CHAPTER THREE

Marking the Body of Jesus, the Body of Christ

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. . . . And the Word became flesh and lived among us.[1]

The Word of God assumed humanity that we might become [like] God.[2]

Focus on the body, on flesh, is no novelty in theological anthropology. Christian teaching long has struggled to understand and interpret—then to maintain—the truth

- that the eternal Word, the *Logos*, became flesh—became the bodily, concrete, marked, historical being, Jesus of Nazareth;
- that Jesus died rather than betray his mission, his love for God and for human beings; and
- that fidelity, integrity, and love were vindicated, and his crucified body was raised glorious from the dead.

This teaching promotes the value and significance of the body, which is never to be disregarded or treated with contempt.

The previous chapter drew on history and memories of enslavement to show just how brutally and easily the value and significance of the body may be undermined. For bodies are marked—made individual, particular, different, and vivid—through race, sex and gender, sexuality, and culture. The protean ambiguity of these marks transgresses physical and biological categories, destabilizes gender identities, and disrupts ethical and relational patterns (*who is my brother, who is my sister?*). These marks delight as much as they unnerve. They impose limitation: some insinuate exclusion, others inclusion, for the body denotes a "boundary" that matters.[3] But, in a finite and sinful context, some unnerved concrete historical human beings manipulate this ambiguity to violate in multiple vicious ways the bodies of others. Such violence overlooks just how these bodily marks ground intelligence, discovery, beauty, and joy; enable apprehension and response to sensible experience; and shape culture, society, and religion. Such violence ignores the ways in which culture, society, and religion in turn shape our bodies. Even if verbal self-disclosure is unnecessary, just as often, the body's marks complexify through creolization, *mestizaje*, and hybridity; just as often, these marks render self-disclosure confusing and frustrating, invigorating and alchemizing.

In theology, the body is a contested site—ambiguous and sacred, wounded and creative, malleable and resistant—disclosing and mediating "more." Further, given the "fact of [Christian] faith that when God desires to manifest"[4] the divine presence, God does so in human flesh, the body can never be simply one element among others in theological reflection. Indeed, any formulation of theological anthropology that takes body and body marks seriously risks absolutizing or fetishizing what can be seen (race and sex), constructed (gender), represented (sexuality), expressed (culture), and regulated (social order). Moreover, such attention to concrete and specific, nonetheless accidental, characteristics also

risks "fragmenting"[5] the human being. But what makes such risk imperative is the location and condition of bodies in empire; what makes such risk obligatory is that the body of Jesus of Nazareth, the Word made flesh, was subjugated in empire.

"New Imperialism," Arundhati Roy observes, is upon us.[6] Even in its battered economic state, the United States continues to cling to hegemonic power—exercising preeminence in nuclear power, asserting its will in global policies, influencing global culture and cultural products, advancing putatively humanitarian initiatives.[7] Yet, even as its breathtaking self-designation as the world's sole superpower faces confrontation from Brazil, China, and India, the global reach of the United States transgresses spatial and temporal limits, national and territorial boundaries. A *pax Americana* shades peace for war.[8] The United States attempts to manage and regulate the relations and interactions of bodies at every socioeconomic level, extract concrete human actions from history, and recreate the very world it inhabits.[9]

Given the location and conditions of bodies in empire, the virulent global persistence of racism, xenophobic reactions to "illegal" or undocumented *anti-bodies* within the body of empire, the bodies maimed and slaughtered in wars mounted by clients of empire, the bodies done to death by AIDS and hunger and abuse, and, above all, that body broken and resurrected for us, theological anthropology can never cease speaking of bodies. In memory of his body, in memory of the victims of empire, in the service of life and love, theological anthropology must protest any imperial word (*anti-Logos*) that dismisses his body and seeks the decreation of human bodies.

Four major sections follow. In the first, empire forms a principal context for thinking about the marked—that is, raced, sexed, gendered, regulated—body of Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus preached the *basileia tou theou*, the reign of God, as an alternative to the *pax Romana*; to put it sharply, he contrasted the future of bodies in God with the future of bodies in empire. In every age, the

disciples of Jesus must take up his critique of empire and through *basileia* practices incarnate an alternative. While empire continues to serve as context for the second and third sections, here we consider marked bodies ensnared in the new imperial order. In particular, we attend to homosexual bodies and point to the difference that embracing those bodies might make to the body of Christ. The third section considers the difference that homosexual bodies might make to Christology. Finally, in order to be worthy of his name, the name in which it gathers, the church cannot help but open its heart and embrace those bodies that empire abuses, negates, and crucifies. Thus, the fourth section calls for a (re) marking of the flesh of his church.

Jesus and Empire

Jesus of Nazareth was born and died in subjugation to the Roman Empire. His flesh, his body, was and remains marked by race, gender, culture, and religion: he was a practicing Jew in a territory controlled by Roman political, military, and economic forces. Jesus was and remains marked by sex, gender, and sexuality: he was male and, although we cannot speak about his sexual orientation, tradition assumes his heterosexuality.

In his flesh, in his body, Jesus knew refugee status, occupation and colonization, social regulation and control. The Matthean account of the flight into Egypt (2:13-23) may well be what John Dominic Crossan calls a "symbol-story,"[10] serving more theological than historical purposes, thus recapitulating Israel's exodus and sojourn in the desert. Nevertheless, argues Richard Horsley, the story insinuates breakdowns in "the social relationships and political conditions that prevailed in Jewish Palestine under Roman and Herodian Rule." Roman military intimidation and brutality coupled with Herodian economic exploitation and taxation uprooted and displaced many people from their ancestral lands,

drove them into debt, and forced them into wage labor as carpenters or day laborers or servants or petty merchants.[11] Ordinary fishermen also found their enterprise disrupted by the policies of Herod Antipas, who erected the city of Tiberias on the Sea of Galilee. Crossan defines Antipas's aim as "Romanization by urbanization for commercialization,"[12] a strict monopoly on fishing and the sea's harvest. Under Antipas's taxation policies, ordinary peasant-fisherman "could no longer cast their nets freely from shore, could no longer own a boat or beach a catch, and probably had to sell what they caught to Antipas' factories."[13]

