither the law nor the prophets specified divorce as the appropriate remedy for intermarriage with Canaanites or any other non-Jewish group. In fact, Malachi made Yahweh's view of divorce quite clear: "Yahweh, the God of Israel says that He hates divorce" (Mal. 2:16). The absence of explicit biblical support for Ezra's reform raises questions about the concerns that motivated Ezra. Were these political, racial, religious, sociological, or a combination of some or all of them?[20] If God is not in favor of divorce, why is Ezra asking the people to divorce their foreign wives? In a divorce, it is the women who are at a disadvantage, as it is the women who lose money, property, and standing. If God hates divorces, then God hates it because of the consequences for the weaker, disadvantaged ones, who are women.

Ezra's mission is concerned with the issue of "mixed marriages." The chronicler presents the return from exile as a new entry into the Promised Land and reiterates the old warnings about contact with the existing inhabitants of the land. His concern is the maintenance of a long established tradition. However, there are clear examples earlier in his work of a welcome for those who are prepared to join themselves unreservedly to the covenant community (2 Chron. 30:11; Ezra 6:11). We need to ask what actually happened at a given moment in the community's history and if the welcome is a mere ceremony performed to retain its distinctiveness.[21] This is certainly unclear, but the message of purity is clearly communicated. When this purity narrative is read in the contemporary

American context, it is detrimental to our society, where hate crimes are committed against groups of people based on their race.

In Ezra, Shecaniah's proposal is essentially one of repentance for intermarrying. The people must turn from their wrongdoing and renew their covenant to be wholly dedicated to Yahweh alone. Shecaniah's final statement, "According to the law let it be done," clearly indicates he believed that sending away the foreign women and their children was in harmony with the Mosaic Law. When Ezra personally addressed the congregation of the *golah* three days later, he commanded the people to "do [Yahweh's] pleasure and separate [themselves] from the people of the land and from the foreign women" (Ezra 10:11). There can be no question that Ezra believed that sending the foreign wives away was in harmony with the law.[22]

How do we understand the compulsion in Ezra 9–10 to expel defenseless women and children as impure, abandoning them to an unknown fate? This may be an outcome of Ezra-Nehemiah's notion of the feminine as unclean (a conjunction exceeding that of Leviticus). This signifies an irreparable trauma at the core of Judean identity—a trauma that the text both records and tries unsuccessfully to repress. The subjectivity of individuals and of communities alike is always divided against itself. Ezra-Nehemiah is a tragic narrative of a fragile, emerging Judean identity. The community is at odds with itself, and it must wrench itself apart in order to reconstitute itself. But in this struggle, the purity strictures fall disproportionately on the women.[23] This disproportionality is a consequence of society's ability to portray women as the Other and therefore subordinate and subjugate them. It happened so easily within the community in Ezra, and if we are not vigilant, it can also happen within our communities today.

The Judean leadership, moreover, would have been under political pressure from the Achaemenid authorities to maintain a clearly delineated ethnic identity; intermarriage might blur the boundaries and threaten the community's authorized status within the empire. Land tenure also was at stake, as foreign women and their children might eventually lay claim to land belonging to the Jerusalem temple community.[24] Marriage with outsiders spells loss of land to the Jewish province and loss of potential husbands for the women of the new Judahite community. The pressures on new immigrants to marry up and out is well documented in ancient and modern situations. It is a matter of maintaining communal cohesiveness and continuity. "It is when women can inherit land from their husbands or fathers that foreign women pose an economic threat; without such rights they would not represent a loss of land to the community."[25] As women gained more power and strength, they were more easily disregarded and pushed aside.

Furthermore, as Harold Washington asks, "Why does it apparently not occur to Ezra that the 'strange wives' might be willing to be converted to Judaism?" The legal tradition invoked in Ezra 9:12 prohibits both foreign husbands and foreign wives (Deut. 7:3: "do not intermarry with them, giving your daughters to their sons or taking their daughters for your sons"; cf. Neh. 10:31; 13.25). Why then are only the wives (and their children) banned in Ezra 9–10?[26] This is an example of sexism, which was and is still present. The men are not pointed out and separated or asked to leave. This entire passage is a clear illustration of the economic power that men had over the women.

One of the core issues surrounding intermarriage is fear of losing purity and moving toward hybridity. However, there is nothing that is pure. We need to accept the hybridity and rejoice in the difference. Many of the *golah* remained with their foreign wives in spite of the pressure. It is also interesting to note that the other accounts of exile and return do not raise this issue in the way Ezra and Nehemiah do.

It is also through these outsider women that Jesus's lineage came to be, most notably Rabah, who is often viewed as the foreign woman. The outsider women were a very significant reality in Scripture. It is our human fear and ignorance that prevents us from welcoming and accepting the Other. God uses everybody, and all people are important and precious in God's sight. It is our intolerance and racism that prevents us from welcoming the outsider.

Welcoming the Foreigner

The understanding of the foreigner within the book of Ezra brings to light how foreign women were treated, excluded, and forced to move away. Within our contemporary context, we are reminded of the wrongs that we have done in our past and how we need to move forward. As more immigrants come into North America, we need to welcome them fully.

It is likely that many of the "foreign women" of Ezra were not ethnically foreign at all. Although Judeans who lived on in the land after the Babylonian destruction are rendered virtually invisible in Ezra-Nehemiah, they persist nonetheless as the "stranger" within.[27] This stranger within is a racist perspective that can lead to devastating consequences.

In Ezra, the "foreigners" or "peoples of the land" are a threat to the community. As Lester Grabbe writes, "It first surfaces with the building of the temple (Ezra 4–6); it comes in the form of a threat through intermarriage with 'foreign wives' under Ezra (Ezra 9–10). The countertheme is that only the returnees were true members of the community, the true Israelites; anyone who had

not gone into captivity had no claim on the God, temple and community of Judah."[28] This is how identity politics emerges and pollutes our society today. Who are the real Americans? Are they the natives who have inhabited this land for centuries or the white European immigrants who have only been here a few generations? We live with xenophobia, afraid of those who are different from us and labeling them as evil.

Asian American women are viewed as perpetual foreigners. As Asian American women struggle with their foreigner identity, they recognize that they are "in between" and on the margins of society. Being in this space allows room for renewal and creativity to form new forms of identity and a place to dream boldly. We need to work toward an inclusive society that welcomes and accepts those who are different and "strange." This can happen when we change our hearts, and it is in the heart that we can welcome the stranger and the foreigner and make them our friends.

We need to generate ongoing hospitality, which requires the creation of a friendly empty space where we can reach out to our fellow human beings and invite them to a new relationship. This conversion is an inner event that cannot be manipulated but must develop from within. We cannot force anyone to such a personal and intimate change of heart, but we can offer the space where such a change can take place.[29] As Henri Nouwen writes, "Hospitality, therefore, means primarily the creation of a free space where the stranger can enter and become a friend instead of an Enemy. Hospitality is not to change people, but to offer them space where change can take place."[30] The basis of this ongoing understanding of welcoming and embracing the foreigner and foreign women comes from our understanding of hope.

Doctrine of Hope

We need to hear and comprehend the voices of marginalized women and how their experiences affect how the Bible is interpreted. To read as a marginalized foreign Asian American woman is to bring to the text the reality of stereotyping, racism, and prejudice against Asian American women. Kwok Pui-lan warns us that "biblical truth cannot be pre-packaged, that it must be found in the actual interaction between text and context in the concrete historical situation."[31] We must be able to reconceive church doctrines that will liberate Asian American women. We cannot just accept what has been passed on for generations within the church and apply it within our own lives, which are so distinct from those of the dominant white society. We must take into consideration our culture and our experiences of foreignness, otherness, and marginality when we discuss hope and eschatology.

Asian American women's undesirable experiences of being looked on as perpetual foreigners and the understanding that they can be cast away when they are not important are unfortunate contexts that generate despair, loneliness, and anguish. In such circumstances, Asian American women can gain hope in their understanding of the gospel.

There is always hope in despair. The mission of the church is to build the reign of God. Christ's resurrection is the beginning and the promise of that which is yet to come. It gives meaning and purpose to Asian American women who suffer from marginalization, stereotyping, and subjugation. Hope is what people cling to as they dream of a better world where liberation and flourishing occurs. As we study the gospels, we recognize that Jesus was a provocative storyteller. Some of his memorable stories were about the *eschaton*, the coming of the reign of God. He used everyday people and objects to talk about the coming reign. Jesus talked about the prodigal son, the sower and his seeds, the leaven and the dough, the mustard seed, and the pearl of great price. All these stories point to the reign of God.

As Asian American Christian women struggle with their sense of identity and belongingness to a new land, they become attracted to the doctrine of eschatology and hope. This doctrinal reflection on hope is shown by Asian American women as they negotiate their othering as foreigners. It is an explicit reimagined doctrine of hope that seeks to break down the walls that continue to mark Asian Americans as the Other. Asian American women who have experienced marginalization and oppression by constantly being viewed as perpetual foreigners can look to the doctrine of hope as a mode of survival and even flourishing. The doctrine of hope is God's promise to act in the future that provides comfort in knowing God's steadfastness. This doctrine of God's promise to act is important to Asian American women as they live with anticipation and hope.

Some may get the wrong impression that a doctrine of hope implies that people can withdraw from the world and not take any action, as they recognize that a better world will come on its own. But we must be reminded that this doctrine of hope actually implies an active and strong participation in the world in order to help bring in a welcoming hospitality that anticipates the *eschaton*. Therefore, Asian American women can become active participants in bringing in the reign of God. The doctrine of hope reminds us that we must be active workers in the world to bring justice, love, and *shalom* to the current social order.

Asian American Christian women recognize that God is ahead of us and is the one who makes all things new. Eschatology gives fullness and purpose to the good news. Jurgen Moltmann, in carving out this theological study of eschatology and hope, states that it is the God of promise and exodus, and the

God who raised Christ and who lets the power of the resurrection dwell in us, who gives us this hope:[32] "Eschatology means the doctrine of the Christian hope, which embraces both the object hoped for and also the hope inspired by it. From first to last, and not merely in the epilogue, Christianity is eschatology, is hope, forward looking and forward moving, and therefore also revolutionizing and transforming the present. . . . Eschatology is the passionate suffering and passionate longing kindled by the Messiah. Hence eschatology cannot really be only a part of Christian doctrine. Rather, the eschatological outlook is characteristic of all Christian proclamation, of every Christian existence and of the whole Church."[33] Eschatology lends us all hope to advocate and work for change. We do not accept the brokenness of our lives, but we muster up the courage to work for change and advocate for the love of God who reaches out to all the ends of the earth and embraces the brokenness of all. Asian American women's hope lies in their faith. Their faith will sustain them and give them a purpose to move forward and participate in the reign of God.

It is during our dark times of being cast aside that we all cling to hope. As Asian American women continue to be viewed as the Other and as foreigners, they are promised the hope of a coming reign of God. They do not withdraw from the work of building the reign of God but rather fully participate in it. In ways that Moltmann could not have anticipated, Asian American Christian women write a new chapter in living according to the doctrine of hope. They need to begin dismantling the structures that perpetuate racism in our society. They need to dismantle patriarchy that continues to subordinate women. When there is so much devastation and corruption in the world, hope gives us light and the direction to rectify what is wrong. As Asian Americans struggle with their identity and strive to survive in a new context, it is hope that sustains them. In difficult times, it is hope that brings people together and gives them a future: a future of love, peace, and joy.

Notes

1. Segments of this chapter have been published as Grace Ji-Sun Kim, "Foreign Women: Ezra, Intermarriage and Asian American Women's Identity," *Feminist Theology* 22, no. 3 (May 2014): 241–52, http://fth.sagepub.com/content/22/3/241.abstract. It is used here with permission.
2. Women's sexual labor has also been exploited to bolster the economy. The sex industries in Southeast Asia were developed during the Vietnam War for the "rest and recreation" of the American service personnel. Today, sex tourism is highly institutionalized and globalized, with the tacit cooperation of local law enforcement agencies, national governments, travel agencies, and the international business community. Women and girls are illegally trafficked to Europe,

North America, Southeast Asia, Japan, and Australia. Young African girls, for example, are exported to Europe through an international ring of criminals to serve as prostitutes in the lucrative sex industry. Sex trafficking of women and children is on the rise, causing unspeakable suffering to the victims and their families. In the United States alone, the government estimates that there are as many as fifty thousand women and children trafficked into the country each year, primarily from Latin America, Eastern Europe, and Southeast Asia, for commercial sexual exploitation. Because of the fear of HIV/AIDS, some customers prefer to have sex with very young girls. Kwok Pui-lan, "Introduction," in *Hope Abundant: Third World and Indigenous Women's Theology*, ed. Kwok Pui-lan (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2010), 4.

3. Joseph Cheah, *Race and Religion in American Buddhism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 132.
4. Peter Phan, "Introduction," in *Journey at the Margins: Toward an Autobiographical Theology in American-Asian Perspective*, ed. Peter C. Phan and Jung Young Lee (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1999), xix.
5. Gale A. Yee, "Where Are You Really From? An Asian American Feminist Biblical Scholar Reflects on Her Guild," in *New Feminist Christianity: Many Voices, Many Views*, ed. Mary E. Hunt and Diann L. Neu (Woodstock, VT: Skylight Paths, 2010), 79.
6. Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. and ed. H. M. Parshley (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), xxvii.
7. Ibid., xxviii.
8. Harold C. Washington, "Israel's Holy Seed and the Foreign Women of Ezra-Nehemiah: A Kristevan Reading," *Biblical Interpretation* 11, no. 3–4 (2003): 427, 428.
9. See description by Hippocrates of menstrual flow.
10. Washington, 431.
11. ". . . and likewise to were two capital letters A. D., cut out in cloth and sewed on their uppermost garments on the arm or back; and if at any time they shall be found without the said letters so worne, whilst, whilest in this government, to be forthwith taken and publicly whipt." George Parsons Lathrop, *A Study of Hawthorne*, "VII. The Scarlet Letter," in *The Complete Works of Nathaniel Hawthorne* (East Sussex, UK: Delphi Classics, 2011), 538. The women in Hawthorne's story would prefer an even harsher symbol: "'The magistrates are God-fearing gentlemen, but merciful overmuch—that is a truth,' added a third autumnal matron. 'At the very least, they should have put the brand of a hot iron on Hester Prynne's forehead.'" Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*, in *The Complete Works of Nathaniel Hawthorne*, 17.
12. A. Philip Brown II, "The Problem of Mixed Marriages in Ezra 9–10," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 162 (2005): 449.
13. Kenton L. Sparks, *Ethnicity and Identity in Ancient Israel* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1998), 295. The holiness God requires always manifests itself in obedience to His Word. For Israel, holiness was therefore not primarily a matter of how one behaved within the sacred precincts of the temple but how one lived in every area of his or her life. This episode also reveals the connection

between the individual's behavior and the relationship of the community to Yahweh. The holiness or unholiness of each person affected the entire community's standing before God. This is why what 113 men had done brought the entire community under His wrath (Ezra 10:14). Corporate holiness is therefore an individual responsibility. The community will be holy only as individuals separate themselves from all that defiles and set their hearts to seek Yahweh. Brown, 458.

14. Christine Hayes, "Intermarriage and Impurity in Ancient Jewish Sources," *Harvard Theological Review* 92, no. 1 (1999): 5.
15. Tamara Cohn Eskenazi, "Ezra-Nehemiah," in *The Women's Bible Commentary*, ed. Carol A. Newsom and Sharon H. Ringe (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1992): 116–23.
16. David Janzen, "Politics, Settlement, and Temple Community in Persian-Period Yehud," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 64 (2002): 492.
17. Brown, 439, 440, 441.
18. Yonina Dor, "The Composition of the Episode of the Foreign Women in Ezra IX–X," *Vetus Testamentum* 53 (2003): 31, 32.
19. Our received doctrinal traditions, in their reflections on Scripture from the diversity of historical and cultural Christian contexts, show the shaping effect of cultural influences. This needs to be taken into account even as we knowingly bring our own cultural issues and resources to reimagine doctrines in our own contemporary cultural contexts.
20. Brown, 437, 438.
21. Richard J. Coggins, *The Books of Ezra and Nehemiah* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 56.
22. Brown, 453, 354.
23. Washington, 428, 429.
24. It appears that the Babylonians deported practically the entire Judean population, effectively emptying the land for the duration of the exile (2 Kings 25:11–12; 2 Chron. 36:17–21). However, only an urban minority was deported—most of the Judean population was left behind, and they were still there when the exiles returned to Jerusalem. There are hints in exilic writings, such as Ezekiel, of the inevitable conflict to come when the exiles return to rebuild the temple and to claim their land (Ezek. 8:1–18, 11:14–21, 33:23–29). Ezra, however, does not acknowledge that the land is already populated with Judeans when the exiles return, thus their opponents can only be represented as hostile non-Judeans. They are subsumed among the "peoples of the lands with their abominations" (Ezra 9:1, 11; Neh. 10:28; Ezra 4:4, 10:2, 11; Neh. 9:24, 10:30–31). See Washington, 430.
25. Eskenazi, 121.
26. Washington, 431.
27. Ibid., 430.
28. Lester L. Grabbe, *Ezra-Nehemiah* (London: Routledge, 1998), 100.
29. Henri Nouwen, *Reaching Out* (New York: Doubleday, 1986), 76, 77.
30. Ibid., 71.

31. Kwok Pui-lan, *Discovering the Bible in the Non-Biblical World* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1995), 11.
32. Jurgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope: On the Ground and the Implications of a Christian Eschatology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 9.
33. Ibid., 16.

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CHAPTER 7

Mary
Liberated and Liberator

Gina Messina-Dysert

Introduction

Mary is a paradigmatic woman in the Christian tradition, and her presence offers encouragement and promotes female self-worth. Nevertheless, the maleness of Jesus has been used to legitimize sexist ideologies and to oppress women within the church. Patriarchal teachings have served to disconnect women from Mary as an empowering figure. Mary has been utilized to justify the subordination of women, and in some cases, Mary has been eliminated altogether, leaving women with no model of a liberated woman in the church.

With the Protestant Reformation came the rejection of Mariology, or what some Protestants refer to as "Mariolatry."[1] Rosemary Radford Ruether explains, "Mariology is simply a closed book for the Protestant tradition, an heretical growth to be excised by responsible New Testament exegesis."[2] The doctrinal concern was that Mary might be made equal to or even more important than Jesus or that her position might detract from the role of woman as wife and mother. Mary's identity as Theotokos, or the Mother of God, was unacceptable to the Reformers; she was acknowledged very specifically as the Mother of the Son of God, as Calvin referred to her,[3] and the first disciple of Jesus. With her Divine Maternity rejected, Mary became designated as solely human, "in the sense of sinful humanity, utterly dependent on divine grace."[4] She was converted to a passive instrument of God and ultimately erased from most Protestant theology and piety.

Since this rejection, the Protestant tradition has been incapable of addressing women's place in practical terms. Women have been forced to embrace Jesus as the only model of humanity—one that is interpreted from a male perspective.

This repudiation of Mary has led to the denial of women's place within the Protestant tradition, reinforcing its patriarchal structure and disregard for women's humanity.

