Vol. 3 No. 1
Fall 2020

Critical Theology

engaging
church
culture
society

Fall 2020 issue edited by Rosemary P. Carbine

# Introduction

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This issue features Black, white, and LGBT Catholic women's constructive theological voices and interventions on some of the most prevalent topics in critical and prophetic theologies in our day, namely the intersectional oppressive realities of systemic racism and white supremacy, poverty and ever-growing economic inequalities, immigration, and ecocide, among others—all amplified by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, which negatively and disproportionately impacts Black/African American, Indigenous, and Latinx communities as well as other communities of colour. Reading the signs of the times in light of the gospel and in light of multidisciplinary methods (e.g., biblical and feminist studies, history, psychology, and ecclesiology, to name only a few), these articles collectively illuminate new theological perspectives and praxis about Mary, about proactive anti-racist solidarity, and about envisioning as well as embodying new ways of being church, of creating ever more inclusive and just communities. The book review that concludes this issue parallels these articles' distinct and yet shared quests for freedom, especially but not only for women and people of colour and for the LGBTQIA+ community.

On the Feast of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, the nuns of the first Carmelite monastery in North America invited M. Shawn Copeland to offer a reflection for the Communion Service they shared with one another and virtually with more than 100 others. The feast provided an opportunity to critically re-encounter Miriam of Nazareth, the Jewish peasant woman of Galilee, the mother of Jesus of Nazareth. Copeland's reflection for that service is extended for this article. In this article, Copeland engages with critical biblical and historical scholarship, feminist hermeneutics, and feminist theologies to counter the patriarchal Christian iconography and hagiography about Mary. Instead, Copeland interprets Miriam of Nazareth in theo-political ways that evoke and provoke active resistance to American and global systemic racism and violence in our day. "Like ordinary poor Indigenous women, like ordinary poor and working-class women of colour, like ordinary poor and working-class white women," Miriam holds much in common with contemporary mothers who lament and protest police

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violence, who routinely face the risks of immigration and border crossing to provide for the well-being of their children and families, and who confront long-standing systemic health and social inequities amid the COVID-19 pandemic. In keeping with the political Christology elaborated in her prior theological work, Copeland paints a political theological portrait of Mary: "With a son who was arrested and brutalized by law enforcement, then tried, convicted, and executed on trumped-up charges of sedition and blasphemy, Miriam of Nazareth has a great deal in common with the mothers of Andy Lopez and Trayvon Martin, the mothers of Tanisha Anderson and Natasha McKenna, the mothers of Eric Garner and Freddie Gray."

Karen Teel's article points out a growing trend in the United States today among many white people to affirm that anti-Black racism is wrong. Moreover, white people are increasingly aware that racial inequity not only involves "people being mean to each other," as Alicia Garza once put it, but also is built on and into our social structures. Nevertheless, Teel inquires why more ordinary white people do not actively fight to abolish racism. Applying key insights from the marital systems analysis developed by psychologist David Schnarch, Teel outlines the "crucible approach" to illuminate white US Americans' racial avoidance. With respect to race, Teel argues, white Americans in the US need to grow up. Spiritual growth operates as a core Christian principle, yet in this moment the Movement for Black Lives most visibly offers such an invitation to do so.

Mary E. Hunt's article about Catholics in 2020 was crafted for a discussion sponsored by the San Francisco Dignity Chapter and was shared on the morning after the death of Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsberg. Hunt focuses on the theo-political and community-making efforts of LGBTIQA+ Catholics as one illustrative part of the Catholic community seeking to address our current times. Hunt highlights several inter/national examples of the sacramental and solidarity work of "queer Catholics, not as the saviors of the world, but as responsible citizens teaming up with others to 'make all things new' (Rev. 21:5)," to create and express new ways of being church in these antagonistic, fraught, polarized times. As Hunt notes, queer Catholics, Women-Church Convergence groups, and other base eucharistic communities sound a new ecclesiological note or "signal a new moment in American, if not global, Catholicism" for long-sought and fought-for equity, inclusion, diversity, and justice.