The village of Nazareth, in which Jesus grew up, is located in Galilee, about four miles from the city of Sepphoris, once a thriving city until Herod Antipas built Tiberias. Galilee was a place of racial and cultural mixture,[14] a frontier region that buffered the "crossroad of empire."[15] Galilee was also a site of "persistent resistance and rebellion" against overweening Roman domination that determined and controlled the political and economic conditions of ordinary life.[16] Although open revolt was rare, as a conquered people Galileans never surrendered "their commitment to the covenantal principles of their traditional way of life," and they demonstrated on more than one occasion their willingness to die rather than transgress Mosaic Law.[17]

Jesus lived and carried out his mission in the palpable tension between resistance to empire and desire for *basileia tou theou,* the reign of God. This desire carried with it certain religious and political convictions: that the messiah would lead the destruction of the Roman empire, that YHWH would rule as king, and that Israel would be vindicated, justice established, peace and prosperity restored.[18] Jesus inserted his body into the tension between resistance and desire. With acts of healing, with images, stories, and parables of "welcome and warning,"[19] Jesus advanced a prophetic praxis on behalf of the reign of God. He sought not only a prophetic renewal of Israel but also denunciation of oppressive Roman rule.[20]

Jesus lived among common people, subjects of empire whose bodies were forced through the winepress of empire building. The old people in the small rural villages of Galilee to which he traveled carried in their bodies memories of brutality, of the Roman army burning their homes, raping women, "enslaving the able-bodied, killing the infirm."[21] These women and men knew forced labor, privation, and loss. "They were shrewd and wary peasants, who had lived long enough at subsistence level to know exactly where the line is drawn between poverty and destitution. [They knew] all about rule and power, about kingdom and empire, but they [knew] it in terms of tax and debt, malnutrition and sickness, agrarian oppression and demonic possession."[22]

Thus, at the center of Jesus' praxis were the bodies of common people, peasants, economic and political refugees, the poor and destitute. They were the subjects of his compassionate care: children, women, and men who were materially impoverished as well as those who were socially and religiously marginalized or were physically disabled (the blind, paralyzed, palsied, deaf, lepers); those who had lost land to indebtedness, who were displaced through military occupation or religious corruption; those who were possessed and broken in spirit from ostracism and persecution.[23] Jesus did not shun or despise these women and men; he put his body where they were. He handled, touched, and embraced their marked bodies.[24] Jesus befriended them, but, as Marcella Althaus-Reid observes, not "to preach and show his compassion in a detached old-fashioned teaching mode. . . . 'Sinners' and prostitutes are human beings like anyone else. Like anybody else they may at times need compassion for their troubles, and at other times just friends for an intimate encounter, conversation and laughter."[25]

Through exorcisms and healings, Jesus decisively changed the village body. Men and women, shunned and isolated, particularly through demon possession or leprosy, hemorrhage or blindness, were restored to synagogue and family, kin and friends. For those lost to human conversation and interaction, physical and affective

intimacy were found; those abandoned or hidden because of deformity were restored to family life. The substantive impact of these miracles could not be ignored. The covenantal community was changed and renewed with the presence and potential participation of bodies formerly absent, and experienced an inflow of hope and joy. At the same time, Horsley suggests, the community was obliged to share perhaps already meager food stores, shelter, clothing, and work and, "to take up the slack in light of the disintegration of some family units."[26] In his teaching and preaching, Jesus called upon these ordinary people to build up their community life, "to reestablish just egalitarian and mutually supportive social-economic relations" in their dealings with one another and with others.[27] Thus, Horsley argues, Jesus enacted a "larger program of social healing" that addressed "illnesses brought on by Roman imperialism,"[28] a program that would heal human bodies and the body politic.

The Welcome Table

Jesus demanded of his hearers and disciples personal conversion and new body practices of solidarity. Chief among these practices was the inclusion of new and "other" bodies at the table. Crossan observes that commensality or table fellowship reproduces the prevailing "map of economic discrimination, social hierarchy, and political differentiation."[29] Even as the table includes, it excludes. With the parable of the Great Banquet (Luke 14:21-24; Matt. 22:9-10), Jesus challenges the social and religious conventions surrounding commensality.

> The host replaces the absent guests with anyone off the streets. But if one actually brought in *anyone off the street*, one could, in such a situation, have classes, sexes, and ranks all mixed up together. Anyone could be reclining next to anyone else, female next to male, free next to slave, socially high next to socially low, ritually pure next to ritually impure.[30]

Jesus lived out this parable audaciously. He ate and drank with sinners: tax collectors, who made the already hardscrabble life of peasants even more so; lepers, whose diseased bodies threatened the bodily boundaries of "others;" women, who were forced to sell their bodies for survival; women, who were accused of giving their bodies away in adultery.[31] Jesus acted out just how unrestricted neighbor love must be, just how much "other" bodies matter. The open table embodied egalitarianism, disrupted the "pleasures of hierarchy"[32] and domination, and abolished the etiquette of empire. The open table embodied the desire for and the design of the reign of God. *All* are welcome. God sets the table for the "little ones," for those denied access to restorative moments of celebration, to the material benefits of culture and society.[33] Jesus invites all who would follow him to abandon loyalties of class and station, family and kin, culture and nation in order to form God's people anew and, thus, to contest empire.

Gender Performance and Embodied Spirituality

On the one hand, saying that the flesh of Jesus of Nazareth is marked by sex and sexuality as well as gender expectations adds nothing to what we know about him; on the other hand, saying this uncovers what too often has conveniently been covered over. Jesus of Nazareth had a human body; his was a male body, he had the genitals of a male human being.[34] To refuse to speak about his sex and gender far too often leaves us unable to speak well and compassionately about sex, about gender, about sexuality, and, especially, about homosexuality.