Whereas the Protestant tradition has relegated Mary to a peripheral role, Roman Catholic doctrine has domesticated Mary and thus exerted control over women, particularly over their sexuality. In glorifying her as the "Blessed Virgin Mary" and the "Mother of God," the formative councils of the Catholic Church created an impossible image of the perfect woman. The result of this domestication is a Mary that no "ordinary" woman can identify with; her being is unattainable and thus shames women for existing as they are, leaving them "essentially identified with Eve."[5]

This male-inspired image of Mary is characterized as a "passive, obedient, yes-woman or humble maid who does everything men want." She is presented with either downcast eyes, demonstrating her submissive position, or a prayerful gaze looking upward toward heaven, proclaiming her as the Lord's servant. According to Chung Hyun Kyung, "This shows the ultimate Catholic male fantasy of 'femininity' or of 'what the ideal woman should be.' This Mary is a symbol of a woman who is domesticated by men." The expression of the ritualistic adoration of Mary is dependent on her relationships to men. "She has value only when she is attached to men as daughter, mother, or spouse." Rather than being acknowledged as a human being "in her own right," she is instead derived according to the needs of men.[6] Through this patriarchal imagery of Mary, concomitant doctrine conveys the notion that women are "naturally inferior."[7] As Mary Daly explains, it is only in her designated role as subordinate that Mary is exalted. Daly quotes Simone de Beauvoir to make her point: "For the first time in history the mother kneels before her son; she freely accepts her inferiority. This is the supreme masculine victory, consummated in the cult of the Virgin—it is the rehabilitation of woman through the accomplishment of her defeat."[8]

In this chapter, I will primarily focus on Catholic theology and demonstrate that Catholic Marian doctrine is patriarchal in nature. Whereas traditional images of Mary have served to disempower, a feminist interpretation allows Mary to be rediscovered as liberated and liberator. I will explore the ways that Marian doctrine has oppressed Mary, only assigning her value within the context of male relationships. Using a feminist liberationist approach and anthropological vision, I will present a reimagining of Marian doctrine that deconstructs sexist ideology and illustrates Mary as both liberated and liberator.

Patriarchal Imagery in Catholic Doctrine

Beginning with the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception, Mary is formulated into a figure that leaves women disempowered and unable to achieve the status of what has become defined as "the perfect woman." According to Mary Daly, the teaching that Mary was conceived without original sin "'officially' sets her apart from all other women as utterly unique, an impossible 'model.'" As Daly explains, although some may claim this doctrine also creates a specific distinction between Mary and men, in fact it is used to "reinforce sexual hierarchy," since the Immaculate Conception occurred in preparation for the coming of Christ. In order to be worthy of becoming the Mother of God, it was necessary that Mary be conceived without sin. Thus this doctrine has a distinct impact on women and "reinforces sexual caste." According to Daly, "The inimitability of 'Mary conceived without sin' ensures that all women as women are in the caste with Eve. At the same time it reflects and reinforces duality of status. Women who are related to men have to be seen by 'their men' as exceptions in some way, just as Mary is good by reason of her relationship with Jesus. It would be intolerable for men to view as entirely evil those who are related to them more or less as 'private property.'"[9]

The doctrine of Theotokos—God-bearer or Mother of God—also presents significant issues for women. Again, it clearly sets Mary apart—glorifying her—while simultaneously subordinating women. In "Redemptoris Mater," Pope John Paul II states that Mary and her role within the Christian community are a model for the place of women in society:

> This Marian dimension of Christian life takes on special importance in relation to women and their status. In fact, femininity had a unique relationship with the Mother of the Redeemer . . . it can thus be said that women, by looking to Mary, find in her the secret of living their femininity with dignity and of achieving their own true advancement in the light of Mary. The Church sees in the face of women the reflection of a beauty which mirrors the loftiest sentiments of which the human heart is capable: of bearing the greatest sorrows; limitless fidelity and tireless devotion to work; the ability to combine penetrating intuition with words of support and encouragement.[10]

In 1988, Pope John Paul II issued "Mulieris Dignitatem," or "On the Dignity and Vocation of Women on the Occasion of the Marian Year."[11] With the objective of detailing a theology of womanhood, the pope used the role of Mary in the Christian community to further develop the connections among Mary, femininity, and women. In it, he claims that Mary as Theotokos provides all mothers, physical and spiritual, the ideal model of motherhood and femininity.

In this document, the pope maintains that women and men are distinct and thus have different roles: "Dignity and vocation result from the specific diversity and personal originality of man and woman . . . Consequently, even the rightful opposition of women to what is expressed in the biblical words 'he shall rule over you' (Gen 3:16) must not under any condition lead to the 'masculinization' of women."[12] Femininity is defined as "receiving" or giving of oneself in relation to God or husband. Although both Jesus and Mary give of themselves, according to Pope John Paul II, Jesus takes the initiative because he is male; thus the pope implies that only men are to take initiative. It is with these statements that the pope argues that women cannot be ordained and cannot represent the Spirit of Christ. Likewise, it is in this document that women's value is defined within relationships with men; women are valued as daughter, mother, and wife rather than in their own right.

The doctrine of the virgin birth further illustrates Mary's value as dependent on the male. According to Gordon Kaufman, the purpose of this doctrine is to explain the theological concept that Jesus is the Son of God and thus Mary is only significant as she relates to Christ.[13] John Macquarrie[14] and Karl Barth[15] also claim this connection, arguing that the divine strategy of the incarnation is supported by the doctrine of the virgin birth. According to Mary Daly, "The point of interest here is the fact that even what would seem to be the most nonrelational aspect of the symbol of Mary, the idea of her virginity, is comprehended by male theologians only in a relational way, having significance exclusively as tied to the male savior and the male God."[16]

The doctrine of the Assumption, officially proclaimed in 1950, teaches that Mary's body and soul ascended into heaven. As John Damascene described, "Just as the holy and incorrupt body that had been born of her, the body that was united hypostatically to God the Word, rose from the tomb on the third day, so she too should be snatched from the grave and the Mother restored to her Son; and, as He has descended to her, so she should be carried up . . . to heaven."[17] Here, the term "assumption" is purposefully used rather than "ascension," which describes Jesus's return to heaven. This coincides with the sexist nature of Marian doctrine in that it specifies Jesus's actions as taking place through his own power, whereas Mary's assumption is passive; she is taken up to heaven and thus has no power over her assumption. With this intentional language, the doctrine of the Assumption maintains a gendered hierarchy and continues to claim difference between men and women—one where men have power and women do not.[18]

Such imagery leaves Mary outside the bodily experience of women. Although Mary should be a source of empowerment, patriarchal representations continually remind women that they cannot be as chaste or as "good" as

Mary. Ruether explains, "But Mariology, in classical Catholicism, is set against historical women as representatives of carnal femaleness. Mary was the spiritual lady in whose service one rejected real (carnal) females."[19] If Mary represents "what is acceptably female"[20] and what no woman can achieve, she becomes a source of disempowerment.

Reimagining Marian Doctrine: Mary Liberated

Although patriarchal imagery has dominated Christian interpretation of Mary, we must define a feminist Mariology in order to liberate her and ourselves from two millennia of the male-defined Virgin and Mother of Christ. Opportunities for empowering representations of Mary must be explored, and this woman who has been silenced and denied must be redeemed. Utilizing a feminist lens to explore Scripture permits a reimagining of Mary as a woman who is both "liberated and liberator."[21]

In order to liberate Mary from the notion of having value only when attached to male relationships, I will offer a reimagining of Marian doctrine inspired by the work of feminist theologians who have recognized Mary as a source of empowerment and liberation. Acknowledging the work of Ivone Gebara and Maria Clara Bingemer, Mary must be understood within a human-centered anthropology. From this perspective, men and women are created in the image of God and are mediators of the relationship between the divine and humanity. As Gebara and Bingemer explain, "All humanity, men and women, are regarded as the center of history and revealers of the divine." A human-centered anthropology acknowledges the historical role women have played in God's salvation "and thus does justice to Mary, to women, in fact, to humanity created in the image and likeness of God."[22]

For Gebara and Bingemer, anthropology must be understood as beginning with human history and entrenched in the experiences of women; incorporating multiple perspectives, both objective and subjective; honoring the varying aspects of human development; and linked to our current historical situation. This anthropology acknowledges the distinctness of human experience and enables us to recognize Mary as continuously evolving within historical context. A human-divine foundation is bestowed, "which enables it to observe with justice and profound respect the human phenomenon—maker of history, created, loved and saved by God." When applied to Mary, it reveals the hitherto obscured facets relating to her and demonstrates that "Mary is the divine in the feminine expression of the human, a key expression of what we call wholly human."[23] Lastly, in being connected to our current historical situation, this anthropology acknowledges the ongoing subordination of women, the

patriarchal structures that continue to oppress, and women's recognition of this condition today. With the "awakening of women's historical consciousness," we must examine Mary from a new perspective that takes into account our current historical context.[24]

The feminist liberationist hermeneutic assumptions made here discern Mary as a woman who lives in God. The limitations and desires that exist for those who live in history are projected onto those who live in God. Women who live in history project their cry for liberation onto Mary, who herself has been oppressed. Mariology from this perspective must approach biblical texts with a hermeneutic of suspicion; texts must be read using a process to discover "underlying presuppositions, androcentric models, and unarticulated interests."[25] Texts about Mary are few, and traditional[26] interpretations, as demonstrated, do not unveil imagery of Mary that acknowledges her independence. As Gebara and Bingemer explain, "Each historical epoch constructs an image of Mary and her past and present historical activity. Hence we cannot say that the only truth about Mary's life is in the little that we are told by the Christian scriptural text. What is not said is also important."[27]

The Immaculate Conception

Although the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception has been recognized as serving to reinforce sexist hierarchy and separate Mary as distinct from women, a reimagining of this dogma explicates Mary as "full of grace" and the beginning of the process of renewal for humanity. She already exists as the "prototype," which every person is called to emulate. The Immaculate Conception is "a utopia that gives strength to the project and sustains the people's hope in their God." The Immaculate Conception of Mary must be understood as a commitment to salvation being realized in the physical world. Both her body and spirit are "animated by grace," and God dwells within her. All that was lost for humanity is regained through the Immaculate Conception of Mary. "Woman's body, which Genesis denounces as the cause of original sin, laying upon the whole female sex a defect and a burden difficult to bear, is rehabilitated through the gospel and the magisterium of the church. This body, animated by the divine Spirit, is proclaimed blessed. In it God has worked the fullness of [God's] wonders." Lastly, it is critical to acknowledge that doctrine venerates the Immaculate Conception of Mary of Nazareth, a poor Jewish woman committed to the Lord, as "insignificant to the social structure of her time."[28]

Theotokos

Theotokos, the divine Motherhood of Mary, has deep biblical roots. Mary is referred to as "Mother" 25 times in the New Testament, more than any other title. Likewise, she is explicitly proclaimed Theotokos by the Council of Ephesus (431 CE), which identifies Mary's divine motherhood as the "key for interpreting the mystery of the incarnation." Mary is the mother of Christ above all else, and Scripture clearly sets both Mary and Jesus—woman and man—at the center of salvation for humanity. "God takes on man's flesh though the flesh of a woman."[29] This must be understood not as claiming Mary's significance only in relation to man but instead as honoring Mary's equal role in the redemption of humanity. Salvation cannot occur without both Mary and Jesus.

A reimagining of this doctrine with an anthropological vision demonstrates that as Mary is the Mother of God, every woman is the mother of "not only the body but the whole person of her child." What can be recognized from the incarnation is that the person is not separated into two separate parts, body and spirit; rather, it is only through the joy and suffering of the body that we encounter the divine. It is through this encounter that we experience salvation. Gebara and Bingemer explain, "Mary is the figure and symbol of the people who believe in and experience this arrival of God, who now belongs to the human race. She whose flesh formed the flesh of God's Son is also the symbol and prototype of the new community, where men and women love one another and celebrate the mystery of life, which has been revealed in its fullness. This also reveals all the greatness of the mystery of woman—a mystery of openness, source of protection and life."[30] Mary must be recognized as the Mother of every living being and as revealing a particular facet of God that has not been examined—one that only became incarnate through her womb. This said, Theotokos must also be understood as identifying Mary as a poor Jewish woman who was mother to a dissident son and who then suffered greatly as she watched him be crucified. In Mary, as Theotokos, we see the suffering of every woman. Thus we must see beyond the "glorious," extravagant, and predominantly colonized imagery of Mary to recognize the simple handmaiden who freely chose a life in service to God.

Virgin

Although the Virgin Birth has only been seen as significant in relation to Christ, a reimagining of this doctrine illustrates Mary as a strong, independent, self-defining woman. In contrast to the contextual understanding of her virginity as significant only in relation to Jesus, the Virgin symbol in Christianity must also be understood as referring to a woman who is not defined solely by her

relationships with men. Instead, it communicates that idea of an autonomous woman, one who freely makes her own decisions and is not subject to any other person.

According to Marianne Katoppo, Mary as a virgin can be understood as meaning that she is a "liberated human being, who—not being subject to any other human being—is free to serve God." A woman who is choosing to remain a virgin is also choosing not to be identified within the context of male relationships. Her identity will not be daughter, wife, or mother; rather, her identity will be one relating to herself. As Marianne Katoppo writes, "She is a woman who matures to wholeness within herself as a complete person and who is open for others."[31]

It must also be noted that the very notion of Mary's virginity reveals that no man was involved in this crucial event—the birth of the Messiah. As Han Kuk Yum writes, "The fact that in Jesus' birth, human-male is excluded, connotes that a new human image, a new saving world could no longer be sustained through a patriarchal order. The human-saving Messiah who saves humanity has nothing to do with the patriarchal view of value or patriarchal order, but is totally the birth of new human image."[32]

According to Chung, from this we can interpret that the virgin birth represents "the overture of the end of the patriarchal order." It is "the symbol of God's judgment against men's sinning against women."[33] This miraculous event demonstrates that God does not ordain the oppression of women. In fact, the doctrine of Mary's virginity must be understood as being in direct opposition to patriarchy.

While the argument could be made that Mary is defined by what she is not doing sexually, as Daly explains, "even the Mariological tradition works against this biological and 'inverse-relational' interpretation. Mary was said to be a virgin 'before, during, and after' the birth of Jesus. This can be heard in such a way that by its very absurdity it literally screams that biology and abstinence from sexual activity are not the essential dimensions of the symbol of Mary as virgin." When liberated from its "Christolatrous" context and "understood apart from the matter of sexual relationships with men,"[34] a reimagining of the Virgin symbol reveals female autonomy. Thus Mary must be recognized as a full human being in her own right. She defines her own existence and her own experience, and as a result, she offers a model of a fully liberated humanity.

The Assumption

The doctrine of the Assumption has a clear focus on Mary as a whole person. "Her bodily nature is fully assumed by God and carried into glory. Her

assumption is not the reanimation of a corpse or the exaltation of a soul separated from its body, but the total fulfillment in God's absoluteness of the whole woman Mary of Nazareth."[35] Thus dualism has no place in the doctrine of the Assumption. Body and soul are one; the body is not diminished in favor of spirit, rather both are acknowledged as holy.

The traditional doctrine, as supported by John Paul II's rearticulation of this gendered theology, communicated a sexist ideology by reinforcing role difference for women and men. However, a reimagining of this doctrine demonstrates that women's bodies, which have been denigrated and subjected to rigid notions of gender complementarity by patriarchal powers in both Jewish and Christian traditions, are restored by the assumption of Mary. "Through Mary, women have the dignity of their condition recognized and assured by the creator of these same bodies." Like the resurrection of Jesus, the assumption of Mary demonstrates sin defeated by grace—God's justice conquering human injustice. She is proclaimed exalted through the Assumption. "Just as the Crucified One is the Risen Christ, so the Sorrowful Mother is the Mother assumed into heaven, the Glorious Mother."[36]

Reimagined: Mary as Liberator

Once Mary is liberated from patriarchal doctrine, she becomes liberator for women who continue to endure oppression, subservience, and denigration. No longer do feminist theological interpretations need to focus on Mary as being an alienating figure for women; rather, revisiting Marian doctrine with a modified feminist lens allows us to realize that a reimagined doctrine with liberating aspects is possible.

In Mary, we find a woman who affirms and participates in the experience of womanhood, a "maternal friend." As Elina Vuola states, she "understands the pains and contradictions of life."[37] According to Chung, Mary's visit to Elizabeth demonstrates that Mary shares the experience of women and stands in solidarity with them: "Mary and Elizabeth understand each other since they are brave women of Israel who open their whole beings to the work of the Spirit. They are two sisters who are walking on a new road, risking the safety of a conventional life, due to their commitment to the salvation of Israel."[38]

However, Mary must also be recognized as a divine figure, a human deification that offers women and men a model to strive for. Through reimagining doctrine, Mary is no longer domesticated by patriarchy; instead, she is birth giver to God and to a new humanity. Because Mary is Theotokos, Mother of God, she "participates in the divine in a special way: she gave human nature to the divine."[39]

We must also acknowledge that "Mary's humanity is female humanity."[40] Through her, we are able to recognize "female deification" as an exemplification of the profoundly human characteristic of the divine. Mary is the Mediatrix—through her, God's grace is bestowed.

Reimagining Mary in this way not only liberates her but also liberates us; recognizing her as a transgressive symbol allows us to begin with the female body when considering the divine.

Notes

1. *Mariolatry* is a term used to imply the revering of Mary as a saint in Catholic tradition is idolatry.
2. Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Goddesses and the Divine Feminine: A Western Religious History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 220.
3. Although Calvin supported the doctrine of Theotokos, he refused to use the title Mother of God, as he feared that it would cause confusion among Christians who did not understand its doctrinal basis. See Thomas A. O'Meara, *Mary in Protestant and Catholic Theology* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1966).
4. Ruether, 221.
5. Mary Daly, *Beyond God the Father* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1985), 81. Also see Tina Beattie, "Carnal Love and Spiritual Imagination: Can Luce Irigaray and John Paul II Come Together?" in *Sex These Days: Essays on Theology, Sexuality, and Society*, ed. Jon Davies and Gerard Loughlin (London: Sheffield Press, 1997), for an important discussion on Catholicism and women's sexual embodiment.
6. Chung Hyun Kyung, *Struggle to Be the Sun Again: Introducing Asian Women's Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1990), 75.
7. Daly, 61.
8. Simone de Beauvoir, *Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1963), 171, cited in Daly, 61.
9. Ibid., 82.
10. John Paul II, "Redemptoris Mater" (sermon, Saint Peter's, Rome, March 25, 1987), http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_25031987_redemptoris-mater_en.html.
11. John Paul II, "Mulieris Dignitatem: On the Dignity and Vocation of Women on the Occasion of the Marian Year" (sermon, Saint Peter's, Rome, August 15, 1988), http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/apost_letters/documents/hf_jp-ii_apl_15081988_mulieris-dignitatem_en.html.
12. Ibid.
13. Gordon Kaufman, *Systematic Theology: A Historicist Perspective* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1968), referenced in Daly, 84.
14. See John Macquarrie, *Principles of Christian Theology* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1968), referenced in Daly, 84.
15. See Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994).
16. Daly, 84.

17. John Damascene, "On the Falling Asleep of the Mother of God," in *Mary in the Documents of the Church*, ed. Paul F. Palmer (Westminster, MD: Newman Press, 1952), 60.
18. See Daly, 84.
19. Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1993), 105.
20. Chung, 76.
21. Ibid.
22. Ivone Gebara and Maria Clara Bingemer, "Mary," in *Mysterium Liberationis: Fundamental Concepts of Liberation Theology*, ed. Ignacio Ellacuria and Jon Sobrino (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993), 483.
23. Ibid.
24. Ibid., 484.
25. Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza, *Bread Not Stone* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995), 15.
26. I use the word *traditional* here to refer to interpretations that do not take a feminist perspective into consideration.
27. Gebara and Bingemer, 484.
28. Ibid., 490.
29. Ibid., 488.
30. Ibid.
31. Marianne Katoppo, *Compassionate and Free: An Asian Woman's Theology* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2000), 21, cited in Chung, 77.
32. Han Kuk Yum, "Mariology as a Base for Feminist Liberation Theology" (paper, Consultation on Asian Women's Theology, Singapore, November 20–29, 1987), 3, cited in Chung, 77.
33. Chung, 77.
34. Daly, 84.
35. Gebara and Bingemerop, 491.
36. Ibid.
37. Elina Vuola, "La Morenita on Skis: Women's Popular Marian Piety and Feminist Research on Religion," in *The Oxford Handbook of Feminist Theology*, ed. Mary McClintock Fulkerson and Sheila Briggs (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 514.
38. Chung, 80. For additional discussion on Mary as "Sister," see Elizabeth Johnson, *Truly Our Sister: A Theology of Mary in the Communion of Saints* (New York: Continuum, 2004).
39. Vuola, 514.
40. Ibid., 515.