# Meeting Miriam of Nazareth on the Feast of Our Lady of Mount Carmel

**By M. Shawn Copeland**
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## I

> Meanwhile, standing near the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother, "Woman, here is your son." Then he said to the disciple, "Here is your mother." And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home.
>
> John 19:26-27 (NRSV)

The gospel reading for the Feast of Our Lady of Mount Carmel is taken from the concluding section of the Passion Narrative as recounted in the Gospel of John. Jesus is dying. He has been tortured, mocked, and sentenced to death—capital punishment by way of crucifixion. The carpenter was forced to carry the wood for his execution to a hill outside the great city of Jerusalem. There, Jesus was stripped naked, his arms stretched out, his hands nailed to the beam. Then soldiers used ropes to hoist him up and nail his feet to the upright stake.

Jesus is dying: he cannot breathe; his diaphragm is collapsing; he is being asphyxiated. As death comes over him, Jesus calls *out to* his mother: "Woman, here is your son." He entrusts his deeply loved mother to his deeply loved disciple and friend: "Here is your mother." Jesus gasps, "It is finished." His head sags and he gives up his spirit (John 19:26-28).

What might we make of this scene so soaked in sadness and anguish? From a human, humane, and compassionate perspective, Jesus, in his dying moments, performs an act of filial piety, entrusting his mother's well-being to the care of a beloved disciple and friend. Biblical scholars do not dismiss such a reading out of hand, but given the highly symbolic character of the Johannine Gospel, they dig deeper. Adele Reinhartz argues that "a clue to the meaning of the passage may be lie in a comparison between these two characters."[1] Each is defined by the quality of intimacy with Jesus: mother and beloved disciple and friend. Scholars suggest that a further clue may lie in the gospel's use of and "emphasis on the language of dwelling"[2] or abiding. "The mother will now dwell [abide] with her new son, just as Jesus dwelt [abided] among humankind," just as the promised Spirit-Paraclete will descend upon and dwell [abide] with the disciples.[3]

## II

Miriam of Nazareth remains hidden, nearly invisible in the New Testament or Christian Scriptures: the Matthean writer mentions her five times, only once outside the Infancy Narratives,[4] and the Markan writer refers to her three times.[5] The author of Luke's Gospel cites the name of the mother of Jesus—Mary (*Maryam* or *Mariam* in Aramaic) 12 times; and the book of *Acts* reports that after the ascension, when the disciples—men and women—meet in an upper room of a house to pray, Miriam, the mother of Jesus, is with them.[6] The Johannine writer refers to the mother of Jesus twice.[7] Yet these references provide no information about the Jewish peasant woman who gave birth to the one whom Christians confess as human and divine, Lord and Christ. On the one hand, Christian iconography and hagiography fill in this vacuum, make her visible, but do so by sculpting her through a patriarchal lens; confining her to pedestals; rendering her difficult, well-nigh impossible for the ordinary woman of any era to imitate. On the other hand, critical biblical scholarship along with feminist hermeneutics and feminist theology can help us peel back the layers of neglect and oversight that conceal the flesh-and-blood Jewish woman, mother, disciple Miriam of Nazareth.

Miriam grew up and lived under the Roman *imperium* in the region known as Galilee. It was known as a place of racial and cultural mixture,[8] a frontier region that buffered the "crossroad of empire."[9] 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.[10] And although open revolt against the Roman military was rare, as a conquered people Galileans never surrendered "their commitment to the covenantal principles of their traditional way of life" and demonstrated on more than one occasion their willingness to die rather than transgress Mosaic Law.[11] Of particular note is a revolt in 4 BCE carried out after the death of Herod the Great by the Galilean

leader Judas, who sacked the treasury and armory at Sepphoris. In retaliation, the Romans burned the city and sold its inhabitants into slavery.[12]

The village of Nazareth was located about 4 miles from the city of Sepphoris, which Herod Antipas redeveloped and made into his capital.[13] The population of the obscure village was comprised roughly of 300 to 400 people—most of whom were peasants working their own land or tenant farmers working land belonging to others, along with a few artisans and crafts persons and, perhaps, merchants. The "basic social unit of the village was constituted by a household working the land, or on a fishing boat on the Sea of Galilee."[14] Archaeological evidence suggests that in villages like Nazareth, family dwellings consisted of one or two cramped rooms, covered with a thatched roof. Often three or four such houses were joined by a common wall and faced a common open-air courtyard, forming a compound where extended family groups might live. The common courtyard functioned as a shelter for domestic animals as well as a kitchen with its "shared oven, cistern that held water, and millstone for grinding grain."[15] The villages surrounding Sepphoris likely would have benefited from trade with the city, but this neither erases nor eliminates "the unequal power structure between the city as the base for Herod Antipas and the local elite, on the one hand, and the villages on the other."[16] Yet the majority of the peasant population would have had to set aside and saved "at least one fifth of the crop for next year's seed," and there were taxes: "land taxes on the harvest, poll tax on house members, and in all likelihood also tithes to the temple."[17]