The notion of sexuality always implies much more than genital sexual acts. Ethicist James Nelson long ago reminded us that sex refers to biology, sexuality to "our self-understanding and way of being in the world as male and female."[35] Sexuality, then, includes our formation in and appropriation of gender roles with their designation as masculine or feminine. Sexuality, writes

Nelson, is "who we are as body-selves who experience the emotional, cognitive, physical, and spiritual need for intimate communion, both creaturely and divine."[36] A healthy appropriation of sexuality, then, includes reverence for "other" bodies and our own, a refusal to insult the dignity of sexual pleasure through narcissistic and dominative sexual repression, and a grasp of authentic freedom through which we realize our "body's grace."[37] In view of these considerations, two issues regarding the sex and gender of Jesus call for attention—his gender performance and his embodied spirituality.

Gender Performance: Feminist New Testament scholar Sandra Schneiders contends that the maleness of Jesus reveals nothing about the sex of the Godhead and cannot be used to divinize or deify human maleness.[38] Through his preaching and practices, living and behavior, Jesus performed masculinity in ways that opposed patriarchal expressions of maleness through coercive power, control and exploitation of "other" bodies, exclusion, and violence. He confronted this system through lived example, intentionally choosing courage over conformity, moral conflict over acquiescence, and boldness over caution. With all his heart and soul, mind and body, Jesus resisted religious and social attempts to reduce God's *anawim* to nobodies. Jesus made his body, his flesh, available to others: He nurtured men and women with word and touch, bread and wine, and water and fish. He reached out in compassion to the infirm, and took the lowly and forgotten, children and women to his heart.

Through his oppositional appropriation of masculinity, Jesus countered many gendered cultural expectations. He overturned the patriarchal family structure, releasing family members from their denotation as property of the male head of household.[39] He stretched solidarity far beyond the bonds and ties of blood and marriage, insisting on love of enemies, of the poor, of the excluded, of the despised.[40] Jesus "inaugurated a reform of male-female relationships," choosing women as disciples and teaching them as he

taught the men, siding with and defending women against "men who questioned, attacked, or belittled them."[41] Jesus affirmed women's agency over against narrow and constricting roles set for them by culture, religion, and empire. Jesus' performance of masculinity was *kenotic,* he emptied himself of all that would subvert or stifle authentic human liberation. In these ways, his maleness stood as contradictory signification, undermining kyriarchy and the multiple forms of oppression derived from it.

Embodied Spirituality: A healthy appropriation of sexuality is crucial to generous, generative, and full living. A fully embodied spirituality calls for the integration of sexual energies and drives, rather than repression or even sublimation. Comfortable in his body, sexuality, and masculinity, Jesus lived out of a "creative interplay of both immanent and transcendent spiritual energies."[42] A reclaimed notion of eros offers one way of thinking about such interplay.

We have poisoned eros, Raymond Lawrence contends. First, we have substituted sex for eros, then appropriated "a vision of sex as a fearsome and destructive force in human life."[43] Audre Lorde echoes his assessment. In "Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power," she maintains that we have confused eros with "plasticized sensation or with its opposite, the pornographic."[44] Lorde seeks to release eros from the confines of the bedroom and to reconnect it with "lifeforce" and "creative energy." Eros, she proposes, is "the first and most powerful guiding light toward any understanding . . . the nurturer or nursemaid of all our deepest knowledge."[45]

Eros as embodied spirituality suffuses and sustains depth or value-laden experiences and relationships that emerge whenever we "shar[e] deeply any pursuit [whether] physical, emotional, psychic, or intellectual with another person."[46] Eros enhances our capacity for joy and knowledge, honors and prompts our deepest yearnings for truth and life, and validates our refusal of docility and submission in the face of oppression.[47] Eros steadies us as we reach out to other bodies in reverence, passion, and compassion, resisting every temptation to use or assimilate the other and

the Other for our own self-gratification, purpose, or plan. Eros empowers and affirms life.

We can say, then, that Jesus had and has an eros for others; he gave his body, his very self, to and for others, to and for the Other. Jesus lived out and lived out of a fully embodied spirituality, an eros. In spite of themselves, the suspicious, the timid, and the broken-hearted were attracted to his energy and joy. In spite of themselves, the arrogant, the smug, and the self-satisfied were drawn to his authority and knowledge. In spite of themselves, hesitant men and women felt intense hope at sharing his struggle for the reign of God. Children, women, and men were attracted to his eros, and found themselves lifted up, made whole and new, open to "others."[48]

Jesus of Nazareth is the measure or standard for our exercise of erotic power and freedom in the service of the reign of God and against empire. He is the clearest example of what it means to identify with children and women and men who are poor, excluded, and despised; to take their side in the struggle for life—no matter the cost. His incarnation witnesses to a divine destiny seeded in our very flesh. Jesus signifies and teaches a new way of being human, of embodied spirituality. Through his body marked, made individual, particular, and vivid through race, gender, sexuality, religious practice, and culture, Jesus mediates the gracious gift given and the gracious giving gift. His incarnation, which makes the Infinite God present, disrupts every pleasure of hierarchy, economy, cultural domination, racial violence, gender oppression, and abuse of sexual others. Through his body, his flesh and blood, Jesus of Nazareth offers us a new and compelling way of being God's people even as we reside in the new imperial order.

The Body in the New Imperial (Dis)Order

The new imperial disorder rises arrogantly over the bones of the bodies of conquered children, women, and men. The bodies of the

indigenous peoples were the first to be sacrificed, eliminated, and contained; then the body of the earth was raped and mastered; finally, the bodies of yellow, brown, poorwhite, and black children, women, and men were squeezed through the winepress of "new" empire-building. Globalization, the dominative process of empire, now cannibalizes the bodies, the labor and creativity, and the sexuality and generativity of global "others." In sacrilegious antiliturgy, the agents of empire hand over red, yellow, brown, white, black, and poor bodies to the tyranny of neo-liberal capitalism, to the consuming forces of the market.