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CHAPTER 8

Motherhood and the (In)vulnerability of the *Imago Dei*

Being Human in the Mystical-Political Cloud of Impossibility

Elizabeth O'Donnell Gandolfo

Whenever I steal a few moments of calm to nurse my youngest, newborn child in solitude, I find myself both marveling at his utter beauty and meditating on the painful nature of his vulnerability. My son's tiny body—such powerfully formed flesh—is absolutely amazing in its lust for life, in its ability to seek and use nourishment, in its soft and sensuous invitation to embrace. I see in his embodied longing the image of Divine Eros, the holy longing for life and love. His already blossoming sense of sociality, his first tentative smiles, his delight at our almost perfectly attuned relationship, and his fascination with his father and older siblings all astound me and remind me of the interdependence of the universe and the communal nature of the divine life itself. His rapid growth and development are also constant reminders of human participation in reality as an unending sacred process of both increase and decrease, of perpetual movement toward ever greater self-transcendence and love. And in the exciting prospects of my son's wide-open future, I see the yet-unknown possibilities offered by the Author of possibility itself. In my precious child, I see the beloved image of divine beauty, holy longing, sacred life, and perfect love in the flesh.

And yet, my son's flesh is not only powerfully formed; it is also mortal and corruptible, and it exposes him to harm. As a newly born human being, this precious person embodies not only the powerful possibilities of the *imago Dei* but also the vulnerability of the *imago*'s incarnation in a physical, interdependent, and finite world of heartbreak and horrors. My experience of mothering

has thus opened my eyes and my heart to the paradoxical power and vulnerability of the human condition and of the *imago Dei* therein.[1]

In this feminist reimagining of theological anthropology, women's experiences are revelatory and interpretive keys to uncovering, understanding, and articulating wisdom in the Christian tradition that has been obscured or distorted by androcentrism and gender injustice. I draw on my own and other women's diverse experiences of maternity and natality to argue that human beings are originally and inherently vulnerable but the *imago Dei* in every person is ultimately *in*vulnerable. Vulnerability exposes mothers in particular, and human beings in general, to tragedy and horrors, and it would be blasphemous to minimize, elide, or romanticize the destructive powers of injustice, violence, and human suffering. Nevertheless, the Christian tradition equally holds that the sin and suffering resulting from vulnerability are never so powerful as to destroy the imprint of divine love within each human person. Maternal narratives give powerful witness to this fundamental invulnerability of the *imago Dei*, even as it is violated by injustice and violence within the tragic contours of vulnerable human existence. Their testimony points to a reimagining of theological anthropology in which the paradoxical nature of human existence—what Nicholas of Cusa calls the "coincidence of opposites"—is encountered and embraced by entering the mystical "cloud of impossibility."[2] It is the invulnerable power of divine Love residing within us as *imago Dei* that can both bring us to contemplative awareness (and acceptance) of the human paradox and return us to the blood-soaked crosses of history to protest violated vulnerability, seek global justice, and inhabit the shared vulnerability of all humanity with the powers of solidarity, courage, peace, and compassion.

The Vulnerability of the Human Condition

Let us begin our reimagining of Christian anthropology with an honest consideration of the underlying conditions of human existence that make the incarnation of the *imago Dei* in humanity possible. Borrowing a term from Edward Schillebeeckx, I call these conditions "anthropological constants"—a system of coordinates that present us with "constitutive conditions" for the possibility of human existence and flourishing.[3] Unlike Schillebeeckx's more general approach, I seek to contemplate and better understand the human condition from the explicitly and scandalously particular vantage point of women's diverse experiences of maternity and natality. This standpoint is best accessed by listening to and learning from the actual narratives of women's (in this case, mothers') daily lives.[4] The anthropological constants that maternal experiences reveal are conditions for the possibility of existence and flourishing, but they are also the

varied sources of what I venture to identify as the anthropological metaconstant: *vulnerability*—that is, the diversely experienced but universal and inevitable exposure of human life to harm. Let us turn to a sampling of maternal narratives for illustrations and analyses of how this is so.

The first and most obvious anthropological constant is embodiment. Where, who, or what would we be without our bodies? And yet our bodies cause us all manner of troubles that power and privilege can assuage and forestall but never eliminate completely. Total control of the human body is impossible; the combination of fragility, sentience, consciousness, and mortality that characterizes our bodies thus renders us vulnerable to both physical and psychological suffering. The vulnerability of the maternal body illustrates this anthropological constant all too well. Kathryn S. March is a feminist anthropologist whose own struggles with a series of traumatic "childbearing losses" led her to notice that the birth stories she had heard in the United States naively centered on personal choice, "danced around a maypole of joyful images," and thus covered up the vulnerability of the reproductive process. In contrast, the rural Nepalese women with whom she worked "surround[ed] their contemplation of childbearing with shared and loudly voiced expression of fear."[5] For example, one woman that March interviewed in her ninth month of pregnancy with her third child reflected, "It's a personal plague, this illness, this childbearing . . . I wonder how it will be for me: if what's inside me is a source of grief and trouble, how will I survive? What might happen? . . . my heart-and-mind hurts! I hurt and a crying need overcomes me and then I cry. I cry."[6] While infant and maternal mortality rates are significantly higher in Nepal than in the United States, March points out that the fear expressed by the women with whom she worked is reflective of the more universal fact that "in childbearing, whether from the charged perspective of modern professional womanhood or from distant rural lifeways, bad things will happen to many of us, whether or not we are brave."[7] The "bad things" that can happen to maternal bodies are indicative of the "bad things" that can also happen to fetal and natal bodies—indeed, we were all birthed in vulnerability and contingency. All human bodies, like the bodies of our mothers and the bodies of our fetal and natal selves, are intractably vulnerable. Maternal experiences of pregnancy and childbirth are a prototypical example of our lack of control over that which threatens the health, well-being, and continued existence of our fragile, finite bodies.

The second anthropological constant is relationality and (inter)dependency. Motherhood illustrates the reality of interconnection from the molecular level all the way up to the level of interpersonal relationships, thus revealing that our embodiment is always and only ever relational embodiment. In conception, pregnancy, childbirth, lactation, and the caring labor that motherhood so often

entails, mothers inhabit a physical, material, and emotional place of "entangled subjectivity."[8] The interrelationality of maternal existence, and human existence in general, is beautiful and to be celebrated, but it also renders us vulnerable to relational harm. Feminist scholars who study relationships of care and dependency—including but not limited to the mother–child relationship—point out that the labors of care and dependency are indicative of the universality of vulnerability in the human condition. Feminist legal scholar Martha Fineman observes that "all of us were dependent as children, and many of us will be dependent as we age, become ill, or suffer disabilities."[9] The "inevitable dependencies" of these stages in life point to what Fineman calls "derivative dependency," which is a form of dependency that arises "when a person assumes (or is assigned) responsibility for the care of an inevitably dependent person."[10] Ursula, a British working-class mother struggling to survive on welfare after her husband left her, is a case in point: "My daughter had problems when she was first born. She only weighed four pounds, three ounces. I was so afraid I was going to lose her. I had to take care of her, I loved her . . . After she was born I couldn't work anymore . . . You never knew when she would get sick. If she had a seizure in school someone had to pick her up. I couldn't give that responsibility to someone else. She is my responsibility."[11]

Eva Feder Kittay argues that the urgency of caregiving responsibility renders mothers and other dependency workers vulnerable to exploitation and abuse. She also points out the affective consequences of such an intense form of relationality: "To infuse caring labor into such a relationship . . . relaxes our boundaries of self, which makes way for an emotional bond that is especially potent."[12] Like relationality in general, this emotional bond is a beautiful thing that is to be celebrated—but not romanticized, for it renders most mothers physically and/or psychologically vulnerable to not only abuse and exploitation but also the emotional effects of the harm that might befall their children or the quality of their relationships with them. The dependency work performed by mothers and other caregivers, with all the material and emotional vulnerability that this entails, ought to remind us that relationality and (inter)dependency are not merely maternal constants but anthropological constants. Our inexorable dependence on one another (and the planet) for our survival and flourishing renders us vulnerable to the harm that might come our way in relation with other dependent, flawed, finite, and vulnerable human beings.

The third anthropological constant is perishing. As embodied and relational creatures, human beings exist in a world of temporality, process, and change—all of which characterize what the ancient Christian writers called "corruptibility." Alfred North Whitehead refers to this reality as "perishing," a term that more readily illustrates the often tragic and painful nature of embodied

and relational processes of change. Monica Coleman explains that "the ultimate evil in the temporal world . . . lies in the fact that the past fades, that time is a perpetual perishing . . . In the temporal world, it is the empirical fact that process entails loss."[13] Many mothers experience this painful reality of perishing in the form of what Bonnie Miller-McLemore calls "mundane grief,"[14] which is the pain of everyday loss felt at the inevitable passing of time. Native American author Louise Erdrich illustrates this pain of passing beauty when she describes how she gathered strands of her daughters' hair and placed them throughout the woods around her home for birds to gather for their nests. Upon finding the emptied nest of the bird that successfully wove its home from her daughters' hair, Erdrich relates,

> I cannot hold the nest because longing seizes me. Not only do I feel how quickly they are growing from the curved shape of my arms when holding them, but I want to sit in the presence of my own mother so badly it hurts. Life seems to flood by, taking our loves quickly in its flow . . . This is our human problem . . . how to let go while holding tight, how to simultaneously cherish the closeness and intricacy of the bond while at the same time letting out the raveling string, the red yarn that ties our hearts.[15]

Mothers who experience only mundane vulnerability and loss from the passage of time are the lucky ones. For all too many mothers, perishing occurs abruptly and traumatically, through the suffering and deaths of their children due to illness, poverty, or violence. To name just one example, Rufina Amaya, the sole survivor of the El Mozote massacre in El Salvador, was devastated by the brutal murder of four of her five children by the US-trained Salvadoran army during the rampage. Her witness to the pain of this loss points to how the potential abruptness of perishing induces a profound vulnerability to traumatic grief: "You never stop feeling sorrow for your children . . . The one that was most painful was my eight month old girl who was still nursing. I felt my breasts full of milk, and I wept bitterly . . . I had such a knot and a pain in my heart that I couldn't even speak. All I could do was bend over and cry."[16] Amaya's experience is a painful reminder that "the beauty of particular lives and loves that are precious to us can be ripped from existence without a moment's notice. The grief that such loss occasions can be primal, unwieldy, and devastating for those who are left behind. Compared with mundane grief, it is voracious in its power. Unlike daily losses that interact with present and future possibilities to create a positive synthesis, such loss has the potential to subject survivors to experience the affliction of radical suffering, the destruction of all meaning, hope, and even reason for living."[17] Maternal experiences of both mundane and traumatic loss

remind us that perishing is a universal reality that affects us all, albeit in radically different ways.

The fourth and final anthropological constant comprises the twin specters of conflict and ambiguity, which render human beings vulnerable to perceived and/or actual failure and guilt. As embodied, relational, and ever-changing creatures, human beings inevitably face the problem of conflicting and ambiguous goods. Our understanding of this anthropological constant is deepened by the internal conflict and ambiguity that many mothers report that they experience both in their social roles and within the deepest recesses of their being. For example, many middle-class North American mothers have reported experiencing what Adrienne Rich, reflecting on her time as a mother of young children, courageously confessed to be "the suffering of ambivalence: the murderous alternation between bitter resentment and raw-edged nerves, and blissful gratification and tenderness."[18] Rich's confession points to the fact that it is possible, even common, to desire more than one good at once. Perfectly balancing one's own good as a mother with the good of one's children is a nearly impossible feat, even under the best of circumstances. This is especially true under conditions of economic and social injustice, as is the case in what has been called "the global care chain." The care chain involves mothers and other women from the Global South, or from impoverished pockets of the Global North, who must leave their families behind in order to earn a living caring for the children or elders of another, wealthier family. The ambiguity of the good here can cause a great deal of anguish for a mother forced to make such an impossible choice. One Filipina mother who left home for economic opportunities abroad reflected, "The first two years I felt like I was going crazy . . . I would catch myself gazing at nothing, thinking about my child. Every moment, every second of the day, I felt like I was thinking about my baby. My youngest, you have to understand, I left when he was only two months old . . . You know, whenever I receive a letter from my children, I cannot sleep. I cry."[19] A mother's tears once again alert us to the vulnerability of the human condition. Although the particular configuration of ambiguous conflicting goods is never inevitable, and is indeed all too often the result of social and gender injustice, the ambiguity of goodness within the finitude of the human condition is ultimately unavoidable. As Whitehead avers, "All realization is finite, and there is no perfection which is the infinitude of all perfections. Perfections of diverse types are among themselves discordant."[20] What the maternal examples here illustrate is how the experience of conflict and ambiguity in human life can produce not only discordant feelings but also guilt, anguish, and even despair at the impossibility of realizing all possible goods—or even of avoiding the choice to

participate in evil. "Failure," or at least the perception of it, is thus built into the system.

These anthropological constants are the very conditions that make human life possible and that are thus required for human happiness. But they also expose us to discomfort, distress, physical harm, emotional mayhem, even personal destruction. Anxiety about these vulnerabilities can spur individuals and interest groups to shield themselves with the armor of power and privilege, which unjustly mismanages universal human vulnerability at the expense of particular others, entire populations, and creation itself.[21] It seems, then, that human flourishing is jeopardized by the reality of vulnerability in human life. As novelist Carol Shield writes, in the voice of maternal distress, "Unless you're lucky, unless you're healthy, fertile, unless you're loved and fed, unless you're clear about your sexual direction, unless you're offered what others are offered, you go down in the darkness, down in despair."[22]

The vulnerability of the human condition presents a theological problem, then: What place does vulnerability hold in a reimagined Christian anthropology? Is the *imago Dei* in humanity vulnerable to the vicissitudes of embodied and relational existence in a changing and conflictual world? What does the Christian doctrine of the *imago Dei* offer to vulnerable and suffering humanity?

The (In)vulnerability of the *Imago Dei*

This feminist reimagining of Christian anthropology operates under the firmly held conviction that women and men are fully equal in their creation as *imago Dei*—reflections of the Trinitarian God who "exists as the communion of love, as a reciprocal exchange of love and persons in which humanity has been graciously included as a partner."[23] Made by love and for love, women and men bear a luminosity in their beings that calls them to free and reciprocal relationships in community with one another, God, and all creation. And yet, the maternal witnesses who grace these pages testify to the fact that the very conditions within which human beings exist—the anthropological constants described previously—render the incarnation of love in human flesh vulnerable to catastrophe, compromise, terror, and trauma. As embodied, relational, and temporal creatures, human beings seem to be faced with an impossible challenge: to mirror infinite and unambiguous goodness and love in a world of finitude and ambiguity. While vulnerability and suffering are all too often unjustly imposed and therefore *should not be*, these painful realities are an ever-present dimension of our existence. What is more, anxious attempts to escape to a fictitious realm of invulnerability by grasping at power and privilege end up exacerbating and violating the vulnerability of others—even at the cost of their very lives. Within such impossible circumstances, the doctrine of the *imago Dei* calls

human beings to love anyway. In the words of Liberian peacemaker, Nobel Prize Laureate, and mother Leymah Gbowee, we must "step out and do the impossible."[24] Or in the words of the wildly popular blogger and mother Glennon Melton, life is hard, but "we can do hard things," and ultimately, "love wins."[25] But how is this possible within the contours of our vulnerable existence?

The witness of three mothers and the contemplative wisdom of two medieval theologians point toward a reimagined doctrine of the *imago Dei* in which the vocation to love does not beckon us from afar as a distant ideal but rather offers us an inner, existential (dare I say ontological?) affirmation of our inviolable worth and dignity as bearers of God's beloved image. Although this existential empowerment of the *imago* arises from within, it is a thoroughly social reality—both drawn from the bonds of community and friendship and issuing forth in a commitment to justice, peace, and solidarity with vulnerable and suffering humanity. For example, it was only once she reentered into community that Rufina Amaya, the aforementioned Salvadoran peasant woman who lost four of her five children in the Massacre of El Mozote, began to resist the despair and fear that threatened to overtake her in the wake of her horror. Empowered by relationships of solidarity with others who had experienced similar trauma and drawing on an inner sense of indignation and personal faith, Amaya refused to be silent. The image of God in her thirsted for justice and peace, and she thus overcame her fear to speak truth to power: "Why should I be afraid to speak the truth? This [the massacre] is a reality that they [the US-trained soldiers] have done and we have to be strong to speak of it."[26] Amaya's courage and commitment to the truth are a testament to the inviolability of the divine image, especially in the most violated and vulnerable of persons and even in the face of horror.[27]

Similarly, but with even more explicit reference to the divine source of her strength, Liberian peacemaker and Nobel Laureate Leymah Gbowee arose from the ashes of domestic violence and civil war to lead a women's movement for peace in her country. As a mother of young children trapped in an abusive relationship and accused by her father of being a "damned baby machine,"[28] Gbowee gathered courage from scriptural affirmation of her identity as God's beloved heir: "O thou afflicted, tossed with tempest, and not comforted, behold, I will lay thy stones with fair colors, and lay thy foundations with sapphires" (Is. 54).[29] Buoyed by this promise and its affirmation of her true worth, Gbowee entered into solidarity with other women who had been affected by violence, first through work with a trauma healing and reconciliation project and later through her leadership in the Liberian women's peace movement. It was in and through her experience of solidarity that the promise of Isaiah—of her true identity as an inheritor of divine royalty—came to fruition in her: "I

had lived in fear for a long time . . . I'd seen friends, whole families, wiped out, and never lost the awareness that I could be next. I'd been depressed for a long time, too, isolated in my own world. When I had to send my children away, I felt the worst kind of loneliness. But now, as the women of [the Women in Peacebuilding Program] gathered together, my fear, depression and loneliness were finally, totally, wiped away."[30] Drawing strength from both the existential knowledge of her true identity and the solidarity that she experienced in community with other women, Gbowee was set on fire with the luminous flame of divine love in her. Nothing that her abusive partner had done to her, her father had said about her, or Liberian president Charles Taylor or the warlords had done to her country could extinguish that flame.