Nazareth would have had a small synagogue where men and women gathered to pray, to listen to the reading and interpretation of Torah, and to receive instruction. More than likely, male heads of households led synagogue services and settled the community's disputes, but scholars observe that in such small rural villages, women would have been active in synagogue and public life. Moreover, as Johnson surmises, "Celebrations of the life cycle, such as circumcisions, marriage feasts, and funerals would also [have entailed] the participation of women according to local tradition."[18]

Christian tradition holds that Miriam's husband, Joseph, was a carpenter, and the gospels use the Greek word *tekton* to describe his work. This word implies more than those tasks and skills we recognize as carpentry. Joseph (and perhaps Jesus) also may have worked as a stonemason or builder, but as historian Maurice Casey observes, we have no idea whether Joseph worked "outside Nazareth to run a profitable business" or had clients in Sepphoris.[19] So, like every other peasant family in the village, Joseph and Miriam would have supplemented their livelihood with a small plot of land for growing basic foodstuffs.[20] Miriam would have worked long hours each day: Both Mark and Matthew intimate that Jesus was not an only child;[21] certainly, then, Miriam would have cared for her children and, perhaps, from time to time, the children of other village women. Each morning she would have risen early to draw water and prepare a meal; she would have collected firewood, planted and tended a vegetable and herb garden, sewed and mended the family clothes. Quite likely, her face and skin would have been weathered by the sun, her hands roughened, her feet calloused, her back sore, and sometimes, her patience worn thin. Such was Miriam's daily *kenosis*, her ongoing self-emptying for family and loved ones, for love of God and love of neighbour.[22]

Still, Miriam's life was not without joy or gladness: she enjoyed the intimacy of marital affection, the warmth of kinfolk, the confidences of women friends, the conviviality of village-community. As a mother, Miriam would have been awed at the birth of her children: surely, she marvelled at holding, nursing, singing to them—simply looking at her infants. Surely, she smiled at their first steps or as they discovered birds or gazed up at the stars. And, surely, Miriam taught Jesus to be attentive to and to listen to those around him, to refrain from hasty judgment, to be compassionate, and to help others as he could. Surely, Miriam taught Jesus to pause and to ponder and to pray.

This brief sketch reminds us that Miriam of Nazareth was a flesh-and-blood Jewish woman who lived in first-century Galilee. For many readers, this portrait clashes sharply with the Mary of popular Catholic devotion and iconography. Miriam the Galilean peasant woman is not the blue-cloaked Mary whose head is tilted to one side, whose eyes are modestly cast downward, whose lips bear the hint of a demure smile. Miriam the Galilean peasant woman well may have been numbed and worn down by the daily battle of subsistence living, yet she held on in love and hope to the faith of her foremothers. Miriam well may have been accustomed to poverty and going without, to waiting and hope, to worry and anxiety, but also to action and intervention. And, in Roman-occupied Galilee, Miriam well may have feared and prayed daily for the safety of her husband, her sons, and her daughters. Given periodic revolts in Galilee, the presence of Roman soldiers in the area well may have caused concern for the parents of female children and for young women. The swaggering presence of unruly soldiers meant that sexual harassment, assault, and rape were not improbable.[23]