Race and Gender

"Globalization," sociologist Howard Winant argues, "is a re-racialization of the world."[49] Re-racialization does not rely on crude practices of lynching and cross burning, derogatory name-calling and physical or sexual assault, although these practices have not ceased altogether within the United States.[50] On a global scale, re-racialization turns on a range of practices nearly invisible and detached from the perpetrators; it relies upon an uncanny ability to mimic and co-opt antiracist social constructionist arguments. The racism of empire, what Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri denote as "imperial racism," replaces biological difference (race) with "cultural signifiers," which take on the essentialism once held by race. So, for example, should students of one race score consistently lower than students of another race on the same aptitude tests, the failure of the one and the success of the other are not linked to racial (biological) superiority but to cultural values.[51]

Race and gender function as "co-constitutive" in empire.[52] Women in empire continue to undergo a double oppression, subjected within the domestic sphere to patriarchy and subjected in the public sphere to imperial design. The bodies of women—especially red, brown, yellow, poorwhite, and black women—bear the brunt of the cultivation of material desire. In sweatshops and

export processing zones, whether in Mexico, Indonesia, China, or India, poor women endure abuse, low wages, and indignities of every sort, even risking their lives, in order to support their children and families, in order to survive. Each year, millions of poor women migrate from one sector of empire to another—from Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, or the Philippines to Hong Kong, Singapore, New York, Taiwan, or the Middle East—seeking employment as nannies, domestic workers, nurses' aides, or caregivers. And as Pei-Chia Len observes, "Globalization has simplified the gendered household burdens for more privileged women even as it complicates the racial and class stratification of domestic work."[53]

Extreme global poverty remains a most serious problem and has been aggravated by some globalization policies. According to the initial report from the United Nations International Forum on the Eradication of Poverty, roughly 20 percent of the world's population continues to live in extreme poverty, surviving on less than two dollars per day. Although poverty rates decreased in developing countries and in East Asia and the Pacific and South Asia, neither Latin America nor Sub-Saharan Africa have made much, if any, progress.[54] The global transfer of power and resources from the natural world to human control, from local communities to transnational and neocolonial elites, from local to transnational power centers reduces life expectancy, increases infant and child mortality, compromises health care, ignores education and illiteracy, and distorts income distribution.

To borrow a phrase from Zygmunt Bauman, this global system results in "a new socio-cultural hierarchy, a world-wide scale"[55] that correlates with the body's racial and gender markers: "the darker your skin is, the less you earn; the shorter your life span, the poorer your health and nutrition, the less education you can get."[56] The darker your skin is, the more likely you are to be incarcerated, a refugee, an undocumented worker; the darker your skin is, the more likely you are to migrate for survival from one outpost

of empire to another. The darker your skin is, the more likely you are to become infected with HIV/AIDS; and, if you are a woman, the darker your skin is, the more likely you will bury your infant.

In the United States, national security strategies devised in response to the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, not only have spawned vigilante patrols of the western border with Mexico but have increased racial profiling, government surveillance, and INS harassment and incarceration of immigrants, particularly Arabs, South Asians, and Muslims. Precedents for such hostility toward racially marked brown, yellow, and black bodies are found, Winant argues, in the nativism of the nineteenth-century assaults against the Irish, Catholics, and Asians; the raids of the 1920s that "targeted eastern and southern Europeans and to some extent Caribbeans"; and the internment of U.S. citizens of Japanese descent during the Second World War.[57] As Winant comments, "race [has] offer[ed] the most accessible tool to categorize the American people politically: who is 'loyal' and who is a 'threat,' who can be 'trusted' and who should be subject to surveillance, who should retain civil rights and who should be deprived of them."[58]

Just as race and racism take different forms in different global circumstances, so too race and racism operate differently within the United States. This transmutation occurs in at least three relational domains: between whites and differently racially marked "others," between and among differently marked racial groups, and within racial groups.

Color-blind Racism: Sociologist Eduardo Bonilla-Silva calls attention to the persistence of racism in the post-Civil Rights era, even though white people in the United States insist that they are not racist. Bonilla-Silva uses the familiar protestation, "I do not see color," to name this phenomenon as color-blind racism.[59] The four main frames of color-blind racism include:

- abstract liberalism, which involves ideas also linked to political and economic liberalism, such as equal opportunity,

individualism, choice, and persuasion rather than compulsion in achieving social policy;

- naturalization, which "allows whites to explain away racial phenomena by suggesting that they are natural occurrences;"
- cultural racism, which replaces the essentialism once held by biology to explain deviations from a putative white norm as the result of inferior culture and cultural norms; and
- minimization of racism, which downplays the role of racial discrimination as a "central factor affecting minorities' life chances."

Bonilla-Silva argues that when taken together "these frames form an impregnable yet elastic wall that barricades whites from the United States' racial reality."[60] He concludes that color-blindness remains the dominant and effective ideology of racism because it "binds whites together and blurs, shapes, and provides" the terrain and terms of the discourse for blacks, Latinos, and East Asian, South Asian, and Middle Eastern diasporic communities.[61]

Inter-racial and Intra-racial Relations: The current debate in the U.S. around immigration offers one way of examining, even in cursory fashion, the relations between and among differently marked racial groups. The results of a survey taken by the Pew Hispanic Center suggest that, in general, "African-Americans view immigrants more favorably than do whites, but they also believe more strongly than whites that immigrants take jobs from native-born workers."[62] But, even as ideological frames shift, the new racism reignites "old racism" issues of discrimination in employment, housing, and education as well as stereotyping.