Finally, Glennon Doyle Melton is a popular "mommy blogger"[31] in the United States who also bears witness to the invulnerable power of Love's divine image in the midst of human vulnerability. For twenty years, Melton experienced the painful realities of bulimia and substance abuse. Having grown up in a relatively privileged, peaceful, and loving family, Melton felt all the more guilty for her brokenness, pain, and vulnerability. Her addictions to food and alcohol became the armor she desperately needed to shield herself from the vulnerability and riskiness of life and love. Upon discovering that she was pregnant, Melton set out on the long hard road to recovery; in the years since, she has finally discovered that she is strong, brave, kind, and true. She has also discovered and has been further empowered by the love and presence of God in the depths of her being. Once she was ready to tune out the incessant voice of Fear, it was Love who spoke to her and assured her,

> When you were born, I put a piece of myself in you. Like an indestructible, brilliant diamond, I placed a part of me inside of you. That part of you—the very essence of you, in fact—is me; it is Love, it is perfect, and it is untouchable. No one can take it, and you can't give it away. It is the deepest, truest part of you, the part that will someday return to me. You are Love. You cannot be tarnished by anything you've done or that anyone else has done to you. Everyone carries this piece of me—this perfect Love. You are all a part of me, and I am part of you, and you are a part of each other. The essence of each of you is Love.[32]

In an effort to shed yet another layer of armor and reach out in love and solidarity to honor the pain and the power of other women, Melton began to tell the truth about the messiness that lay under the veneer of her "perfect life" through her blog at Momastery.com and later through her memoir and speaking engagements. A community of women—self-declared "Monkees" who live by the creed "We Belong to Each Other"—has assembled around Melton's social media presence. Not she alone, but these women together, testify to the

fact that the *imago Dei*, the image of divine Love, resides within each of us—that "the Love, the spirit, the God in you and in everyone, is equally brilliant and unmarred."[33]

Amaya's courage to speak the truth, Gbowee's passionate pursuit of peace, and Melton's experience of Love as the true essence of her being are all contemporary maternal echoes of the experience and articulation of divine Love present in the tradition of Christian mysticism. While human beings are subject to tragic and traumatic suffering as a result of their vulnerability (and its sinful mismanagement in systems of privilege), the Christian tradition nonetheless maintains that human beings are ultimately defined not by their vulnerability but by their origin, identity, and end as beloved bearers of the *imago Dei*. "For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God" (Rom. 8:38–39). In Christian mysticism, this invulnerable union of God with the soul empowers the soul for embodying truth, love, and beauty in a world of vulnerability, suffering, and woe. For example, Julian of Norwich's reflections on Love point to the invulnerability of the divine image present within all humanity. Julian refers to this inviolable substance of the human person as the "godly will" of the soul,[34] which is "knitted" to God in its creation with a subtle and mighty knot that nothing can undo.[35] Although Julian is careful to maintain a distinction between God and creation, she paradoxically insists that God sees no distinction between the godly will of the soul and Christ and therefore no real difference between God's own substance and God's image in humanity. Both the body and soul are enclosed in the goodness of God; the whole human person dwells in God and God in the whole human person. While human beings are vulnerable creatures that, like all things, pass away, the goodness of God is everlasting in us—"always complete, and closer to us, beyond any comparison."[36]

A similar, though perhaps more esoteric, line of mystical thought runs through the spiritual writings of Nicholas of Cusa, who avers that the face of God is "the natural face of all nature, the face which is the absolute entity of all being, the art and the knowledge of all that can be known."[37] God is properly understood here as the essence of all existence and the foundation of all being. Therefore, "just as nothing that exists is able to flee from its own proper being, so neither can it flee from [God's] essence, which gives essential being to all things."[38] As much as the vulnerability and suffering of the human condition may induce us to "flee" or "fall" from the image and power of divine love that resides within us, such separation is impossible. In other words, no one can be deprived of their true identity as bearers of Love's divine image, for Love is the

essence of all that is. Julian and Nicholas thus articulate in mystical language what Amaya, Gbowee, and Melton testify with their lives: that the pervasive and unalterable power of divine love for creation preserves and protects the absolute dignity, worth, and beauty of the human person as the image of God.

The invulnerability of the *imago Dei* in the human person does not, however, magically ward off vulnerability and suffering, nor should it be appealed to in the dualistic hopes of spiritual escapism or otherworldly salvation. Rather, the incarnation and cross of Jesus point to the manner in which human beings on this earth and in this lifetime are united to God not only in the invulnerability of our divine substance but in what Julian calls the "sensuality" of our vulnerable flesh. Nicholas sees God's presence not only in the exalted nature of all things that partake in the divine essence but in the "lowly" nature of human finitude and particularity. That the divine person of Christ became vulnerable, suffered, and died in the human flesh of Jesus of Nazareth means that the invulnerability of the divine image is not wrapped up in or turned in on its own essential nobility. Rather, the divine image goes out into the world with the power of Love that embraces vulnerability and suffering, meeting them with the virtues of courage, peace, and compassion. The paradox of the *imago Dei* as both vulnerable and invulnerable in humanity is the selfsame paradox of divinity—infinitely powerful, yet potently present in creation as vulnerable, suffering love.

Conclusion: The Mystical-Political Cloud of Impossibility

The suffering that human beings can experience as a result of creaturely vulnerability is capable of destroying bodies, minds, and spirits. It would be blasphemous to elide the very real pain and all too frequent horror of the human condition. The murdered children of El Mozote and Liberia will never have the chance to let their light shine to its fullest potential. Even in the midst of privilege, peace, and prosperity, it is not an unusual occurrence to live a life of "quiet desperation"[39] or to die in darkness and despair. Nevertheless, the maternal and mystical witnesses that grace these pages point us to the invulnerability, the indestructability, the heartbreaking beauty of our ultimate identity as God's dwelling place on earth. Such is the paradoxical nature of the human condition and of the residence of the divine image therein. Julian points to this paradox in her integration of the godly and human natures of the soul. Nicholas offers a similar articulation of the mysterious paradox of human existence within divine reality and divine reality within human existence. These insights regarding the paradoxical unity of invulnerability and vulnerability that exists in human beings as God's beloved image push us to the edge of reason, to the

brink of language itself. Taking a cue from the apophaticism embraced by Nicholas, I conclude with the suggestion that the human embodiment of the *imago Dei* must ultimately be approached within "the cloud of impossibility," beyond the capacity of human reason where the divine and human mysteriously meet in the "coincidence of opposites."[40] Far from removing our concerns from the vulnerability and violation of God's beloved image in suffering humanity, this mystical experience should serve to keep our feet planted on the bloody spoils of human history, inspiring and empowering social and political resistance to that violation. Just as my beloved son embodies the perfect, yet vulnerable image of God in his growing body, mind, and spirit, so too do all other children, women, and men embody that (in)vulnerable image. In the cloud of impossibility, divine Love unites the invulnerability and vulnerability of the *imago Dei* in and through a mystical-political commitment to defending the sacred dignity and worth of every human person.

Notes

1. For a more extended reflection on the power and vulnerability of both the human condition and divine redemption, see my book *The Power and Vulnerability of Love: A Theological Anthropology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015).
2. Nicholas of Cusa, "On the Vision of God," in *Selected Spiritual Writings*, ed. H. Lawrence Bond (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1997), 251ff.
3. Edward Schillebeeckx, *Christ: The Experience of Jesus as Lord* (New York: Crossroad, 1980), 733.
4. I recognize the methodological (and political) dangers of speaking of "women's experience" and "motherhood" in academic (and popular) discourse, especially when such terms contribute to an abstract universalism that elides differences. For an extended consideration of these dangers, see the introduction to Gandolfo, *Power and Vulnerability of Love*.
5. Kathryn S. March, "Childbirth with Fear," in *Mothers and Children: Feminist Analyses and Personal Narratives*, ed. Susan E. Chase and Mary Frances Rogers (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2001), 169–70.
6. Ibid., 170.
7. Ibid., 173.
8. Marcia Mount Shoop, *Let the Bones Dance: Embodiment and the Body of Christ* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2010), 79.
9. Martha Fineman, *The Autonomy Myth: Towards a Theory of Dependency* (New York: New Press, 2004), 35.
10. Ibid.
11. Val Gillies, *Marginalized Mothers: Exploring Working Class Experiences of Parenting* (New York: Routledge, 2007).
12. Eva Feder Kittay, *Love's Labor: Essays on Women, Equality, and Dependency* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 36.

13. Monica Coleman, *Making a Way Out of No Way: A Womanist Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008), 56.
14. Bonnie Miller-McLemore, *In the Midst of Chaos: Care of Children as a Spiritual Practice* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2006), 176ff.
15. Louise Erdrich, *The Blue Jay's Dance: A Birth Year* (New York: Harper Collins, 1995), 68–69.
16. Rufina Amaya et. al., *Luciérnagas en El Mozote* (San Salvador, El Salvador: Ediciones Museo de la Palabra, 1996), 20 (translation mine).
17. Gandolfo, 78.
18. Adrienne Rich, *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Institution and Experience* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1976), 21–22.
19. See Arlie Hochschild, "Global Care Chains and Emotional Surplus Value," in *On the Edge: Living with Global Capitalism*, ed. W. Hutton and A. Giddens (London: Jonathan Cape, 2000), 131. Hochschild is citing the research of Rhacel Salazar Parreñas here, which was later published in *Servants of Globalization: Women, Migration, and Domestic Work* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001).
20. Alfred North Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas* (New York: Macmillan, 1933), 330.
21. See Gandolfo, chapters 3–4.
22. Carol Shields, *Unless* (New York: Fourth Estate, 2002), 224.
23. Catherine Mowry LaCugna, "The Trinitarian Mystery of God," in *Systematic Theology: Roman Catholic Perspectives*, vol. 1, ed. Francis Schüssler Fiorenza and John P. Galvin (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 188.
24. *Pray the Devil Back to Hell*, DVD, directed by Gini Reticker (New York: Fork Films, 2009). See also Leymah Gbowee, *Mighty Be Our Powers: How Sisterhood, Prayer, and Sex Changed a Nation at War* (New York: Beast Books, 2011).
25. "Welcome to the Momastery (Mom-astery)," accessed July 15, 2014, http://momastery.com.
26. Amaya, 20 (translation mine).
27. I had the privilege of meeting Rufina Amaya and conversing with her at length on many occasions between 2001 and 2005. Although the testimony recorded in *Luciérnagas* does not touch on her personal faith and resilience, her comments to me indicated that she drew strength to speak and to go on living from an interior divine source.
28. Gbowee, 72.
29. Cited in ibid., 47 (italicization of the biblical text is Gbowee's).
30. Ibid., 130.
31. See Melton's website at http://www.momastery.com.
32. Glennon Doyle Melton, *Carry on Warrior: The Power of Embracing Your Messy, Beautiful Life* (New York: Scribner, 2013), 248.
33. Ibid.
34. Julian of Norwich, *Showings*, trans. Edmund Colledge and James Walsh (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1978), 241, 283.
35. Ibid., 284.
36. Ibid., 186.
37. Cusa, 246.

38. Ibid., 250–51.
39. Henry David Thoreau, *Walden* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1910), 8.
40. Cusa, 251ff.

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CHAPTER 9

Divine Grace and the Question of Free Will

A Feminist "Stumbling Block"?

Amy Carr

As a Finnish American born in the mid-1960s and raised in a rural northwoods Upper Michigan town surrounded by an Ojibwe reservation, it was not until I attended college in another state that I realized my hometown's particular combination of immigrant and indigenous cultures was not common in the United States.[1] Nevertheless, as a child, I had a sense of providence about having come into existence when the larger world seemed to be changing for the better. If only inchoately, I was aware of the civil rights movement and of women moving into all spheres of the workforce. In my Lutheran denomination, women were beginning to be ordained as pastors in 1970. Although later I would recognize that two world wars had interrupted nineteenth-century notions of progress, as a child, I wondered if God had willed that I be born in a time when ideas of equality were bearing fruit in society. At the very least, I was certain that the Spirit of God was driving these changes, although participating in them seemed to mean moving to more highly educated urban places with more support for intellectually intense women who were theologians in the making.

Surely for many women of my generation, a sense of God's grace stirring us into becoming ourselves—expressing freely our individual wills and graced callings—was inextricably united with a sense of providential social changes. As put in an oft-quoted paraphrase of nineteenth-century Unitarian minister Theodore Parker's insistence that providence directed the antislavery movement: "The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice."[2] Feminist Christians move within this trajectory of progressive theological imagination, noticing a continuity between contemporary movements to create more

egalitarian societies and biblical examples of the Spirit reworking God's covenant with Jews and Christians in new, more inclusive ways.[3] Grace manifests in the unfolding of social progress wherein ever more persons are being incrementally liberated from oppressive social forces; today, divine justice has been gracing more women with freedom to will the shape of their lives, less bound by the limits of patriarchal expectations.

To be sure, contemporary North America also harbors quite different narratives of free will and grace's intertwining with providentially construed social norms. During my first year of college, I worked as piano accompanist at a Missionary Alliance Baptist Church, where providence was witnessed in the number of souls saved by missionaries globally and in stories of missionaries for whom money would mysteriously come their way just when they needed it. The music director gave me pamphlets warning of the dangers of secular humanism, which she believed to be rampant at my liberal arts college. For her, God's grace and our free will are exercised in the context of the born-again conversion of individuals who maintain traditional family values in an era when the apocalypse is nigh. What I took to be signs of the Spirit shaking up the old patriarchal social order were, for her, signs of the end times.

This clash of theologically framed social visions is the backdrop for feminist reconstructions of Christian doctrines of free will and grace. Certainly there is a *spectrum* of Christian conceptions of gender norms, and even evangelical and Pentecostal churches that advocate women's subordination to husbands have been affected by feminist movements of the past half century and by demographic changes (like more women working outside the home).[4] But those of us with egalitarian and often nonessentialist or queer-friendly views of gender know that we operate in a theological battle zone fraught with a kind of ecclesial temptation that is as old as the church: a trial of perception about God's revealed will. Are—or in what respect are—shifting gender norms prompted by divine grace rather than perspectives of a fallen world? Are egalitarian visions of the church (Christ's body) propelled by prophetic insight about the demands of justice? Or are they driven by worldly ways that promote self-seeking individualism, rather than a Christ-centered community in which the word *obedience* inspires dedication, not shudders? Like polemical Christian debates about predestination over the centuries, any Christian feminist reflection on free will and grace is set within this larger context of contested theological anthropology and ecclesiology. But whereas Calvinists and Arminians disputed whether a person possesses free will before justification and what sort of human freedom might be present in sanctification, in gender-oriented discussions the primary question about grace and free will is concerned with whether (or to what extent) a woman redeemed in Christ may exercise her own will apart from patriarchal

authority. While all doctrinal reflection on grace and free will presupposes particular depictions of human nature—fallen and redeemed—feminist conversations on grace and free will took shape initially around contested gender norms, as these feature within theological anthropology and ecclesiology.

In what follows, I work from the classic Christian feminist assumption about grace and free will as doctrines correlated with an egalitarian (if queerly differentiated) human nature as transformed in Christ. But I complicate this broadly shared feminist picture by noting some of the varied ways feminist theologians are painting in the details. First, I sketch a threefold typology of feminist construals of God's grace and our freedom to will, and then I focus more specifically on feminist reflections on grace in relationship to the effects of trauma (or being sinned against deeply) on human agency. To the latter, I contribute a Lutheran feminist account of free will and grace attuned to the spiritual dynamics that often mark being profoundly sinned against. I conclude with a broader observation about how, in negotiating their relationship to historical creedal-shaped Christian thought, feminist theologians are dividing over rather different conceptions of divine power in relation to our own, with implications for how we perceive the manifestation of grace and the nature of creaturely freedom. Traditional assumptions about the omnipotence of grace constitute a stumbling block for feminist theologians, some of whom continue to navigate the paradoxes of classic Trinitarian theology as the most insightful resources for their work, while others are designing notions of divine grace and creaturely possibilities that are more configured by the metaphysical worldview of process theology and addressed to a broader-than-Christian public—a North American public hungry for a theological depth of imagination but not necessarily informed by or invested in historical Christian thought.

Let us begin with three sketches of grace-empowered women that circulate today, if not exactly by the rather whimsical names I have given them as shorthand for some distinctive patterns in relating grace and free will that seem to be present at least implicitly in feminist Christian thought.

Three Images of a Grace-Empowered Woman: From a Deceived Eve to a Receptive Mary, a Forthright Feminist Pelagia, or an Ecofeminist Stoic

At least since Augustine, Catholic and later Protestant theologians have thought about the doctrines of free will and grace in conjunction with debates about original sin and the degree to which our theological anthropologies should offer a pessimistic account of human nature (until or apart from our nature's transformation in Christ). Consequently, Christian feminist theologies often first

went to work on the more frequently gendered discussions of sin and anthropology by critiquing doctrines of sin insofar as they blame and shame women (through Eve) disproportionately and even "essentially" for original sin. The idea that Eve's sin warrants women's perpetual subordination to men has New Testament roots: "Let a woman learn in silence with all submission. I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she is to keep silent. For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor. Yet she will be saved through childbearing, provided they continue in faith and love and holiness, with modesty."[5] While there are creative ways of limiting the authority of this text in contemporary Christian churches,[6] feminist theologians have generally regarded this passage as one whose authority is compromised by patriarchal assumptions and prefer to build on Galatians 3:28, which portrays an androgynous (or newly, nonoppressively gendered) freedom in Christ in whom "there is neither male nor female."[7]

One image of a grace-empowered woman simply bypasses the question of women's subordination to men (whether for feminist ends or not) and instead points to Jesus's mother, Mary, as a model of a woman whose grace-shaped will is defined by her capacity to say "yes" to the vocation God asks of her. As one example, a Catholic apostolate draws on Vatican II's teachings about a new "hour . . . when the vocation of woman is being acknowledged in its fullness": "The mission of Women of Grace® is to transform the world one woman at a time by affirming women in their dignity and vocation as daughters of God and in their gift of authentic femininity™. Exploring all aspects of [what John Paul II called] the 'feminine genius,' Women of Grace® promotes . . . the gift of true womanhood . . . and presents the Blessed Virgin Mary as the exemplar of all women."[8] The phrase "feminine genius" refers to women's "potentiality to bear another human person within herself," which in turn cultivates practices of "self-giving" to others.[9] Women of Grace founder Johnnette Benkovic promotes this essentialist definition of women with passion through a weeknight cable show and other media outlets, often citing Mary's "yes" to God as the pattern for all Christian women's ways of exercising an evangelized and evangelizing will: "[Mary's] receptivity, trust and surrender are the hallmarks of what it means to be a woman of grace."[10]

In addition to finding this essentialist view of graced women too limiting, even when it is allied with women's public leadership in evangelism, many feminist theologians worry that the model of a receptive Mary who is always "self-giving" fails to take into account what Valerie Saiving called a gendered difference in sin's expression (pride and self-assertion for men, a diffused sense of self for women).[11] Although third-wave feminists rightly challenged Saiving's tendency to generalize about the universality of women's experiences on the

basis of mid-twentieth-century, white, middle-class assumptions, many feminist theologians remain wary of characterizing a graced will in terms of receptivity.

Still, some—like Beverly Lanzetta and Sarah Coakley—have generated more appreciative accounts of surrender to God in prayer and of receptivity as an interior space of discernment,[12] connecting freedom to will (including what Coakley calls "empowerment to speak against injustice and abuse") with a grace animated in contemplation.[13] Likewise, in her feminist reading of Luther's commentary on the Magnificat, Lois Malcolm underscores a Marian spirituality of bearing witness to God's own saving actions in a twofold sense: as mystical observation and prophetic announcement of God's reversing the fortunes of the mighty and the lowly.[14] While they might not equate submission to God with submission to papal teaching on gender, each of these theologians advocates a feminist sort of "receptive Mary."[15]

Coakley herself notes that many feminists hold up a vision of women's autonomy that dismisses the value of vulnerability, even before God.[16] The dominant North American feminist Christian view of a grace-empowered woman has tended to be a kind of feminist Pelagia who stands in the lineage of the prophets, forthrightly challenging social injustices like the exclusion of women from positions of leadership, androcentric God-talk, and other forms of hierarchy-based oppression. Here free will and grace are conceptualized in light of a *telos* of women's flourishing that does not depend on an essentialist view of gendered natures: human willing is bound by patriarchal delusions until a process of conscientization awakens women to the need to claim their own agency against oppressive, internalized social forces. Accordingly, divine grace is construed as a communally mediated power enabling persons of all genders to cultivate egalitarian, interdependent selves[17] who together create what Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza calls a nonkyriarchical society—one that resists oppressive hierarchies of every sort.[18]

Why coin the name *Pelagia* to characterize influential Christian feminist theologians like Fiorenza or (at least early) Rosemary Radford Ruether? Pelagius was an early fifth-century Christian moral reformer who believed that God would be unjust if our own moral choices were not the ultimate factor in our destiny.[19] For Pelagius, a key dimension of God's grace was the gift of the moral law itself. Because Augustine argued that Pelagius failed to see that the incarnation would have been unnecessary if humans could save themselves, in the history of Augustinian-influenced Western theology, to be called a *Pelagian* was to be considered a heretic who ascribed too much power to human initiative in salvation. Yet in North America's pragmatic do-it-yourself culture, Pelagius's assumptions often make more sense. Likewise, in their drive to reform patriarchal accounts of sin and human nature, some feminist theologians have

seemed remarkably optimistic about the capacity of human beings to recognize and shake off socialized gender norms, with an arguably Pelagian tendency to depict grace as that which gives the vision of mutual right relations (the gift of a feminist "law") as well as aiding in their cocreation. Grace becomes a vehicle to the end of our empowerment as agents who can freely invent our lives in ways responsible to one another but not defined by patriarchal gender assumptions. Self-assertion and activist moral zeal, not receptive surrender, are the prominent traits of a feminist Pelagian vision of Christian free will. While this approach to feminist theology is often called "prophetic," characterizing it also as Pelagian highlights prophetic feminism's assumptions about grace and free will—assumptions that should be owned as lived options within the larger feminist Christian conversation.

If somewhat earlier second-wave feminist theologies express a North American and Pelagian optimism, recent reflections on graced human capacities often embody something more akin to an ecofeminist Stoicism—urging a mindfulness of our human place in a larger ecological order while being aware of the persistence of the physical, emotional, and spiritual effects of abuse, marginalization, and the systemic violence of a still kyriarchical world. Here a more modest sense of human freedom is allied in sundry ways with divine grace, seen variously as that which enables resilience, wonder amid loss, sheer survival, hope for the future (near and/or eschatological), and—again—holding steadily in view a vision of mutual right relations that always lies at the heart of Christian feminist imagination.

In particular, theological reflections on the environmental crisis, trauma, and disability have opened up more tempered depictions of grace and free will among feminist Christians, as have efforts to trace the degree to which theological anthropologies acknowledge vulnerability, fragility, and/or tragedy as a feature of human existence generally (with or without a notion of fallenness) or within a circumscribed social location. Kathleen Sands and Sharon Betcher are two of many who articulate a more Stoic than Pelagian liberationism. Critiquing feminist theologies that avoid acknowledging permanent loss, Sands calls for a more realistic feminist theological heuristic of "tragic consciousness" in which human willing is opened by mourning and wonder to enable our creative survival.[20] Drawing on disability studies and crip theory (which, like queer theory, retools a disparaging term for productive cultural analysis of how we construct social identities), Betcher challenges all liberation theologies to a conversion away from fantasies of physical wholeness to a Spirit-graced identity as crip—as one who equates freedom of the will not with freedom to have or use a "normal" body but with a capacity for "equanimity"—for trust "as a way of abiding with our mortality" without illusions of present or future

perfection.[21] In various ways, these and many like-minded progressive theological voices have a quasi-Stoic ring to them with regard to human willing. While they do not advocate that expressly Stoic move of withdrawing from public action to contemplate placidly the world's ordering, they do focus on delineating the limits of what is possible for individual and collective willing and holding these limitations in awareness while imagining what life before God is and can become.

If an ecofeminist Stoic approach encourages a kind of human willing that harmonizes with creation's own dynamics in sustainable rather than destructive ways for ourselves and our planet, then what of grace? Insofar as what I have called a Stoic sort of feminist tends to cast God as the ground of creaturely interdependence, God's grace takes a form like that of Pelagia: a pointing to the vision of right relations. The difference is that a more Stoic sensibility sounds a note not of optimistic liberation but of worried warning. Hope allies with practices of resistance and care in the face of an often apocalyptic awareness of climate change, population displacements amid civil wars, and the contingency of women's (and men's) access to education and improved living conditions, as even once-intact civic institutions can crumble amid economic, political, or military crisis. Grace here enables endurance and proceeding according to a vision of right relations, albeit as if under a yellow caution light and with a graver sense of God's own limited powers. While a feminist Pelagia might stress human empowerment and regard God as a background enabler, an ecofeminist Stoic seems more conscious of the genuine possibility that grace will fail; omnipotence does not even take the form of ensuring that the arc of the moral universe will bend toward justice at the hands of many Spirit-inspired persons. While the reception history of Rosemary Radford Ruether's groundbreaking work in *Sexism and God-Talk* often renders Ruether a model for what I have called a feminist Pelagian voice, she also articulates an ecofeminist Stoic perspective on the interplay of our free but fateful choices with a necessary but finite grace:

> We either choose to learn new ways of relating that recapture biophilic mutuality on a new, consciously chosen, level, or else we will destroy ourselves and much of the life forms of the earth with us. I see God, the divine ground of being, as the ground of our hope in this struggle for transformation, but this is not a God who is "in charge" and will intervene to save us despite ourselves and bring in a reign of God from the sky. Rather the deep ontological structures that dictate biophilic mutuality as the only way to generate well-being give us the potential for making a new future, but one we could miss through our greed, hatred, and delusions.[22]

Similarly, Flora Keshgegian replaces the notion of divine willing with the metaphor of God as nonanthropomorphic "energy for life"; God is power "in" rather than "with" us—and not "for" us in any eschatologically directed sense.[23] For Keshgegian, there is no omnipotent grace, no assured outcomes; rather, hope is a process built on "practices of habitation" we can cultivate for life's preservation.[24] Or as Shelly Rambo puts it, reflecting on the persistence of Holy Saturday in the wounds that remain on even a risen Jesus in John 20, "Life is not victorious and new, but it's a *living-on.*"[25]

Some feminist-minded theologies with an arguably Stoic approach to freedom of the will *do* affirm a more potently directive grace. Kristine Culp, for example, depicts our power of willing in relationship to our creaturely vulnerability to "both transformation and devastation."[26] God's glory manifests via grace through and to our vulnerability itself, at the cross as a crossroads between devastation and transformation, shining in our cultivation of virtues like delight, gratitude, and resistance to idolatrous denials of our vulnerability. For Culp, God's grace bears us in a particular direction: toward a glory-filled transformation beyond survival.[27]

In feminist theological reflection on trauma, we can see a similar Stoic wrestling with how to testify to divine grace while also naming more precisely the wounding of the will in those deeply sinned against.

Grace and Freedom after Trauma: A Catholic and a Reformed View

Trauma, and the broader experience of being "sinned against" profoundly, is not the only disruptive force that enervates human agency. But attending to voices that think theologically about it lets us build on the more forthrightly prophetic, ambitious theologies of our feminist ancestors while being aware of the ways a harmed person's agency can be constrained by feelings of defilement, impurity, and frozenness (even if one cognitively believes in egalitarian principles and worries that shame after victimization is a byproduct of internalized patriarchal attitudes about women). While trauma can follow in the wake of combat, torture, or public tragedies (natural or human), it also occurs after acts of interpersonal violence addressed by feminist movements: rape, domestic violence, child abuse, and sexual abuse. Two feminist theologians who have pondered trauma's effects on human agency are Jennifer Erin Beste,[28] who critiques Catholic theologian Karl Rahner's account of grace and freedom in light of the experience of victimization, and Serene Jones,[29] who reflects from within the Reformed tradition on trauma and grace.

Beste argues that Rahner's view of human freedom must be modified to acknowledge that trauma borne of incest can destroy a person's capacity to freely respond to grace. In Rahner's influential theological anthropology that

shaped Vatican II's recognition of truth in other religious traditions, each of us is graced with an inborn openness to transcendence, including an ability to learn to discern and answer to this sense of the divine. Unless our faculties of reason are compromised too severely, we are each capable of being a "receptive Mary"; in Rahner's words, insofar as freedom is "mediated by . . . the world of other persons. . . . towards God, there can and must be present in every [this-worldly, interpersonal] act an *unthematic 'yes' or 'no'* to this God of original, transcendental experience."[30] Grace rouses us to love our neighbor, in whom we are freely choosing to love God as well. Yet Beste cites evidence that many survivors of incest have been socialized into equating self-giving with participation in abusive relationships and therefore struggle to form any sense of self-worth not infused with self-loathing or to exhibit self-directed agency instead of compulsive repetition of traumatic memories or self-destructive behaviors. Moreover, incest survivors often experience "greater fear and shame before God."[31] How then can they readily trust God and others sufficiently to say yes to God through freely expressed love of neighbor?

Drawing on feminist accounts of socially constructed selves and on trauma theory, Beste develops a hinted-at dimension of Rahner's own theology of freedom: A freed-up will that can respond to grace—and hence the efficacy of divine grace itself (in this life)—is contingent on the ethical quality of one's interpersonal relationships, including "experiences of *being* loved."[32] On one hand, "interpersonal harm can damage our freedom to receive and respond to God's grace";[33] by the same token, healing, trust-restoring relationships may foster a survivor's sensitivity to grace. Both God's grace and our freedom are always intersubjectively formed or hampered; in Catholic fashion, there is no salvation apart from the church (although Beste, with Rahner, perceives an implicitly ecclesial yes-saying to God wherever humans love one another).

Although Serene Jones mentored Beste, Jones's own approach is more typically Protestant in its focus on scriptural encounter as the vehicle of grace. In her experimental assays into reading together trauma theory and theology, Jones, like Beste, evokes how trauma disorients a person's apprehension of the world and herself, leaving her unable to act without feeling ineffectual, or like a perverse interloper who never quite belongs. Jones then ponders both trauma theory and contemporary stories of the traumatized within the landscape of biblical scenarios whose characters—from Rachel and Mary to Jesus—suffer due to the sins of others. But it may be in Jones's essay on Calvin's commentary on the psalms[34] that we can most readily see a Reformed enunciation of how grace interfaces with a traumatized will.

Drawing on Calvin's depiction of sovereignty at work within the human act of narrating one's own life in relationship to Scripture's imagined worlds, Jones

depicts grace as that which restores a capacity for agency to the traumatized by "rescripting" human lives undone by trauma. By communally reading the psalmists' own laments that somehow turn into praise of God, the traumatized are assisted in first naming their own "maladies"[35] before divine and human witnesses and then being drawn to a horizon of hope that sets their maladies as one moment in a larger narrative about a restored world.[36] This pattern is part of the larger gospel story of sin and grace. As Jones puts it, "A Christianly formed imagination thus tells stories about people who are agents in their own lives, with God-given grace to act . . . coherently connected to their own pasts . . . related intimately to other people and to the good creation that sustains them, and looking forward in hope to a flourishing future. The challenge . . . is to explore how an imagination shaped by grace might meet and heal an imaginative world disordered by violence."[37] Indeed, a grace-bearing rescripting of traumatized lives is more akin to a juxtaposition of one story upon another than a singular passage from trauma to healing. In a Stoic gesture, Jones describes her disillusionment with liberation, feminist, and substitutionary atonement theologies' shared, "almost instinctual optimism about change that is hard to sustain," since neither "justice-seeking policies" nor work at self-change alters the "fact that the vast majority of trauma survivors reach the end of their lives still caught in its terrifying grip."[38] Seeking a grace that encompasses such lives, she eventually reaffirms the sin-grace story not as a linear movement of dramatic change but as the possibility of telling and living two simultaneous truths: of loss and hope, mourning and wonder.[39] Even if one is fortunate enough to experience a linear break from a violent context to a safer one, there is still an embodied need to mourn, even as one turns, like David in exile, to perceive a fuller frame of reference—to picture being in the Temple praising God, while still alone in the wilderness. Consequently, the sovereignty of grace does not mean an instant erasure of a circumscribed ability to will a life apart from the disordering effects of the sins of others (alongside any compounding sins of one's own). But through the company of contemporary and biblical companions, grace can enable one to see, feel, and name those disordering consequences—while also glimpsing and beginning to enact a reordered, trustworthy world.

Both Beste and Jones emphasize that freedom of will can be hindered in the wake of trauma. Although they might disagree about whether or how grace is "sovereign" with regard to a traumatized person's experience of an entrapped will, Beste and Jones suggest that grace is that which either addresses or enables a human will that has genuine freedom of movement. In a Lutheran turn, I will suggest that grace can also be witnessed *within* a will that is still bound in response to the harm of others.

Grace in and beyond a Bound Will: A Lutheran View from the Cross of the Sinned-Against

Lutheran feminist theologians often angle toward grace and free will from the direction of a theology of the cross, in which God's grace is hiddenly active in apparent weakness (Christ in the manger, on the cross) rather than publicly successful exercises of our will that tempt us to an illusion of self-reliance. Deanna Thompson nuances a theology of the cross to show how it addresses us differentially insofar as we are sinners (facing God's right judgment) and sinned-against (met in the crucified Jesus by One who capaciously understands our plight).[40] Similarly, Arnfríður Guðmundsdóttir ties a redeemed free will to both God's converting solidarity with the oppressed on Christ's cross and the risen Christ in whom we are free to *voluntarily* suffer on behalf of others.[41]

In a Lutheran constructive move of my own, I build on Luther's conviction that a sense of *Anfechtung*, or divine affliction, can itself be a locus of divine grace, in order to suggest that grace acts *within* and not only *against* a "bound will"—including a traumatized or sinned-against state of soul—as part of a cruciform Christian existence.[42] Such a troubled state of soul may involve sensing God's countenance as oppressive, as having called one into a state of alienation from others for unfathomable reasons or perhaps to convert one away from an idolatrous trust in fellow creatures. I would suggest that grace is at work within—not only in drawing us away from—these sorts of unsettling spiritual dynamics common in the sinned-against (just as grace is at work through our spiritual senses convicting us insofar as we are sinners). Such provident grace directs the arc of our lives inwardly and with others precisely by its peculiar expression in the sometimes challenging, sometimes comforting sensations of divine countenance that accompany the spiritual effects of trauma—*and* in our Spirit-led, shifting responses to those senses of God, including speaking back to some divine faces. Our interior life is both acted on in ways beyond our willing and met with our energy of ongoing interpretation; grace operates dually in spiritual perceptions that arise unbidden, and in our evolving interpretations of them, as we are guided from within a bound will toward a will freed from self-alienation. And as Beste and Jones insist, such a gospel of grace is more readily heard in the company of those who can bear faithful witness to our inner lives.

In Luther's commentaries on Genesis and Isaiah, he interprets biblical characters' experiences of divine affliction in just such a manifold way:[43] one that resonates with all three feminist approaches to free will and grace I sketched earlier. At times, Luther regards a sense of divine affliction as an illusion generated by the demonic, by traumatic circumstance, or by the "flesh" (our perception as distorted by sin). At other times, he reads divine affliction as a manifestation

of divine purgation or pedagogy—or, rarely, as a mask God dons that we must challenge by recollecting a more benevolent face of God promised in Christ. In the spirit of both a feminist Stoic and a receptive Mary, Luther depicts the Christian life as a process of learning ever better to endure the many faces of God. Commenting on Genesis 45:5, he states,

> This, then, is the way the saints are governed . . . namely, that they are not scandalized by the counsels of God or offended by the face with which He meets us. For sometimes He wraps it up and hides it, lest we be able to recognize or look upon it. He is indeed the God of life, glory, salvation, joy, and peace; and this is the true face of God. But sometimes He covers it and puts on another mask by which He offers Himself to us as the God of wrath, death, and hell. See to it, therefore, that you . . . learn and hear what He means with His unfamiliar and strange form. For this is done in order that you may be humbled, that you may endure and wait for the hand of the Lord and the revelation of His face.[44]

While Luther did not himself distinguish between sinner and sinned-against in his talk of a humbled or bound will, he nevertheless stands with prophetic feminists (though not a Pelagian view per se) not only when he regards divine affliction as an illusion but insofar as he affirms a vision of well-being (including a more direct experience of God's goodness) as the direction in which grace draws Christian life eschatologically. Nevertheless, for now, grace often appears paradoxically, as a lifelong process of cruciform purgation that wears away our old sinful, sinned-against humanity by uniting us with Christ, who drags us from the mud of a will bound to sin-soaked relations to the firm ground of a will freely bound to trust in God and love of neighbor. The possibility of such trust presupposes not only the old-fashioned Christian value of forgiveness of those who have sinned against one but also the sentiment sharpened by liberation theologies of all sorts that the fullest redemptive healing for any one of us presupposes the equally ancient prophetic vision of justice coming to pass among persons and in our shared world. At a broader level, then, there is providence for *all* at play in the way that the sinned-against can feel God calling them (by a strange sort of grace) into their state of affliction, for such alienation signals spiritually that all is not well until those who harmed them are held to account and brought to the possibility of repentance, in this life or in that ultimate space-time we mark by the language of resurrection and judgment day.

Omnipotent Grace as a Stumbling Block: Two Emerging Feminist Paths to Construing Human Freedom in Relation to the Divine

There are feminist warning signs on any route to appropriating Luther's multidimensional ways of spotting grace within sensations of divine affliction—familiar dangers about valorizing suffering as saving. Is it not spiritually safer and theologically sounder to ally grace only with interior spiritual senses that obviously mend rather than seemingly undo the bearings of the sinned-against? Yet if a feminist doctrine of grace cannot find a way of affirming an ever-active, eschatologically efficacious grace, then God or divine power is in danger of being reductively identified with the potential or occasional *effect* of creaturely crafted right relations[45] or the inspiring but ineffectual *source of the idea* of flourishing right relations—an idea whose effectiveness depends on human will and capacities.

What seems a danger to some is treasure to others. And certainly theological views without omnipotence should be cultivated insofar as they speak meaningfully to many within or without Christian churches who are shaped by a more naturalistic or process worldview or by an outlook that is increasingly "spiritual but not religious." There is need for theological discourse among those who are neither captivated by creedal-informed Trinitarian thought nor part of another historically well-developed religious tradition; here an ecofeminist Stoic perspective offers a genuinely fruitful direction to travel for a more vaguely theistic feminist theology or a spiritual humanism in which a reclaimed human agency and creaturely flourishing is the sovereign (or at least modestly plausible) end and grace an aid to that end (or sign of its arrival). Feminist theologians in this trajectory often organize their doctrines of God and grace around a worry about God overpowering rather than empowering human beings (a worry reinforced when confronting a long history of Christian texts about grace and free will that emphasize predestination, itself an easily misunderstood and variously construed doctrine). If divine omnipotence inevitably implies a logic of domination, then affirming an irresistibly potent grace seems at odds with any real human free will.

For many feminist Christians, however, shared power between equals makes sense in the human realm, just not in the divine-human realm. The doctrines of grace and human will thus form one flashpoint prompting feminist theologies to discern how they envision God's power in relationship to our own. To "Christ crucified" as a stumbling block to Jews and Gentiles in Paul's day,[46] and to feminist Christians concerned about how to interpret the cross in our own time, we can add the idea of an omnipotent grace as another feminist stumbling block. The issue arises for those pondering how to relate divine power to a vision of mutuality—a vision that Ada María Isasi-Diáz termed the "Kin-dom

of God"[47] to evoke a sense of interrelationship ("kin") without the hierarchy implied by the idea of "king."

Speaking for those who perceive this particular stumbling block as a foundation of Christian theology, Sarah Coakley and Kathryn Tanner point out that a Christian account of creatureliness need not fear a hierarchy between God and humans—nor embracing ideas like divine sovereignty and creaturely dependence—if we recognize that we are not competitors with God on the same plane of existence but rather that the whole of our existence and the orientation of our ends are gifted by God.[48] Feminist concerns about women's subordination (to men or to God) can be addressed within—rather than by having to reject—the Christian paradox that affirms simultaneously an omnipotent divine grace and human freedom, when that paradox is nuanced in a way that is mindful of how interpersonal oppression can block or warp a sense of agency.

Undoubtedly, what I have termed feminist Pelagian, ecofeminist Stoic, and/or receptive Marian approaches to grace and free will might be developed in either embrace or repudiation of the related Christian doctrine of divine omnipotence. To the conversation about how to articulate grace in relation to the bondage of the will that often accompanies being traumatized or otherwise jarringly sinned against, I have suggested that the Lutheran tradition contributes resources for elucidating grace with regard to the very experiences of self and God that many feminist theologians have been quick to condemn as effects of patriarchy: senses of defilement and alienation that so often trail victimization.

A Lutheran feminist doctrine of grace and free will can highlight both the humanly willed causes of victimization and the divine grace transforming from within the bound wills of both sinner and sinned-against—not always swiftly, not fully in this life, but with a hope for all creaturely existence that teleologically trends toward redemption. While even this sort of feminist configuration of a "graced will" may not speak to the Missionary Alliance Baptist music director I once knew, I would hope that a broad spectrum of Christians would recognize that feminist doctrinal reflection can proceed in a way that acknowledges elusive divine sovereignty over our individual lives and creation as a whole.