Let me pose three examples of inter-racial and intra-racial relations. First: Consider that Mexicans and Brazilians were *imported* and employed to do repair work in New Orleans.[63] Working-class, working-poor, and poor blacks were *deported* from New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina in 2005. With little or no financial means

by which to return to the city, these men and women not only are deprived of the opportunity of employment but also of the personal and humanly recreative satisfaction of participating in their city's recovery. But the situation in New Orleans ought to be read in a global context: an editorial in *The New York Times* pointed out that undocumented immigrants outnumber legal immigrants for the first time.[64] This situation may be read as exposing the difficulty that the United States (and Europe) has come to have with "guest workers," the new "interiorized others."[65]

Second, sheer survival (food, medicines, clothing, shelter) pushes Mexicans and Brazilians, as well as peoples from Central and Latin America, Asia, and Africa, from one sector of empire to another.[66] These women and men enter empire's domestic economy at low wage rates and take on jobs that endanger their bodies, their lives.[67] Their immigrant labor is in high demand in slaughterhouses, meat packing plants, canneries, food processing plants, sweatshops, construction sites, and janitorial services. These places make "easy pickings" for raids by the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE).[68] On May 12, 2008, the ICE carried out the largest raid against undocumented workers to date at Agriprocessors, Inc., the nation's largest kosher slaughterhouse, located in Postville, Iowa. In this incident, nearly 400 undocumented workers, most identified as illiterate villagers from Guatemala, were subjected to criminal charges (use of false Social Security cards or legal residence documents) rather than with immigration violations.[69] The latter allegation would have ensured deportation; the former called for incarceration. A similar raid took place in New Bedford, Massachusetts, at Michael Bianco, Inc., a leather manufacturer. Approximately 350 workers, predominantly immigrants from Guatemala and El Salvador, were taken into federal custody on charges of violating immigration laws and held for deportation.[70] The speed of the raid sent undocumented workers to detention centers with little or no warning, and an estimated one hundred to two hundred children

were separated from their parents.[71] But what is most egregious is the way in which the lives of immigrants have been cheapened. Luis Ramirez, a twenty-five-year-old man from Guanajuato, Mexico, was beaten and kicked to death by three white teen-aged youth in Shenandoah, Pennsylvania.[72]

Third and finally, displacement of Mexicans, Brazilians, and blacks in New Orleans precipitates interracial resentment and forces some of the poorest subjects of empire to fight one another for crumbs. Let us consider comments taken from "Black Like Whom?" in which Lori Robinson interviews several racially black immigrants. Robinson's aim is to identify and address differences about the meaning and function of blackness within the African diaspora. The first person Robinson interviews is Susan Peterkin-Bishop, who says flatly,

> Growing up in Jamaica, basically what I heard about African Americans was that they were lazy, didn't want to do any work, were just sitting there waiting for the White man to give them something. But when I came here, I realized that it was not true.[73]

The second woman, Miriam Muléy, who is Puerto Rican of African descent, born and raised in the Bronx, New York, says that she meets incredulity from African Americans whenever she declares her ethnic background. Muléy told Robinson that blacks seem to be insulted by her claim of Puerto Rican identity. Muléy says that African Americans ask her pointedly, "You don't want to be an African American? You're disowning your Black roots?"[74] The third woman is Nunu Kidane, an Eritrean immigrant, whose encounters with African Americans are similar to those of Muléy. When Kidane insists that she is not black, but Eritrean, African Americans say, "When was the last time you looked in the mirror? Sister, you're Black." Kidane says, "What was missing from our dialogue was the fact that to me 'Black' or 'race' was not an identity."[75]

Each of these comments pinpoints tensions between and among women and men whose skin pigmentation is dark—black. Such remarks also highlight the impact of racial formation as well as complicity with and resistance to this process.[76] Racial formation racializes all human subjects who, consequently—willingly or unwillingly—perpetuate and transmit racist ideologies and practices through uncritical acceptance of standards, symbols, habits, assumptions, and reactions rooted in racial differentiation and racially assigned privilege.

The comments by Peterkin-Bishop illustrate just how emphasis on the "hardworking" culture (and character) of immigrants and the "lazy" culture (and character) of African Americans reinforces cultural racism and undermines positive and humane relationships between African Americans and various immigrants. Stereotypes disguise the operation of racist ideology and racist (historical as well as current) practices that create and sustain political and economic conditions that, in turn, continue to impede African American achievement and flourishing.

The statements made by Muléy and Kidane highlight the impact of racial formation on African Americans, who see and name race but often overlook cultural and historical differences. On the one hand, the human legacy of the transatlantic slave trade in African bodies can be traced, seen, and heard in Belize, Brazil, Cuba, Haiti, Jamaica, Puerto Rico, Trinidad, and Venezuela.[77] In the United States, African Americans, who have had to learn (and are still learning) to love their blackselves, perhaps too quickly identify people of mixed African, European, and indigenous ancestry as "black," thus pulling them into a black expressive culture that is really quite foreign to them. For in some of these geopolitical sites, despite pigmentocracy, the coalescing of class, culture, and language relativizes the meaning of dark skin, of blackness. On the other hand, Dominicans, Cubans, Eritreans, Egyptians, Ghanaians, Nigerians, Ugandans, and Congolese understand themselves in equally complex ways—nationality, ethnicity, cultural origins,

ancestry, and village. To these women and men, use of the term *blackness* provides no meaningful point of reference. For many of these immigrants, blackness is not yet the "political identity" that Pan Africanists on both sides of the Atlantic once desired so ardently.

Bonilla-Silva contends that the "new global racial reality will reinforce . . . versions of colorblind racism."[78] A complex system of triracial stratification that mirrors race relations in Latin America will emerge: whites, honorary whites, and the collective black, with phenotype taking a central role, "determining where groups and members of racial and ethnic groups will fit." Yet this scenario will not dislodge white racist supremacy, only hide it from public view.[79] Still, the actualization of this scenario depends upon the refusal of re-racialized subjects within empire to form counter-hegemonic alliances and to repudiate the bias that grounds and extends this process. Yet, it is not sheer refusal alone. Jesus of Nazareth calls us to break bonds imposed by imperial design, to imagine and grasp and realize ourselves as his own flesh, as the body of Christ.