Notes

1. While half my ancestors were Finnish, my last name reflects the Slovenian quarter of my ancestry (Çar, pronounced and meaning "czar"), and my maternal grandmother descends from German immigrants. I grew up hearing Slovenian spoken among some relatives but Finnish among other relatives, many older neighbors, and some of my classmates. Ojibwe and Latin were the only languages taught at my high school; Lutheranism and Catholicism dominated religiously. I mention this only to point out that "Euro-American" does not always get at the

local particularity of "white" cultural identities. At the same time, I sensed that there *is* a broader common culture—in this case a feminist-inflected one—that was visible even in my far-flung corner of the United States.

2. For a history of this quotation with citations, see "The Arc of the Moral Universe Is Long but It Bends toward Justice," *Quote Investigator*, November 15, 2012, accessed July 10, 2014, http://quoteinvestigator.com/2012/11/15/arc-of-universe.
3. Here are just two examples: the covenant will one day include eunuchs and foreigners (Isaiah 56:1–8), and Gentiles may be included in the covenant in Christ without becoming circumcised (Acts 15) or giving up unkosher foods (Acts 10).
4. For one example, see R. Marie Griffith, *God's Daughters: Evangelical Women and the Power of Submission* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2000).
5. I Timothy 2:11–15 (New Revised Standard Version).
6. For example, the passage might be taken to apply only to a context in which women are uneducated, or to unruly women in the particular church to which 1 Timothy's author wrote. For a review and critique of the "seven major principles that distinguish the hermeneutics of evangelical feminism from those of hierarchalists," see Robert L. Thomas, "The Hermeneutics of Evangelical Feminism," in *Evangelical Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2002), 373–405, http://cbmw.org/uncategorized/the-hermeneutics-of-evangelical-feminism.
7. In arguing that authority cannot be given to *any* biblical text as if it can speak apart from a community of interpreters, Dale Martin points out that the earliest readings of Galatians 3:28 envisioned the new humanity in Christ as that of an androgynous male. *Sex and the Single Savior* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2006), chapter 6.
8. "About Us," *Women of Grace*, accessed June 6, 2014, http://www.womenofgrace.com/en-us/about/default.aspx. The trademark applies to the term *authentic femininity*. I am not sure what such trademarking might mean.
9. Ibid., visible as a pop-up glossary when clicking on the highlighted phrase "feminine genius."
10. Johnnette Benkovich, "The Fertility of the Fiat," *WOG Blog*, March 25, 2011, accessed July 2, 2014, http://www.womenofgrace.com/blog/?p=2009. Benkovich describes herself as a formerly nonpracticing Catholic who underwent a conversion in 1981 that renewed her commitment to Catholicism and "sparked a new vocation: . . . sharing the Gospel message through the utilization of media." See "About Us," *WOG Blog*, accessed July 2, 2014, http://www.womenofgrace.com/en-us/about/default.aspx. Benkovich lifts up the mystics, not the liberation theologians, from Catholic tradition. Cultivating conservative women's empowerment, she also seems to be the primary face of the Benedicta Leadership Institute for Women, which "train[s] Catholic women to be active leaders" with a focus on Catholic pro-life teachings. See "Leadership," *WOG Blog*, accessed July 10, 2014, http://www.womenofgrace.com/en-us/leadership/default.aspx.
11. Valerie Saiving, "The Human Situation: A Feminine View," *Journal of Religion* 40, no. 2 (1960): 100–112.

12. For examples, see Beverly Lanzetta, *Radical Wisdom: A Feminist Mystical Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005); Sarah Coakley, *Powers and Submissions: Spirituality, Philosophy and Gender* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2002).
13. Sarah Coakley, "How My Mind Has Changed: Prayer as Crucible," *Christian Century* 128, no. 6 (2011): 36.
14. Lois Malcolm, "Experiencing the Spirit: The Magnificat, Luther, and Feminists," in *Transformative Lutheran Theologies: Feminist, Womanist, and Mujerista Perspectives*, ed. Mary J. Streufert (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010), 165–76.
15. See also Rosemary Radford Ruether's comparison of patriarchal and liberation Mariologies in chapter 6 of *Sexism and God-Talk* (Boston: Beacon, 1993).
16. Coakley, "How My Mind Has Changed," 36, cites Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza as an example.
17. Ruether is often credited with articulating the concept of interdependence as an alternative to male independence and female dependence. See *Sexism and God-Talk*.
18. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Wisdom Ways: Introducing Feminist Biblical Interpretation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2001).
19. While we do not have enough of Pelagius's own writings to know whether his critics described him rightly or wrongly, the term *Pelagian* has come to refer to a theological approach that emphasizes free will rather than a predetermining grace. While *Pelagian* is often used pejoratively to dismiss someone as heretical, I am suggesting that a feminist Pelagian position can be embraced in the spirit of feminist reclamations of derogatory terms for women—even if the position can also be critiqued from non-Pelagian feminist perspectives.
20. Kathleen Sands, *Escape from Paradise: Evil and Tragedy in Feminist Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994).
21. Sharon Betcher, *Spirit and the Politics of Disablement* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 204.
22. Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Women and Redemption: A Theological History* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), 224.
23. Flora Keshgegian, *God Reflected: Metaphors for Life* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008), chapter 8.
24. Flora Keshgegian, *Time for Hope: Practices for Living in Today's World* (New York: Continuum, 2006), chapter 7.
25. Shelly Rambo, "'Theologians Engaging Trauma' Transcript," *Theology Today* 68, no. 3 (2011): 227 (emphasis in original).
26. Kristine Culp, *Vulnerability and Glory* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2010), 129.
27. Ibid., 129, 159–60.
28. Jennifer Erin Beste, *God and the Victim: Traumatic Intrusions on Grace and Freedom* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).
29. Serene Jones, *Trauma and Grace: Theology in a Ruptured World* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2009).
30. Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, trans. William V. Dych (New York: Crossroad, 1978), 98, cited in Beste, 25 (emphasis in original).
31. Beste, 56.

32. Ibid., 104; see also 95–106.
33. Ibid., 87.
34. Jones, 43–67.
35. John Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, vol. 1, trans. James Anderson (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1845), xxxvii, cited in Jones, 53.
36. Jones, 52–63.
37. Ibid., 21.
38. Ibid., 155.
39. Ibid., 157–65.
40. Deanna Thompson, *Crossing the Divide: Luther, Feminism, and the Cross* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004). See a similar approach by Catholic moral theologian Cynthia Crysdale in *Embracing Travail: Retrieving the Cross Today* (New York: Continuum, 2001).
41. Arnfríður Guðmundsdóttir, *Meeting God on the Cross: Christ, the Cross, and the Feminist Critique*, AAR Academy Series (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).
42. Amy Carr, "A Hermeneutics of Providence amid Affliction: Contributions by Luther and Weil to a Cruciform Doctrine of Providence," *Pro Ecclesia* 16, no. 3 (2007): 278–98.
43. For citations from Luther's writings, see ibid.
44. Martin Luther, "Lectures on Genesis, Chapters 45–50," in *Luther's Works*, vol. 8, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan, trans. Paul D. Pahl (St. Louis, MO: Concordia, 1966), 30–31.
45. Carter Heyward tends this way in *Touching Our Strength: The Erotic as Power and the Love of God* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1989).
46. "But we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles," 1 Corinthians 1:23 (NRSV).
47. Ada María Isasi-Diáz, "Kin-dom of God: A *Mujerista* Proposal," in *In Our Own Voices: Latino/a Renditions of Theology*, ed. Benjamin Valentin (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2010), 171–89.
48. See Coakley, *Powers and Submissions*; Kathryn Tanner, "Is God in Charge? Creation and Providence," in *Essentials of Christian Theology*, ed. William Placher (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2003), 116–31. For a fuller account, see Kathryn Tanner, *God and Creation in Christian Theology: Tyranny or Empowerment?* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1988).

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CHAPTER 10

Reimagining Creation as Creative Activity

Possibilities for Women's Empowerment through Aesthetic Agency

Elise M. Edwards

Creativity is at the origin of human works, words, and ideas. It is displayed in the making of something original and the reformation of something that already exists. Creativity is revealed in the design of the world and is therefore integrally linked to the Christian doctrine of creation. Why then do theologians and ethicists so seldom make the leap from creation to creativity?[1] Why do we hesitate to forge conceptual links between God's creation and human creative activity? Beyond the scope of Christian theology and ethics, creation is understood as the act of an agent's making, producing, bringing into existence, or constituting something for the first time or afresh by one's agency. Creation is synonymous with invention, causation, and production. This means that creation cannot be discussed without considering action as well. In the Christian tradition, creation has an additional meaning centered on the activity of God. When preceded by *the*, the creation refers to the events through which God brought the entire world into existence and it also refers to everything created through those events (e.g., the natural world, the universe, all creatures, and humankind).[2]

In this chapter, I bring the concepts of creativity and creation together by examining how the creative activity of women enacts the theological impulses of creation. Moving from a traditional doctrine of creation to a feminist interpretation of creation largely informed by Dorothee Soelle's work, I discuss how this doctrine might be applied to a particular concern for gendered justice—namely, the plight of immigrant and disenfranchised women to create livelihoods for

themselves. Their use of creative work[3] to build new lives is a manifestation of their agency and roles as re-creators within God's creation. Employing a liberationist methodology, throughout this essay will I draw upon the stories of program participants and staff from Empowered Women International (EWI), a nonprofit organization based in the Washington, DC, metropolitan area. EWI's mission is to create jobs and entrepreneurial opportunities for immigrant, refugee, low-income, and at-risk women and uniquely does so by harnessing its participants' creative and artistic abilities, cultural knowledge, and passion for change.[4] The organization supports the women who join its programs by providing them with business development training, mentoring, market access, and other support services. This organization's praxis provides illustrations and insights about creation and creative activity.

Theological Interpretations of Creation

The theological doctrine of creation, with its locus in the biblical narratives of Genesis, specifies that God is the origin of the created world, and as such, nothing is without design or meaning. Thus the doctrine of creation has implications for how we occupy the world; a doctrinal consideration of creation is the lens with which Christians view the created world and humanity's place within it. The doctrine addresses God's initial act and includes interpretations of the order and meaning of the cosmos. Additionally, interpreters derive theologies from the Genesis accounts of the Garden of Eden and the Fall about the ideal state of the world as it was created, the introduction of sin, and the emerging narrative of redemption. These stories also inform theological anthropology, the doctrine that describes humanity, our nature, our work and vocation, and our reflection of the *imago Dei*.[5] In recent decades, theologians' work on the doctrine of creation has tended to focus on creation and the natural world because of the ecological crisis.[6] These reinterpretations are incredibly important for enacting global justice. However, the doctrine is comprehensive enough to include theological reflections on creation and creativity as a mode of divine and human activity.

Given that I advocate not only an expansion of the doctrine of creation but also a reorientation of it to a feminist perspective, I should address what makes common interpretations of the doctrine problematic or insufficient so that it warrants a specifically feminist reinterpretation. The most obvious objection feminists make of creation interpretations based on the Genesis narratives is that the narratives of Adam and Eve reinforce patriarchal narratives about men's superiority to women. In the feminist classic *Sexism and God-Talk*, Rosemary Radford Ruether explains that celebrated theologians such as Augustine,

Thomas Aquinas, Martin Luther, and Karl Barth establish and conform to a pattern of describing women as possessing a heightened proneness to sin and responsibility for its introduction into the world. The woman of the creation narrative, in her physical, sexual nature, is an inferior and nonnormative human being.[7] Women are closer to nature and thus rightly become the object of (male) subjugation of nature.[8] Feminists typically reject these interpretations and the assertion that they are part of the order God established at creation: "man" over woman, "nature," and the rest of the created world.

Feminists disparage many of the existing presentations of the doctrine of creation because along with the linking of women and sin, many orthodox positions on creation and anthropology create theological warrants for domination over women and nature. Contemporary thinkers including Andy Crouch and David Bruce Hegeman have developed theologies about artistic and cultural work from the creation narratives in Genesis, in which the world is made by God, and humans participate in forming ("culturing") creation through language, beauty, and work. Humanity is called to work the ground and cultivate it. This call to rule, fill, and transform the earth is understood as the "cultural mandate."[9] Although their interpretations reflect the ways humans interact with nature and make a place in the created world, feminists often find this type of interpretation offensive and therefore reject it. Language of "ruling," "filling," and "transforming" the earth confers a power of domination to humans—and especially to men, they contest. Attitudes of domination are obviously forces by which marginalization is accomplished. A similar problem with these theological proposals specifically related to the arts is that these meaning-making schemes do not acknowledge the oppressive hegemony of the dominant culture in its many forms (or at least its potential to become oppressive).

A feminist reinterpretation of creation will affirm the equality of all humanity and establish a pattern of human engagement with the created world (including nature and culture) that is relational and cooperative rather than based on domination. To reimagine the doctrine of creation in feminist terms goes beyond recognizing how existing proposals hurt women. As Mary McClintock Fulkerson argues, "feminisms are social practices for change."[10] How then does a feminist reimagining of creation inform social practices for the betterment of women's lives? In this vein, I argue that traditional conceptions of the doctrine of creation, rich and meaningful as they may be in some ways, do not offer a cohesive vision that connects God's creativity to human work and cultural making in a way that supports work and the *particular* needs of women in global efforts of gender justice. So my efforts here develop a feminist interpretation of creation to offer this cohesive vision. A feminist reimagining of creation as creative activity suggests that the practice of making artistic and

cultural products functions as a mode of aesthetic agency that enables humanity to reshape our material realities and conditions. Creation as creative activity can become a relational means of working for gendered justice. This reimagined doctrine provides a motivation for humans' intentional interaction with the rest of the created world: to discover its meaning and beauty and to use the existing world to create new objects that serve God's purposes of redemption for the world. Doing so is participating in the world's liberation through re-creation. My reinterpretation from a feminist perspective encourages artistic and cultural production that is intentionally beneficial to society in general and to the lives of women and their families more specifically. Creative activity is a mode of remaking what needs to be restored.

Dorothee Soelle's feminist interpretation of creation provides a foundation for understanding creative activity as a form of meaningful work. Soelle was a liberation theologian and political activist who was concerned about the oppression of women, racism, and exploitation of the working class. She believed that the task of both an authentic Christianity and an authentic politics is human liberation.[11] In several of her works, but most notably the 1984 book *To Work and To Love: A Theology of Creation* written with Shirley A. Cloyes, Soelle offers an interpretation of creation that acts as an alternative to pessimistic theological and anthropological perspectives that devalue humanity's power to actively resist evil. Her understanding of creation challenges prevalent deterministic and nihilist attitudes about injustice by emphasizing human agency in participation with God to bring about transformation. The concern she expresses for liberation is a crucial element of my exploration of creation as a doctrine for promoting gendered justice.

Soelle distinguishes three forms of creation found within the biblical tradition. The first creation she describes is God's activity depicted in Genesis, through which the world is brought into "being-in-relation," or "living in togetherness."[12] The second creation is depicted in the Exodus story. This creation occurs in history when the people of God are brought out of slavery into peace and justice. This second creation is the unfinished project of struggling for freedom. Although the conflict is lived through the Hebrew people who are subjugated and released from slavery in Egypt, the struggle continues in every generation, even our own.[13] The third creation is the creation of the new woman and new man brought about by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, symbolized by Christian baptism. In this creation, a person's old way of being—an egotistical, self-concerned, apolitical, and individualist way of existing socially and spiritually in the world—dies and is reborn in the resurrection of Christ. The resurrection enables her or him to become a loving participant in creation as a cocreator with God.[14] Creation is God's activity that brings all beings into

existence and relation with each other, the regeneration of the Christian who claims Christ's resurrection as a rebirth into a way of living in connection, and the ongoing efforts of people (not only Christians) to work toward liberation.

In a chapter entitled "In the Beginning was Liberation," Soelle examines the Genesis and Exodus narratives to describe the interrelated purposes of creation and liberation. She argues that the Hebrew people's concept of God was primarily shaped by their belief in God's deliverance of them through particular historical acts. The Exodus event, the Hebrew people's liberation from Egypt, was the defining event for their faith, and this faith in turn interprets Genesis. Through the language of origins and cosmology, Genesis presents a description of humanity's ongoing process of becoming what we should be, but this "ontological project" is also described in historical terms in Exodus as the project of becoming free.[15] Systematic theologians typically begin with the cosmology of creation and then describe what humanity should become and what we should do (this is what Soelle identifies as the ontological project), but Soelle reverses that schema. She begins with liberation and derives the meaning of creation from it. By adopting her framework and the interpretations of creation developed from it, I foreground the aims of liberative work through creation. Because creation is ongoing, human agency exercised through creative work has the potential to renew the world and its communities.

Although Soelle's interpretation of creation was developed in the 1970s and '80s, it remains relevant for a contemporary feminist reimagining because it originates from activist commitments and affirms the need for human agency. The methodology and purposes are consistent with current feminist scholarship. Connecting theory with praxis, Soelle's main contribution to my thought is framing the doctrine of creation in terms of resistance and liberation. The doctrine's ethical significance is really brought forward in her work. It provides an answer as to how the doctrine of creation can be applied to transformative justice work: participating with God to bring about liberation is the ongoing work of creation that humanity is tasked to do. Creation and liberation require human agency—that is, our efforts to reshape the world to address its problems.

Creative Activity: The Exercise of Aesthetic Agency

My analysis so far has established that creation is a continuing liberative effort. It includes the exercise of human agency participating with God's action to re-create the world in beneficial ways to bring about salvation and liberation. At this point, I turn to a discussion of how the practice of making cultural products operates as a feminist practice of aesthetic agency. Christa Davis Acampora

uses the term *aesthetic agency*, which I adopt because it conveys the power of transformation that artistic and cultural practices hold.

In the introduction to an edited volume about transformative aesthetics and practices of freedom, Acampora asserts that women have often sought to bring about social change through "less traditional channels" of organized resistance. Although, in their book, Acampora and her coeditor, Angela Cotten, are primarily concerned with social change directed at addressing racism and sexism, their insights apply to other feminist concerns for justice. Their study of political resistance through aesthetic practices is motivated by their conviction that "it is, in part, because women are excluded or shunned from more traditional venues of political organization against racial or class oppression (specifically because their gender) that they seek these alternative modes of media or expression." They argue that women use artistic works to remake themselves and spaces of marginalization because creative work is both more effective and readily accessible than political organization and the production of written works. Acampora writes, "The kind of transformation or remaking sought *requires* different modes of expression. Many find they do not have the language to simply rewrite the inscriptions that mark the faces of racism and sexism, or they find writing alone is insufficient for their task."[16] For social change to occur, a broad range of practices must be used.

Conviction that artistic and cultural work can have a socially transformative purpose rests on belief that art, broadly conceived, is not solely for entertainment or ornament. Entertainment can be beneficial for women and their communities when used to promote rest and leisure. Art as decoration or ornament beautifies our spaces and is also potentially good for us. But within commonplace forms of art and culture (television, magazines, films, and paintings), women are too often depicted in ways that reinforce sexist ideologies. Women's bodies are displayed as decoration or intended to arouse viewers, objectifying the subjects in the process. This is not to say that all artistic efforts that display women as subjects would attract the scorn of feminists.[17] However, frequent degradation or objectification of women should promote feminists to utilize art and culture in other ways that go beyond entertainment and ornament.

Art plays multiple roles in human life; it can be used to praise great people, express grief, evoke emotion, or communicate knowledge as theologian Robin Jensen observes.[18] Even as objects for perceptual contemplation, which is art's most common role in museums and other institutions of high art, art may serve a variety of purposes. For example, visual art's purpose and impact depends on its location (such as the museum, the street, or the home) and the way an artist, owner, or curator chooses to display it. Its position and placement among other objects and artworks give clues to its message and meaning. Because art has

multiple purposes and ways of reaching its audience, the possibilities for it to be transformative are numerous. Even if we consider art's usage in churches, only one kind of context in which art is displayed, we can discern its multiple uses. Within churches, art may be prophetic, decorative, didactic, or devotional, a point also developed by Jensen.[19]

In addition, art, cultural objects, and the creative processes by which they come into being can be used to share experiences from which dialogue is generated. They can also educate viewers about an issue, provoking interest and discussion about it, and demonstrate the value of creativity. These functions of art—to share experiences and to educate—are affirmed in the stories of participants in EWI's programs. One of EWI's successful women, Paulette Mpouma, created a game specifically intended to educate children about Africa. Mpouma is an immigrant from Cameroon. She wanted to teach her children about her home country, so she developed a game about African history, geography, religions, and cultures. The objective of the game reflects a teaching that Mpouma passed on to her children: "If you don't go to school enough you have to pay for what you don't know."[20] In the Africa Memory Game, players earn money by correctly answering questions and displaying knowledge. But when they respond incorrectly, they lose the money they earned. Through the assistance of EWI's Entrepreneur Training Program, Mpouma used her cultural knowledge and creative abilities to develop the game so that it would appeal to a wide audience. In 2012, when she presented her game on *Voice of America* (a syndicated talk show) and then National Public Radio (NPR), her game quickly sold out. People within the United States and across Africa were interested in using her game for educational purposes. The process of building her business through EWI's programs was also educational and community focused. Mpouma explains that EWI facilitates the sharing of experiences about the creative process and business development. Speaking of her time with the other participants, she states, "It's a community building experience, similar to fabric woven together, women working together and connecting through their work."[21] In her story, we see that creative activity becomes a way of sharing one's experiences and expressing some aspect of the artist or craftsperson's commitments. In Mpouma's case, she used her game to express her belief that lack of education can be costly.

Art is often a mode of self-expression for the artist. Meseret Desta and her husband, Mekbib Gebertsadik, both fine artists from Ethiopia, continued to paint when they immigrated to the United States, even when they did not use art to support themselves financially. Painting sustained their senses of self. Creative activity is self-affirming and it can be a source of empowerment. Feminist cultural critic bell hooks remarks that the lack of creative production

contributes to the loss of one's power: "It occurred to me then that if one could make a people lose touch with their capacity to create, lose sight of their will and their power to make art, then the work of subjugation . . . is complete."[22] Through painting, Desta communicates aspects of herself. She expresses not only who she is but also the values that are important to her and that connect her to her homeland. "I'm not very good at talking about my feelings," she explains. "But I can express my emotions through peoples' faces in my art." The themes of hope and freedom, as well as depictions of women as mothers and strong, responsible, beautiful beings, emerge in her portraits and figurative paintings. The subjects within her paintings are often situated in front of their homes or at open air markets, which the artist sees as demonstrating their connection to nature. "Nature represents freedom and the absence of walls," Desta remarks. She also explores the themes of hope, women as mothers, strength, responsibility, and inner beauty.[23]

Most of EWI's participants are interested in using their creative activity for the betterment of their families and communities. The desire to improve the social conditions of marginalized women is a key aspect of aesthetic agency. At its core, the exercise of aesthetic agency is about acting and exerting power on social structures through the creation of cultural and artistic works. Acampora explains that "social and political progress requires not only what is traditionally considered intellectual or cognitive development but also expansion of the sensibilities that both sharpens our perceptual capacities and fuels creative activity. We call this 'aesthetic agency.'" Acampora clarifies that the word *aesthetic* is not meant to designate a kind of agency that is distinct from moral agency. Moral agency, in the "so-called western tradition" is often grounded in rationality and ideals of autonomy.[24] But the capacity to make decisions about the rightness or wrongness of particular acts and to act upon them requires experiential skills that go beyond intellect and reason. Acampora argues that the sense- and experience-based skills required for creative activity are also used in ethical reflection and activity. Aesthetic agency and moral agency both depend on the agent's skills of observation, creativity, and transformation.

Agreeing with Acampora and Cotten, my own position is that the expansion of creative sensibilities is an element of aesthetic agency that is absolutely essential to the moral agency required to participate in creation in its theological sense. Creation, as the ongoing process of humanity to become who we should be, requires an *ethical* remaking of ourselves and the world to accompany the *physical* processes of creation. To transgress social, political, economic, and—in the case of the immigrant women in EWI—international and cultural boundaries to form a better reality, one must draw upon intellectual, creative, and physical skills. The literal and existential remaking of a world requires creative

work: envisioning a new livelihood, practicing new trades, conversing in a new language, and furnishing a new dwelling to make it a home. The work of creation is both a material and ethical process. The exercise of aesthetic agency—that is, the willingness to participate in the remaking of the world through creative activity, produces not only goods—the actual works of art, skill, and craft—but also goodness. Participation in the ongoing struggle for freedom is an attempt to manifest a liberationist vision of the good. If, from a theological perspective, we can affirm the goodness in creation and the role of humanity in promoting that goodness, we can recognize creative action as an ethical practice that accompanies theological reflection on the goodness of creation.

Creation, Creative Activity, and Empowered Women International

Empowered Women International (EWI) participates in the ongoing work of creation within the struggle for freedom and liberation by helping women support themselves through their creative and cultural work. The organization began in 2002 when founder Marga Fripp began offering empowerment workshops for immigrant women to assess their skills and develop life and career plans in the United States.[25] As an immigrant herself, Fripp understood the challenges these women faced that impeded full participation in society, and as a former journalist and women's activist in Romania, she sought ways to access women's gifts to move them out of isolation in their new, unfamiliar cultural context. The women she encountered faced linguistic, cultural, and social barriers. Her series of workshops provided an opportunity for the women to connect and share their stories. In the workshops, Fripp noticed that when their agency through language was limited, the women would often occupy themselves by engaging in creative activities like crochet and needlework. These activities might seem insignificant, but they became a necessary outlet for the women to express themselves. This is the exercise I have identified as aesthetic agency. The women adopted these alternative modes of self-expression because they were familiar and accessible. Most of the workshop attenders were not fluent in English, and were therefore forced to use their other senses to tell their stories and establish their new identities. These creative acts transcended barriers by connecting the women both to their countries of origin where they developed their artistry and crafts and to the circle of other immigrant women in the Washington, DC, area. From these initial workshops, Fripp built an organization to help women monetize their creative abilities. In the following years, EWI helped women develop art portfolios, improve their artistic ability, and find venues for the display and sale of their work. EWI continues to be invested in creation as a process of improvement in women's lives and their communities. By doing so, the members of the organization, its mentors, clients, and

beneficiaries play their part in the ongoing work of creation (in the Christian sense of the term). I am not claiming that EWI's work is intentionally or even "anonymously" Christian. It is a nonprofit organization without explicit religious ties, and the women participating in its programs represent diverse religious and spiritual backgrounds. But EWI's focus on enabling women through their artistic abilities and passions does enact the process of re-creation. Studying EWI's efforts provides us with examples and insights about creative activity as creation.

EWI is committed to the praxis of rebuilding lives, which is itself an expression of re-creation. The organization's programs provide outlets for self-expression and promote creative acts of self-expression for the betterment of women's lives. By providing visual and performing arts events and workshops across the DC area, EWI simultaneously enriches community life while enabling these women to "use their art as a means to many ends—self-employment and economic gain as well as community participation and integration."[26] The organization has established several entrepreneurial training and mentorship programs to promote the women's empowerment through economic advancement, community participation, and self-development. Most but not all women who take part in its programs develop microbusinesses related to the arts and culture, and all of them rely on their creative abilities. Whether they are making and selling fine art, jewelry, clothing, or bath products, or developing a residential and commercial cleaning service, all the women turn a seed idea into a business over the course of three months. They all strive to create something that is more than who they are—something that exceeds their prior visions of themselves and their capabilities and, thus, their creative activity becomes liberative. Fripp observes, "Often many of the women we support talk about the impact EWI had on their life not only because of teaching them entrepreneurship, financial and business skills, but [also] because of helping them heal, becoming role-models to others and developing human relationships with like-minded souls—[we are] validating their journeys and giving meaning to their experience and existence." Through their creative activity, the women come to recognize their contribution to the world, building their sense of worth.

EWI's work is an example of how creative activity promotes healing. I have asserted several times that the task of humanity's role in creation is to participate with God in creating or remaking what needs to be restored. The data that EWI keeps to track its impact reveals that 77 percent of its participants are considered "at-risk," which means they are coping with unemployment or underemployment, physical or mental ailments, abuse, or some other aspect of their lives that prevents them from being fully productive and participatory in society. By coming to EWI, the women see that their struggles are shared, and they have

been able to open up about their own stories and experiences. Being bonded with other women through a common mission, purpose, and commitment to change enables them to overcome their individual hurts. Tiffany Carter participated in EWI's Entrepreneur Training for Success program with her business partner Breann Whitcomb in order to develop Thinking in Cups, their business that creates and sells hair pieces, jewelry, and bath products. Carter notes the program's impact on her life as a whole: "I was asked to face my personal fears in order to grow and excel as a woman and a business owner. My most prized possession that I walk away with is a newly found confidence that I can carry with me in all areas of my life."[27]

The process of creation operating in this organization is about the empowerment women obtain when they participate in the creative process. The participants and their mentors gain meaning, hope, and healing from their work, revealing the collaborative nature of development. Their difficult journeys are validated while they do the unfinished work of Soelle's second stage of creation—bringing about freedom. Fripp describes their labor as a shared act of creation. Every woman who joins a program is guided by a whole community of people who invest their knowledge, skill, energy, and financial resources into her life. It is only through this relational, cooperative process that they overcome barriers.

The impact of EWI's efforts is evidenced in economic, personal, and social development, reinforcing the insight that creative activity produces goods other than the artistic products. Their creativity most definitely serves a purpose beyond entertainment or decoration. Since 2002, EWI has helped launch 180 microbusinesses. Of those start-ups, 70 percent are still in operation. The financial impact of this growth is an average increase of ten thousand dollars in personal and household income, which is especially significant because two-thirds of EWI's graduates are heads of household and 76 percent of them have very low household incomes when they begin the program.[28] Personal development is another key outcome of the program, as narrated in the previous stories. Nearly three quarters of EWI's graduates see themselves as better role models for their children. They realize their self-worth because they have participated in the process of creating something valuable that is recognized by their community and by their children, the people important to them. The recognition and appreciation the women receive from their families, cohorts, and outside sources like newspapers, blogs, and other media outlets, promote pride and increased confidence. Their increased confidence to communicate in English, which is nurtured in group settings where they practice with others who share a similar challenge, is crucial for their ability to participate fully in

their communities.[29] Like Christians who experience becoming a new creation in their baptism, EWI's participants are reborn as cocreators.

The social impact of EWI's work follows from its personal impact. Because they have been mentored and assisted by EWI's staff and volunteers, participants invest in the lives of others. Meseret Desta, the painter, notes that EWI "help[s] us feel like we're part of a community. That's why we want to work with them to help other artists who are facing the same challenges we have faced." Their reinvestment in the lives of others is not limited to those in their local communities and organizations. Many of the immigrants who receive support from EWI use their increased income to support communities in their countries of origin, often seeking to target the needs of women, girls, and orphans in their homelands. The women do not have millions of dollars to invest, but the thousands of dollars they send across the world make a tangible impact on other's lives. Being-in-relation is a fundamental reality imbedded in the world by God's first act of creation. The women of EWI draw upon and expand the principles of living in togetherness by their cooperative use of aesthetic agency.

EWI is only one organization attempting to improve women's lives in practical ways. Not everything its mentors, volunteers, or participants do is successful. They recognize that hard work does not always result in its intended goals. But among its participants, the organization cultivates the courage to persevere and take action. In EWI's praxis, we see that creation requires risk and the courage to take those risks. Another insight from their work is that aesthetic agency exercised within creation transcends sociocultural barriers. Creative activity allows people to express themselves. For immigrant and at-risk women who are rebuilding their lives, the motivation for self-expression comes from an inner calling to express their own stories so that they can connect with others. From this, we realize that creation is a shared act. Its process is cooperative and benefits are for the common good.

Conclusion

Through creativity, we aim to ultimately achieve the long-term purposes of establishing freedom and liberation in the created world. This liberative vision emphasizes relationship and community. As such, every person should be able to participate in the flow of teaching and learning, of making and receiving contributions, and of being needed and having needs met. When this occurs, everyone realizes and exercises their creative abilities. The significance of this feminist reinterpretation of the doctrine of creation is that it undermines the theoretical priority of the doctrine over its practice in the life of faith. Remaking is the ethical practice that accompanies theological reflection on the potential goodness

of creation. The point of this reflection is for people to become agents who participate in the work of creation and who do not simply accept that creation is already complete. When we participate in re-creation as an active, intentional praxis, our efforts impede nihilism, passiveness, and human subjugation. We accept the world neither as wholly corrupted and irredeemably fallen nor as perfect and so pristine that human modification becomes idolatrous. Instead, we interpret the existence of good and evil within the created world as a call to manifest its re-creation and improve it. As Marga Fripp so eloquently stated as she encouraged EWI's 2014 graduates, "We now believe that everything is possible, and that each act of love, care, joy and compassion we perform becomes a source of more courage, hope, abundance and opportunity."[30] This is what it means to see creation as creative activity: Each of us has an opportunity to improve our communities through the goods we produce. When we engage in creative action with faith, hope, and love, we can transform our world for justice and good.

Notes

1. One notable exception to this is Gordon D. Kaufman's book *In the Beginning . . . Creativity*. It is not an exploration of the doctrine of creation as much as an exploration of the doctrine of God. In conceiving God as "creativity" instead of "creator," Kaufman paraphrases the Gospel of John to assert, "All things came into being through the mystery of creativity; apart from creativity nothing would have come into being." *In the Beginning . . . Creativity* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Press, 2004), 71.
2. "Creation," *Oxford English Dictionary*, 3rd ed., accessed June 21, 2012, http://oed.com/view/Entry/44068. In references to "the creation," the beginning of the world as an event from which time can be thought to begin, the initial letter in creation is often capitalized. I have chosen not to capitalize it, preferring a stylistic unity between "the creation" as event, "creation" as created world, and "creation" as an exercise of human agency. The doctrine of creation concerns all three, so I choose to preserve some of the ambiguity of its meaning.
3. Although I use the term *work* throughout this essay to discuss creative activity and products, many artists and cultural producers do not refer to their creations as such. To them, the term *work* connotes a type of labor or nonpleasurable effort, whereas their processes reflect more of a spirit of play.
4. More information about this organization can be found on their website: "Who We Are," Empowered Women International, http://ewint.org/about-us/who-we-are/#ewi,press.
5. Feminists like Rosemary Radford Ruether and Mary McClintock Fulkerson have considered the doctrine of humanity and its interrelatedness with the *imago Dei*. Fulkerson summarizes the contribution of these feminist interpretations and their connection to creation: "The feminist charge is that tradition's compliment to humanity with the *imago Dei* has never been fully paid to women. Instead,

Jesus' maleness has long been used to characterize authentic human being and to limit the implicit universal reach of *imago Dei*. The beauty of its formal grammatical unction, however, is that the *imago* can warrant the correction of centuries of misnaming the ideal human as male. . . . The doctrine's basic work is to say that being female is 'like God,' too, even as it is God-dependent, and in doing so produce new insights about creation." Mary McClintock Fulkerson, "Contesting the Gendered Subject: A Feminist Account of the *Imago Dei*," in *Horizons in Feminist Theology: Identity, Tradition, and Norms*, ed. Rebecca S. Chopp and Sheila Greeve Davaney (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), 108.

6. One example of this is the essay discussing creation in the previous volume of this work. Pamela K. Brubaker, "Alternatives to Globalization Addressing People and Earth: A Feminist Theological Reflection on Women, Economy, and Creation," in *Reimagining with Christian Doctrines: Responding to Global Gender Injustices*, ed. Grace Ji-Sun Kim and Jenny Daggers (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).
7. Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1993), 94–95.
8. Ibid., 72–73.
9. David Bruce Hegeman, *Plowing in Hope: Toward a Biblical Theology of Culture*, rev. ed. (Moscow, ID: Canon Press, 2004), 21.
10. Fulkerson, "Contesting the Gendered Subject," 109.
11. Dorothee Soelle, *Political Theology*, trans. John Shelley (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1974), xiv.
12. Dorothee Soelle, *Dorothee Soelle: Essential Writings*, ed. Robert Ellsberg (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2006), 144.
13. Ibid., 146–47.
14. Ibid., 147–48.
15. Dorothee Soelle and Shirley A. Cloyes, *To Work and to Love: A Theology of Creation* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 7–8. Soelle uses scholarship by Gerhard von Rad and Severino Croatto to support her claim that Liberation precedes creation. Von Rad argues that faith in creation was a late development and secondary belief to the redemptive work of Yahweh. To support his thesis, he notes that the Book of Exodus was composed before Genesis.
16. Christa Davis Acampora, "On Unmaking and Remaking: An Introduction (with obvious affection for Gloria Anzaldúa)," in *Unmaking Race, Remaking Soul: Transformative Aesthetics and the Practice of Freedom*, ed. Christa Davis Acampora and Angela L. Cotten (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007), 2.
17. Obviously, there is much literature and debate about images of women in the media. I do not wish to explore this debate at length, since it is not specifically relevant to my discussion here. Rather, I mention this debate to identify a need to consider art and culture as something that can do more than entertain or decorate. In addition to exploring the other purposes of art and media, feminists should continue to address the problems in entertainment.
18. Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Art in Action: Toward a Christian Aesthetic* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1980), 4.

19. Robin M. Jensen, *The Substance of Things Seen: Art, Faith, and Christian Community*, The Calvin Institute of Christian Worship Liturgical Studies Series (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2004).
20. "Success Stories," Empowered Women International, accessed July 14, 2014, http://ewint.org/stories.
21. Ibid.
22. bell hooks, *Art on My Mind: Visual Politics* (New York: New Press, 1995), xv.
23. "Success Stories."
24. Acampora, 4–5.
25. I am grateful for correspondence and conversations with Marga Fripp in which she explained EWI's mission and impact. Unless otherwise noted, my descriptions of EWI's work come from these informal discussions.
26. "Who We Are."
27. "Success Stories."
28. "Our Impact," Empowered Women International, http://ewint.org/#our-impact.
29. Ibid. Of EWI's graduates, 38 percent report improvement in in their English skills over the course of three months. This allows them to very quickly become more confident in communicating with others outside their families and reduces the isolation many of them experience prior to joining the program.
30. "Heartfelt Moments and Words of Courage at EWI's Graduation," accessed July 14, 2014, Empowered Women International, http://ewint.org/heartfelt-moments-and-words-of-courage-at-ewis-graduation.

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Epilogue

Cynthia L. Rigby

Eighteen years ago, I had a student research assistant who offered to reshelve the books in my office. She was an amazingly organized person. She had already labeled and sorted my files. So I wasn't surprised when I came into my office and saw the neatly arranged shelves and freshly printed labels indicating topic sections. "Here are your commentaries, here is your church history, here's your pastoral care," she said, pointing and gesturing. "And—of course—this whole wall is theology. And over here," she said, turning around and walking over to two smaller bookcases, across the room, "over here we have your fiction *(gesturing to the bookcase on the right)* and your feminist theology *(gesturing to the left)*."

I remember being flabbergasted, because my feminist theology texts had always been jumbled together with the rest of my theology books. What had possessed my student assistant to pull them out of the mix, separate them out, and reorder things so she could shelve them across the room? This student, by the way, had just finished a course in feminist theology with me, a course in which I tried to emphasize that feminist theologians are in the business not only of critiquing religious traditions but also of shaping them. When I asked why she had created a feminist "section," my student said, "Because I thought it might be more convenient for you to have your feminist books all in one place."