Sex and Sexuality

Insofar as race and gender are co-constitutive in empire, they are governed by political and economic displays of power; but sexuality in empire is subjugated through commercial exchange. Red, brown, yellow, poorwhite, and black female bodies—violated and "occupied" in empire-building, poached in the process of globalization—function as exotic and standard commodities for trafficking and sex tourism, pornographic fantasy, and sadomasochistic spectacle.[80] Red, brown, yellow, and, especially, black male bodies lynched and castrated in empire-building, mechanized in the process of globalization, now are caricatured as "sexually aggressive, violent, animalistic."[81] Empire's eager debasement of black flesh robs *all* human persons of healthy, dignified, and generative sexual expression. For

in empire, the primary function of sex no longer entails human communication, embrace, and intimacy (not even procreation), but the heterosexual service of white male privilege. Sex is amusement; its imperial purposes are distraction, entertainment, dissipation. Thus, homosexuality in empire undergoes particularly intense opprobrium. Empire entices and intimidates its *ordinary* subjects, and perhaps especially, its most wretched subjects, to react to gay and lesbian people with panic, loathing, and violence (malevolent homophobia); empire permits its *privileged* subjects to respond with curiosity, experimentation, and tokenism (benign homophobia). In empire, self-disclosure and self-disclosive acts by gay and lesbian people are penalized by repression, expulsion, and sometimes death.[82] The vulnerability and marginality of gay and lesbian people makes a claim on the body of Jesus of Nazareth, on the body of Christ.

Catholic church teaching on sex and sexuality manifests ambivalence and disquiet toward the body—female and homosexual bodies, in particular. Such teaching signals a preference for celibacy and promotes marriage chiefly as a means for procreation. Certainly this teaching acknowledges the presence of gay and lesbian persons, accords them equal human dignity with heterosexual persons, and urges pastoral compassion in their regard.[83] Yet that teaching does little to contest the use and abuse of gay and lesbian people in empire.

Catholic church teaching distinguishes homosexual orientation from homosexual activity and deems the latter "intrinsically disordered."[84] Homosexual acts are deemed contrary to the natural law, and the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* declares that such acts "close the sexual act to the gift of life [and] do not proceed from a genuine affective and sexual complementarity."[85] This teaching admonishes gays and lesbians to repress or sacrifice their sexual orientation, to relinquish genital expression, to deny their bodies and their selves. But, if the body is a sacrament, if it is the concrete medium through which persons realize themselves

interdependently in the world and in freedom in Christ, and if in Catholic sacramental economy "to express is to effect,"[86] then, on Catholic teaching, in and through (genital) bodily expression, gays and lesbians are compelled to render themselves disordered. For on Catholic teaching, the condition of homosexuality constitutes a transgression that approximates ontological status. Can the (artificial) distinction between orientation and act (really) be upheld? What are gays and lesbians to do with their bodies, their selves?

Consider the response of *Homosexualitatis problema* to these questions:

> Fundamentally [homosexuals] are called to enact the will of God in their life by joining whatever sufferings and difficulties they experience in virtue of their condition to the sacrifice of the Lord's Cross. That Cross, for the believer, is a fruitful sacrifice since from that death come life and redemption. While any call to carry the cross or to understand a Christian's suffering in this way will predictably be met with bitter ridicule by some, it should be remembered that this is the way to eternal life for "all" who follow Christ.
>
> [The Cross] is easily misunderstood, however, if it is merely seen as a pointless effort at self-denial. The Cross is a denial of self, but in service to the will of God himself who makes life come from death and empowers those who trust in him to practise virtue in place of vice.
>
> To celebrate the Paschal Mystery, it is necessary to let that Mystery become imprinted in the fabric of daily life. To refuse to sacrifice one's own will in obedience to the will of the Lord is effectively to prevent salvation. Just as the Cross was central to the expression of God's redemptive love for us in Jesus, so the conformity of the self-denial of homosexual men and women with the sacrifice of the Lord will constitute for them a source of self-giving which will save them from a way of life which constantly threatens to destroy them.
>
> Christians who are homosexual are called, as all of us are, to a chaste life. As they dedicate their lives to understanding the

> nature of God's personal call to them, they will be able to celebrate the Sacrament of Penance more faithfully and receive the Lord's grace so freely offered there in order to convert their lives more fully to his Way.[87]

This is stern counsel: it calls for embrace of the cross, for bodily (sexual) asceticism, self-denial, and imposes strict abstinence. In a carefully argued analysis of the document, Paul Crowley affirms the meaningfulness of the cross not only for gay and lesbian people but for *all* Christians since the cross is *the* condition of discipleship. Crowley rightly objects to the peculiar application of "crucified living" (enforced abstinence) to the (sexual) fulfillment of gays and lesbians.[88] With regard to the last sentences quoted above, Crowley points out, "While penance is mentioned here as an aid to gay persons in attaining a chaste life, no mention is made of the graces accruing from one's baptism or from the life of the Eucharist."[89]

Regarding the command of abstinence, Xavier Seubert reasons that "to prescribe, in advance, abstinence and celibacy for the homosexual person simply because the person is homosexual is to say that, as it is, homosexual bodily existence stands outside the sacramental transformation to which all creation is called in Christ."[90] The writing of *Homosexualitatis problema* surely was motivated by deep pastoral concern. But it echoes with what James Alison describes as a reproachful sanctioning ecclesiastical voice, which commands: "'Love and do not love, be and do not be.'" He concludes: "The voice of God has been presented as a double bind, which is actually far more dangerous than a simple message of hate, since it destabilizes being into annihilation, and thinks that annihilation to be a good thing."[91]

Church teaching repels gay and lesbian (anti)bodies to the periphery of the ecclesial body and may well disclose just how afraid the church may be of the body of Jesus of Nazareth. Moral theologian Stephen J. Pope calls the magisterium's teaching about homosexual orientation "powerfully stigmatizing and dehumanizing."[92] That teaching, he continues:

> is also at least tacitly, if not explicitly, liable to be used to support exactly the kinds of unjust discrimination that the Church has repeatedly condemned. Describing someone's sexual identity as "gravely disordered" would seem to arouse suspicion, mistrust, and alienation. . . . One can understand why observers conclude that the magisterium's teaching about homosexuality stands in tension with its affirmation that each gay person is created in the *imago Dei*. [93]