The authors and editors of the *Reimagining with Christian Doctrines* volumes are willing to take on the inconvenience caused by feminist insight sharing the same space with doctrine, particularly when the goal of the partnership is to promote global gender justice. Editors Daggers and Kim understand this collaboration to be an unusual phenomenon; perhaps a unique contribution of the volumes. As they put it in the opening sentence to Chapter 1, "*Christian doctrines* and *global gender justice* rarely appear together in the same sentence." One of the reasons these elements do not appear together is because pairing them immediately reminds those who are attuned to global gender injustices of the ways in which Christian doctrines have perpetuated and promoted injustices. A sensitive person who recognizes this heinous history has little choice but either to walk away from doctrines or to radically rethink them. In short,

once you decide to keep "Christian doctrines" and "global gender justice" in the same sentence, you are setting yourself up for a lot of work, and possibly for significant change and its associated inconvenience.

These volumes dive into all the messiness, their authors sharing the hope that something transformative can or might happen—something powerful that might help inspire and create a more just world for everyone, but especially for women and girls. Why do these authors think Christian doctrines can help in this way, given the history of how they have funded abuse and the justification of abuse? It seems as though they must have, in some way, experienced Christian doctrines as also liberating. There is something about doctrines that have given them life, something they do not want to let go of, something they want more actively to pursue.

One of the messes Christian feminists have often found themselves in, when they confess they are still committed to the church and/or to thinking doctrinally, is that they are viewed, in some sense, as "less feminist" than those who have recognized the severity of the church's complicity in injustice and left it. An extreme example of someone who sees Christian doctrine as only damaging is Daphne Hampson, who understands "the myth of Christianity" to be "crucifying women."[1] Her hope is that feminist consciousness will develop to the point where women will be "set free,"[2] leave the church, and think in other than doctrinal terms, which she understands—having negotiated them herself—to be beyond repair, even by way of imagining. A more subtle version of this phenomenon can be seen by comparing the forewords to *Womanspirit Rising*[3] and *Weaving the Visions*,[4] companion volumes published ten years apart by Carol Christ and Judith Plaskow. In *Womanspirit Rising*, Christ and Plaskow distinguish between feminist women who are "reformers" and those who are "revolutionaries." While they deny in their later *Weaving the Visions* that this is was ever their intention, they acknowledge that there is a problem to the degree that this distinction seems to set up a hierarchy among feminists—those who "stay in" the church and work to reform it are less "radical, profound, and courageous" than the church-leaving, "revolutionary" feminists.[5]

The feminist theologians writing for these companion volumes eschew this way of dichotomizing feminist thinkers, boldly being who they are as those who represent a range of theological identities as well as a diversity of ethnicities and cultural backgrounds. What the contributing writers who identify with particular ecclesial communities are *not* doing, then, is sifting through their beloved traditions, trying to isolate those aspects that might be justice-promoting from all those justice-inhibiting elements present in the doctrinal muck. Rather, they are seeking to make meaning of their and their community's at-face-value inexplicable experiences of wholeness, articulating this meaning

in ways that can be shared with others. This work cannot be done without employing imagination—without playing in the teachings of our traditions long enough and deeply enough to change the "rules of the game."

I watch my two children play, with their living room full of friends, and I notice that the more serious they are about whatever game they are playing, the more careful they are about negotiating the rules. First they focus on learning "the basics" about whatever it is they are playing: kick the can, hide-and-go-seek, "American Girl Dolls." Those who have been around the longest—especially if the game is being played at *their* house—get to explain "how we play" the game. The newer ones or visitors at first comply; as the game progresses and they become experts at the rules, they begin to evolve into fellow rule shapers. One of the main reasons new rules are either devised or rejected, I have found, is because something is suddenly perceived as unfair. "But that's not fair!" a kid will say, followed by another kid suggesting, "Well, what if we made it so that when the . . . ? Would that be OK?" It is fascinating and encouraging to watch kids come up with new rules that make it possible for everyone to join fully into the play again.

Sometimes when I'm watching these dynamics I think about something Jürgen Moltmann said about the relationship between play and liberation: "Liberation from the bonds of the present system of living takes place by playing games."[6] Inspired by this, I suggest we might understand what we are doing when we reimagine Christian doctrines for global gender justice as a form of "theological play." It is my hope, in fact, that we become even more deliberate about such play as we move into future similar projects and actions.

The "double movement" Daggers and Kim describe in Chapter 1 might be considered a playful depiction of what reimagining doctrine for global gender justice looks like. There is an outward movement, they say, away from "orthodoxy" and toward "unimpeded creative constructions" even as there is, simultaneously, an inward movement that is responding to the pull toward "received doctrinal traditions." This description has almost a dance-like feel to it that certainly captures the spirit of the essays that follow. There is a playing in or dancing in the doctrines engaged by each author—a taking on of the rules of the game that then gives way to a reshaping of these very rules. The play that is here is perhaps the most serious work of all—it is also generative, liberative, and inevitably inconvenient, resisting status quo appropriations not by turning its back on doctrine and leaving it to be used by systems that would apply it for ill but by entering inside of it and being changed by it into those who ourselves reform and remake the rules of the game.

By joining the playful dance that pushes out to create and is pulled back to what the editors identify as "orthodoxy," it is my hope we can move into a

future in which doctrine itself is understood as more than something "regulatory." The purpose of doctrine is not only to tether us to our communities so that our creative, "outward"-driven passions do not drive us to break off as isolated, unaccountable, lone rangers. As important as this function of the "internal" pull is, it banks on the assumption that what is creative stands in tension with what is orthodox. The work in these volumes, however, again and again suggests that "orthodox" doctrine itself is creative and transformative. The teachings of the church, as teachings shared by the community, continue creating us even as we move creatively into the "play" of the world. This is the appeal of doctrine for us, at best. It creates creators. It pulls us in, not to temper our creativity, but to whisper, again, the "rules of the game" so we can play into something that is even greater than the rules themselves.

The story is told of how Barbara Jordan always carried around a copy of the United States Constitution in her purse. As an African American woman who served as a senator for the state of Texas, she was profoundly aware that the "blessings of liberty" spoken of in the preamble to that beloved document were not written with her in mind: "I felt somehow for many years that George Washington and Alexander Hamilton just left me out by mistake . . . But through the process of amendment, interpretation and court decision I have finally been included in 'We, the people.'" She went on to assert, "My faith in the Constitution is whole, it is complete, it is total, and I am not going to sit here and be an idle spectator to the diminution, the subversion, the destruction of the Constitution."[7]

As these volumes demonstrate, there are many feminist theologians who feel about Christian doctrine the way Barbara Jordan felt about the Constitution. We refuse to be left out of it not so much because we feel a need to be bound in some way by "orthodoxy" but because we have found some transforming, liberating truth we want to continue changing us so that we can change the world.

In an address given at the 2014 American Academy of Religion meeting in San Diego, former president Jimmy Carter reimagined Christian doctrine for global gender justice. Reading excerpts from his book *A Call to Action: Women, Religion, Violence, and Power*, President Carter identified "the deprivation and abuse of women and girls" as "the most serious and unaddressed worldwide challenge."[8] He reflected imaginatively about the doctrine of Scripture, noting that Jesus demonstrates a concern for the plight of women and girls that should be emulated. In the question-and-answer period following his address, he was at two points pressed to talk about the ways in which Scripture contributes to the problem of violence against women and girls. Asked what he thought about the hierarchy between men and women presumably established in Genesis 1–2 by the ordering of their creation, President Carter seemed to me almost to scoff,

suggesting that we all need to think a little more imaginatively about the possibilities the text, at its best, opens up for promoting human flourishing. While he is cognizant and publicly critical of the ways in which the Bible has been used to impede women's flourishing,[9] he chooses to put his best energies into imagining the myriad ways the Bible can be used to advocate for global gender justice.

It is in this positive, creative, and hopeful spirit that I close this epilogue, capping off the work of this book and its companion, *Reimagining with Christian Doctrines*. I still remember, a couple of years back, when Jenny Daggers emailed me to point out that Serene Jones, in the new *Oxford Handbook of Feminist Theology*, had identified feminist theologians who work on reinterpreting Christian doctrine as a subset of feminist theologians more generally. Jenny immediately saw a place for the work of these volumes, joining hands with coeditor Grace Ji-Sun Kim in actualizing the vision. On behalf of the authors, I thank Jenny and Grace for so graciously encouraging us to write what our imaginations allow us to believe possible.

It is a tradition to note that epilogues suggest the end is just a beginning. In this case I wonder if this is even more true than usual. My sense is that those who made these volumes live are right: there are opportunities to engage imaginatively with doctrines in ways that weren't as wide open before. A lot of hard work has been done, naming ways in which doctrines have funded unjust power structures and have been used to justify the violent treatment of girls and women. These ways need continuously to be named so that we do not forget and so that the violence can be condemned and stopped. But feminist theologies are, thankfully, no longer a new thing in the land. Those who have gone before us have named the problems, shaping the rules of the game in ways that allow for more players and for more energy to be devoted to imagining new possibilities. It is our task now to enter into the play, into the work of making all things new.

Cynthia L. Rigby
Advent, 2014

Notes

1. See Daphne Hampson, *After Christianity* (London: SCM Press, 1996).
2. Daphne Hampson, *Feminism and Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990).
3. Carol Christ and Judith Plaskow, eds., *Womanspirit Rising* (1979; repr., New York: HarperOne, 1992).
4. Judith Plaskow and Carol Christ, eds., *Weaving the Visions* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1989).

5. Christ and Plaskow, viii.
6. Jürgen Moltmann, *Theology of Play* (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), 13.
7. Francis X. Clines, "Barbara Jordan Dies at 59: Her Voice Stirred the Nation," *The New York Times*, January 18, 1996.
8. Jimmy Carter, *A Call to Action: Women, Religion, Violence, and Power* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2014), 3.
9. See, for example, ibid., chapter 3, where he talks about leaving the Southern Baptist Church because of their narrow interpretation of Ephesians 5 (the passage that includes "wives, submit to your husbands").

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Notes on Contributors

Amy Carr is Associate Professor of Philosophy and Religious Studies at Western Illinois University. Active in an Evangelical Lutheran Church of America (ELCA) congregation, she has participated in the Society of Anglican and Lutheran Theologians, Lutheran Women in Theology and Religious Studies, and conferences for teaching theologians of the ELCA. She is also a Benedictine oblate associated with St. Mary Monastery in Rock Island, Illinois.

Jenny Daggers is Associate Professor in Christian Theology at Liverpool Hope University. She completed her PhD in Theology and her MA in Social and Pastoral Theology (with Feminist Studies) at the University of Manchester and her BSocSc in Political Science at the University of Birmingham. Daggers's publications include *Reimagining with Christian Doctrines: Responding to Global Gender Injustices*, coedited with Grace Ji-Sun Kim (Palgrave Pivot, 2014); *Postcolonial Theology of Religions: Particularity and Pluralism in World Christianity* (Routledge, 2013); *Gendering Christian Ethics* (CSP, 2012); and chapters and articles on feminist theology, systematic theology, and women's history.

Elise M. Edwards is Lecturer in Christian Ethics at Baylor University. She holds a PhD in Religion (Claremont Graduate University) with a specialization in Theology, Ethics, and Culture; an MTS (John Leland Center for Theological Studies); and an MArch and a BS in Architectural Studies (Florida A&M University). Edwards is a registered architect in the state of Florida. A black feminist, her study and practice of architecture has influenced her interdisciplinary theological interests in civic engagement and how beliefs and commitments are expressed publicly. Her publications include "Television, Social Networking, and Cultural Criticism: Alternative Methodologies for Feminist Scholarship," in *Feminism and Religion in the 21st Century*, edited by Rosemary Radford Reuther and Gina Messina-Dysert (Routledge, 2014); and "The Jazz Aesthetic as a Model for Theological Discourse," *ARTS Magazine: A Journal of the Arts in Religious and Theological Studies* 22, no. 4 (Fall 2011).

Mary McClintock Fulkerson is Professor of Theology at Duke University Divinity School. She completed her BM at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, her MDiv at Duke University; and her PhD at Vanderbilt University, and she is an ordained minister in the Presbyterian Church (USA). Her book *Changing the Subject: Women's Discourses and Feminist Theology* examines the liberating practices of feminist academics and nonfeminist church women. Her book *Places of Redemption: Theology for a Worldly Church* is on ecclesial practices that resist racism and other contemporary forms of social brokenness, interpreting the doctrine of the church in light of racial diversity and the differently abled. Fulkerson has coedited two volumes: *The Oxford Handbook of Feminist Theology* (2011, with Sheila Briggs), a collection of essays on feminist theology and globalization, and *Theological Interpretation for Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness: Public Intellectuals for the Twenty-First Century* (2013, with Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz and Rosemary P. Carbine). Her book *A Body Broken, A Body Betrayed* is shaped by her involvement in the "Pauli Murray Project: Activating History for Social Change," a Duke Human Rights Center project on racial reconciliation in Durham County through history-telling.

Elizabeth O'Donnell Gandolfo received her PhD in Theological Studies from Emory University in Atlanta, and she holds a Masters in Theological Studies from the University of Notre Dame. She is the author of *The Power and Vulnerability of Love: A Theological Anthropology* (Fortress Press, 2015). Her work, which constructively engages feminist and liberation theologies, has also appeared in *Theology Today*, *Spiritus*, *The International Journal of Practical Theology*, and *Horizons*. Gandolfo has taught religion at Furman University and Converse College. She resides in Greenville, South Carolina, where she works at home as both an independent scholar and a mother of four young children.

Sigridur Gudmarsdottir is a native of Iceland and a rural dean in the Lutheran Church of Norway. Along with her pastoral work, she teaches philosophy of religion as Visiting Lecturer at the University of Iceland. She obtained her PhD at Drew University in 2007. Her areas of interest include mysticism, ecofeminism, queer theology, philosophy of religion, and practical, postcolonial, and poststructuralist theology. Recent publications include "Ecstatic Nature and Earthly Abyss: An Ecofeminist Journey to the Icelandic Volcano," in *Philosophy of Sacred Nature: Prospects for Ecstatic Naturalism*, edited by Leon Niemoczynski and Nam Nguyen (Lexington, 2014); "Water as Sacrament: Tillich, Gender and Liturgical Eco-justice" *Dialog: A Journal of Theology* 53, no. 2 (June 2014); "Trinh Minh-ha and Inbetween Religious Language Painted with Gray and Red Colors," *The Journal of European Women in Theological Research* 20 (December 2013); "Touch, Flux, Relation: Feminist Critique of Graham Ward's 'The

Schizoid Christ,'" in *The Poverty of Radical Orthodoxy*, edited by Lisa Isherwood and Marko Zlomislic (Wipf and Stock, 2012).

Grace Ji-Sun Kim received her PhD from the University of Toronto, and she is presently a Visiting Researcher at Georgetown University. She is the author of *The Grace of Sophia* (Pilgrim Press, 2002); *The Holy Spirit, Chi and the Other* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2011); *Colonialism, Han, and the Transformative Spirit* (Palgrave Pivot, 2013); *Reimagining with Christian Doctrines* (Palgrave Pivot, 2014), coedited with Jenny Daggers; *Contemplations from the Heart* (Wipf and Stock, 2014); *Theological Reflections on "Gangnam Style"* (Palgrave Pivot, 2014), cowritten with Joseph Cheah; *Here I Am* (Judson Press, 2015); and *Embracing the Other* (Eerdmans, 2015). Kim is serving on the American Academy of Religion's (AAR) "Research Grants Jury Committee." She is also a cochair of AAR's steering committee, "Women of Color Scholarship, Teaching and Activism Group," and a steering committee member of AAR's "Comparative Theology Group" and "Religion and Migration." Kim is an ordained minister of word and sacrament within the Presbyterian Church (USA).

Hilda P. Koster is an Assistant Professor of Religion at Concordia College (Moorhead, Minnesota), a liberal arts college of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. A native from the Netherlands, Koster studied theology in both her native country and the United States. She received her BA and MDiv from the University of Groningen (the Netherlands) and holds a ThM from Princeton Theological Seminary and a PhD from the Divinity School of the University of Chicago. Koster's research interests are in ecological and feminist theology. She is currently working on a monograph on *Creation and Salvation in Ecological Theology* and is coediting (with Rosemary Carbine) a volume on the theology of Kathryn Tanner titled *The Gift of Theology: The Theology of Kathryn Tanner* (Fortress Press, forthcoming). Koster is a member of the *Protestantse Kerk Nederland*, which unites the reformed churches: the Netherlands Reformed Church and the Lutheran Church of the Netherlands.

Loida I. Martell-Otero is Professor of Constructive Theology at Palmer Theological Seminary / Eastern University, in Pennsylvania. She is a licensed doctor in veterinary medicine as well as an ordained minister in the American Baptist Churches. She is a bicoastal Puerto Rican who has taught in various institutions of higher learning including the University of Puerto Rico's College of Allied Health Professionals, Gordon-Conwell Seminary's Center for Urban Ministerial Education, and New York Theological Seminary. She pastored in New York's urban centers for 15 years. She is a member of the American Academy of Religion, as well as the Society of Race, Ethnicity, and Religion. She coedited

Teología en Conjunto: A Collaborative Hispanic Protestant Theology (WKJ, 1997) and coauthored *Latina Evangélicas: A Theological Survey from the Margins* (Cascade Books, 2013). She has published various articles on *evangélica* soteriology, Christology, and vocation. Her recent research on Taíno religious beliefs has focused on its links with theological anthropology/embodiment, eschatology, and spirituality. She is an avid amateur photographer.

Gina Messina-Dysert, PhD, is Dean of the School of Graduate and Professional Studies at Ursuline College and cofounder of *Feminism and Religion*. She has authored multiple articles and the book *Rape Culture and Spiritual Violence: Religion, Testimony, and Visions of Healing* (Routledge, 2014), and she is coeditor (with Rosemary Radford Ruether) of the anthology *Feminism and Religion in the 21st Century: Utilizing Technology to Expand Borders* (Routledge, 2014). Messina-Dysert's research interests are theologically and ethically driven, involve a feminist and interdisciplinary approach, and are influenced by her Catholic culture, activist roots, and experience working with survivors of rape and domestic violence. She can be followed on Twitter @FemTheologian, and her website can be accessed at http://ginamessinadysert.com.

Cynthia L. Rigby is the W. C. Brown Professor of Theology at Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary, where she has taught since 1995. She holds an AB in religious studies from Brown University and an MDiv and PhD from Princeton Theological Seminary. Cynthia's research and publications explore the relevance of Christian doctrines to our lives and the life of the world. She is the coeditor of *Blessed One: Protestant Perspectives on Mary* (Westminster John Knox, 2002) and author of *The Promotion of Social Righteousness* (Witherspoon, 2010) and *Holding Faith* (Abingdon, forthcoming). Cynthia is an associate editor for Brill's *Journal of Reformed Theology*, the former editor of *Insights: The Faculty Journal of Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary*, and the cochair of the "Reformed Theology and History" group of the American Academy of Religion. She also writes regularly for the Religion section of the *Dallas Morning News*. Cynthia is an ordained minister in the Presbyterian Church (USA), the spouse of Dr. William Greenway, and the mother of Xander (11) and Jessica (9).

Linda E. Thomas is Professor of Theology and Anthropology at the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago. She is a transdisciplinary scholar who works at the intersection and under the mutual influence of religion and culture. Her work is rooted intransitively in a womanist perspective. She is passionate about uncovering and exploring historical and contemporary experiences and ideologies that govern actions, policies, and norms surrounding sex/gender, race/ethnicity, and class. Her publications include *Under the Canopy: Ritual Power and*

Spiritual Resilience in South Africa (University of South Carolina Press, 2007); *Living Stones in the Household of God* (Augsburg Fortress, 2003); and a volume coedited with Dwight N. Hopkins titled *Walk Together Children: Black and Womanist Theologies, Church, and Theological Education* (Cascade Books, 2010). Dr. Thomas's scholarly career has taken her to South Africa, Peru, Cuba, the former Soviet Union, and Europe. She is an ordained minister in the United Methodist Church.

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