Church teaching on homosexuality exposes us to the manipulation of agents of empire, and coaxes our collusion in opposing and punishing gay and lesbian people who refuse to internalize homophobia and who live their lives without self-censorship. This teaching feeds innuendo and panic; it nudges us to discipline the body's phrasing and comportment, the curiosity and play of our children; it disturbs our families and relationships; it rewards our disingenuousness as we praise then mock women and men whose talents enrich our daily lives and weekly worship.[94] Seubert poses a grave critique, one that incriminates the very mystery of the church: the "denial of the homosexual body as this group's basis of spiritual, relational, historical experience is tantamount to impeding access to the reality of Christ in a certain moment of human history."[95] This charge brings the church much too close to betraying the great mystery of love that suffuses it and stirs up continually a longing to realize itself as the marked flesh of Christ. This situation provokes a most poignant, most indecent question, "Can Jesus of Nazareth be an option for gays and lesbians?" This question uncovers the pain, anguish, and anger that many gays and lesbians feel as we thwart their desire to follow Jesus of Nazareth, to realize themselves in his image. This question springs from the deep-seated feeling among many gays and lesbians that Jesus Christ is not an option for them, that he, as the embodied representative of God, hates them, and that they have no place in either Christ's church or the Kingdom of God he announced during his earthy ministry.[96]

If Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ of God, cannot be an option for gays and lesbians, then he cannot be an option. An adequate response to this concern requires a different christological interpretation, one in which we *all* may recognize, love, and realize our bodyselves as Jesus' own flesh, as the body of Christ.

Marking the (Queer) Flesh of Christ

This section pushes the boundaries of our thinking about the homosexual body further. The words *queer* and *Christ* form a necessary if shocking, perhaps even "obscene" conjunction.[97] By inscribing a queer mark on the flesh of Christ, I *neither* propose *nor* insinuate that Jesus Christ was homosexual. By inscribing a "queer" mark, I recognize that this mark poses epistemological challenges for theology: Have we turned the (male) body of Christ into a fetish or idol? In an effort to discipline *eros*, have we disregarded "God's proto-erotic desire for us"?[98] Can a Christology incorporate all the dimensions of corporality?

These questions target some of the discursive limits of sex, gender, and sexuality in Christianity and disturb cherished symbols. Just as a black Christ heals the anthropological impoverishment of black bodies, so too a "queer" Christ heals the anthropological impoverishment of homosexual bodies.[99] Because Jesus of Nazareth declared himself with and for others—the poor, excluded, and despised—and offered a new "way" and new freedom to *all* who would hear and follow him, we may be confident that the Christ of our faith *is* for gay and lesbian people. Conversely, if the risen Christ cannot identify with gay and lesbian people, then the gospel announces no good news and the reign of God presents no real alternative to the "reign of sin."[100] Only an *ekklesia* that follows Jesus of Nazareth in (re)marking its flesh as "queer" as his own may set a welcome table in the household of God.

Robert Goss takes the experience of homophobic oppression of homosexual bodies in culture, society, and church as a starting point for a "queer" christological reflection.[101] He grounds this articulation in the "generative matrix" of the *basileia* praxis of Jesus and in the real suffering of gay and lesbian people.[102] The immanent and transcendent scope of that praxis allows Goss to detach the radical truth of Jesus Christ from all forms of hegemony and ideology—whether cultural, social, ecclesiastical, biblical, or theological—that might seek to master Infinite God present among us. Further, he constructs a "queer" biblical hermeneutic through which to unmask and discredit any heretical use of the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures to justify bigotry and violence against gay and lesbian people.[103]

Goss challenges the abusive use of the cross to justify explicit or implicit oppression and violence against gay and lesbian people as well as gay and lesbian acquiescence to interiorized oppression.[104]

> The cross symbolizes the political infrastructure of homophobic practice and oppression. It symbolizes the terror of internalized homophobia that has led to the closeted invisibility of gay and lesbian people. It indicates the brutal silencing, the hate crimes, the systemic violence perpetuated against us. The cross now belongs to us. We have been crucified.[105]

Crucifixion was the response of imperial power to Jesus' *"basileia* solidarity with the poor, the outcast, the sinner, the socially dysfunctional, and the sexually oppressed."[106] The death of Jesus "shapes the cross into a symbol of struggle for queer liberation" and Easter becomes the hope and fulfillment of that struggle.[107]

> From the perspective of Easter . . . God identifies with the suffering and death of Jesus at the hands of a political system of oppression. For gay and lesbian Christians, Easter becomes the event at which God says no to homophobic violence and sexual oppression. . . . On Easter, God made Jesus queer in his solidarity

> with us. In other words, Jesus 'came out of the closet' and became the 'queer' Christ. . . . Jesus the Christ is queer by his solidarity with queers.[108]

All Christology is interpretation and, in these passages, Goss articulates an understanding of the cross and resurrection from the perspective of the homophobic suffering of gay and lesbian persons. His theological analysis turns on the scandal of the body particular: Jesus of Nazareth, in all his marked particularity of race, gender, sex, culture, and religion, teaches us the universal meaning of being human in the world.[109] In Jesus, God critiques any imperial or ecclesiastical practice of body exclusion and control, sorrows at our obstinacy, and calls us all unceasingly to new practices of body inclusion and liberation. In Jesus, God manifests an eros for us *as we are* in our marked particularity of race, gender, sex, sexuality, and culture.

In contrast to christological formulations that avoid or distort sexuality and sexual desire, Goss's work offers an opportunity to honor what Sarah Coakley calls the "profound entanglement of our human sexual desires and our desire for God."[110] For as Sebastian Moore insists, sexual desire is always a "hint of the ultimate mystery of us that is love."[111] A "queer" Christ is not scandalized by human desire but liberates that desire from cloying commonsense satisfaction, misuse, and disrespect.[112] This liberation begins in regard and esteem for the body and comes to proximate fulfillment in authentic love of the body, as authentic love and loving.[113] Thus, a "queer" Christ embraces *all* our bodies passionately, revalorizes them as embodied mystery, and reorients sexual desire toward God's desire for us in and through our sexuality. This is not a matter of fitting God into our lives but of fitting our lives into God. Homosexual and heterosexual persons are drawn by God's passionate love for us working in us to bring us into God's love.[114] To live in and live out of this reorientation demands refusal of isolating egoism, of body denial, and of whatever betrays spiritual

and bodily integrity. Moreover, living in and out of this reorientation leads us, even if fitfully, toward virtue; helps us to grow lovable and loving; and, in fulfillment, we are gift and gifted with and in love.

In his relationships with women and men, Jesus embodied openness, equality, and mutuality. In his suffering and death on the cross, Jesus showed us the cost of integrity, when we live in freedom, in love, and in solidarity with others. In his resurrection, Jesus became the One in whom "God's erotic power"[115] releases bodily desire from the tomb of fear and loathing, the One who fructifies all loving exchange, the One who, in his risen body, quiets the restless yearning of our hearts.

(Re)Marking the Flesh of the Church

If theological reflection on the body cannot ignore a Christ identified with black, brown, red, yellow, poorwhite, and queer folk, neither can it ignore reflection on "the flesh of the Church."[116] For as Gregory of Nyssa tells us, whoever "sees the Church looks directly at Christ."[117] And as the flesh of the church is the flesh of Christ in every age, the flesh of the church is marked (as was his flesh) by race, sex, gender, sexuality, and culture. These marks differentiate and transgress, they unify and bond, but the flesh of Christ relativizes these marks in the flesh of the church. These marks may count; but the mark of Christ, the baptismal sign of the cross, counts for more, trumps all marks. Still, counting and trumping marks in the body of Christ must give way before *basileia* praxis. These acts of justice-doing, empire critique, love, and solidarity mark us as his flesh made vivid leaven in our world.

In a letter to followers of "the way" at Corinth, Paul hands over the gift he has been given: "For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke

it and said, 'This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me'" (1 Cor 11: 23-24). This is the Tradition: the body of the Lord is handed over to us, handled by us as we feed one another. Further on Paul declares: "You are the body of Christ and individually members of it" (1 Cor 12:27). We are the body raised up by Christ for himself within humanity; through us, the flesh of the crucified and resurrected Jesus is extended through time and space.

In the very act of nourishing our flesh with his flesh, we women and men are made new in Christ, emboldened to surrender position and privilege and power and wealth, to abolish all claims to racial and cultural superiority, to contradict repressive codes of gender formation and sexual orientation. In Christ, there is neither brown nor black, neither red nor white; in Christ, there is neither Creole nor *mestizo*, neither senator nor worker in the *maquiladoras*. In Christ, there is neither male nor female, neither gay/lesbian nor straight, neither heterosexual nor homosexual (after Gal 3:28). We are all transformed in Christ: *we are his very own flesh*.

If my sister or brother is not at the table, we are not the flesh of Christ. If my sister's mark of sexuality must be obscured, if my brother's mark of race must be disguised, if my sister's mark of culture must be repressed, then we are not the flesh of Christ. For, it is through and in Christ's own flesh that the "other" is my sister, is my brother; indeed, the "other" is me (*yo soy tu otro yo*). Unless our sisters and brothers are beside and with each of us, we are not the flesh of Christ. The sacramental aesthetics of Eucharist, the thankful living manifestation of God's image through particularly marked flesh, demand the vigorous display of difference in race and culture and tongue, gender and sex and sexuality. Again, Gregory of Nyssa: "The establishment of the Church is re-creation of the world. But it is only in the *union of all the particular members* that the beauty of Christ's Body is complete."[118]

The body of Jesus the Christ, both before and after his death, radically clarifies the meaning of be-ing embodied in the world.

His love and praxis releases the power of God's animating image and likeness in our red, brown, yellow, white, and black bodies—our homosexual and heterosexual bodies, our HIV/AIDS infected bodies, our starving bodies, our prostituted bodies, our yearning bodies, our ill and infirm bodies, our young and old and joyous bodies. To stand silent before war and death, incarceration and torture, rape and queer-bashing, pain and disease, abuse of power and position is to be complicit with empire's sacrilegious antiliturgy, which dislodges the table of the bread of life. That desiccated antiliturgy hands us all over to consumption by the corrupt body of the market.

The only body capable of taking us *all* in as we are with all our different body marks—certainly including the mark of homosexuality—is the body of Christ. This taking us in, this in-corporation, is akin to sublation, not erasure, not uniformity: the *basileia* praxis of Jesus draws us up to him. Our humble engagement in his praxis revalues our identities and differences, even as it preserves the integrity and significance of our body marks. At the same time, those very particular body marks are relativized, reoriented, and reappropriated under his sign, the sign of the cross. Thus, in solidarity and in love of others and the Other, we are (re)made and (re)marked as the flesh of Christ, as the flesh of his church.

We have drawn out some implications of the relation between Christology and anthropology by focusing on the marked body of Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus was born of people subjugated by the Roman Empire; an itinerant and charismatic preacher and teacher, his strenuous critique of oppressive structures—whether political or religious or cultural—along with his fearless love of ordinary people provoked those in authority to brand him a criminal. Jesus mediated God's presence among us through a body marked by race, gender, sex, sexuality, culture, and religion. His radical self-disclosure constitutes the paradigm for all human self-disclosure in contexts of empire and oppression, exclusion and alienation, slavery and death.

The body of Jesus provokes our interrogation of the new imperial deployment and debasement of bodies. The flesh of his church is multilayered. Pulling back layer after layer, we expose the suffering and groaning, outrage and hope of the victims of history. In them we glimpse the flesh of Christ and we are drawn by that eros, his radiant desire for us, and we too seek to imitate his incarnation of love of the Other, love of others. The body of Jesus of Nazareth impels us to place the bodies of the victims of history at the center of theological anthropology, to turn to "other" subjects.