## III

To return to the gospel text for the feast: faithful to Jesus to the end are two persons whom he loved deeply—his mother and his disciple and friend. In the Fourth Gospel, these two figures function symbolically, bringing the past and future together: Jesus' mother represents the past; the beloved disciple represents the future.[24] From the beginning, Jesus' mother has been a witness to his ministry; her presence at the cross "represents the continuation of his [now concluded] earthly ministry."[25] The presence of the beloved disciple symbolically connects "the Jesus tradition and the life of the faith community."[26] Finally, in the Johannine Gospel, "at the heart of Jesus' ministry is the creation of a new family of God."[27] The members of this family will not be "born of the flesh," Jesus says to Nicodemus, but rather "of water and spirit" (John 3:1-6). The members of this family will "claim *no* 'father' except God alone … and [they will] worship God in spirit and in truth," Jesus tells the Samaritan woman (John 4:23-24).[28] To belong to God's new creation, to belong to this new family, means to follow the 'way' that Jesus taught. Moreover, following that 'way' requires that we root our fundamental identity *not* in national dominance or religious orthodoxy, *not* in culture or political affiliation, *not* in racial primacy or ethnic purity, *not* in gender superiority or sexual orientation. Rather, we are to root our fundamental identity in concrete praxis of love of God and love of neighbour. The author of the First Letter of John writes, "Whoever does not love abides in death." And again, "Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and in action" (1 John 3:14, 18).

## IV

Amid crushing waves of the lethal coronavirus and of irruptions of violent anti-Black action and sentiment, we in the United States are reeling with grief, pain, anger, even rage, and confusion. We turn to the Galilean peasant woman Miriam of Nazareth, who would have had so very much in common with ordinary poor Indigenous women, with ordinary poor and working-class women of colour, with ordinary poor and working-class white women. For, to quote the brilliant, infuriating, and brilliantly infuriating feminist theologian Marcella Althaus-Reid, Miriam of Nazareth "was no rich white woman who does not walk."[29] Like ordinary poor Indigenous women, like ordinary poor and working-class women of colour, like ordinary poor and working-class white women, Miriam, too, had to walk. Rain or shine, heat or cold: like these women, Miriam walked. There was no other way then; there is no other way now.

Having been driven into exile by gangs of soldiers sent to kill her son, Miriam of Nazareth knew the fear felt by those mothers in nearby villages as soldiers, under Herod's orders, grabbed and murdered their sons; knew the "pain, the sickness, the confusion, the fogginess"[30] experienced by Samaira Rice, the mother of 12-year-old Tamir Rice, who was killed by police.

Having faced down danger and risked abuse in the escape to Egypt so that her son might live and thrive, Miriam of Nazareth knew the courage and resilience gathered by so many mothers around the world each day as they cross foreign borders so that their children might live and thrive.

Just as Kadiatou Diallo, the mother of Amadou Diallo, insisted that her son was not an "insignificant migrant," Miriam of Nazareth, too, knew the desire "to have . . justice and respect and dignity, from those who are supposed to protect us."[31]

Having worked long hours to nourish and provide for her family, Miriam of Nazareth has much in common with impoverished mothers around the world—ordinary and poor women of Indigenous communities, women of colour, white women—mothers whose children are intentionally deprived of food and water, of medicine and health care because of race, ethnicity, religion, or culture through the indifference and cruelty of their governments.

Having cared for children or adults sick with disease in rural Galilee, Miriam of Nazareth has much in common with mothers around the world whose husbands or children, relatives or friends have suffered and died from COVID-19.

With a son who was arrested and brutalized by law enforcement and tried, convicted, and executed on trumped-up charges of sedition and blasphemy, Miriam of Nazareth has a great deal in common with the mothers of Andy Lopez and Trayvon Martin, the mothers of Tanisha Anderson and Natasha McKenna, the mothers of Eric Garner and Freddie Gray.

## V

As George Floyd *lay under the weight of white supremacy*, gasping for air, struggling to breathe, he called out to *his* mother. This adult man's cry moved mothers around the world. Diana Spalding wrote, "When mothers around the world heard this, we let out a collective wail. Because deep down in the depths of our beings, all we ever want to be able to do is to come when our babies call us."[32] At that moment, he summoned *all* mothers.[33] As George Floyd *lay pressed under the knee of white supremacy*, gasping for air, struggling to breathe, he called out, "Mama." At that moment, Miriam of Nazareth met him, embraced him, and led him to his mother.

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2 Ibid.

3 Ibid., 392.

4 Matt. 1:16, 18, 20; 2:11; 13:55.

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6 Luke 1:27, 30, 34, 38, 39, 41, 47, 56; 2:15, 16, 19, 34; Acts 1:14.

7 John 2:1-11; 19:27-29.

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10 Richard Horsley, *Jesus and Empire: The Kingdom of God and the New World Disorder* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003), 35, 15.

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12 Maurice Casey, *Jesus of Nazareth* (New York: T & T Clark, 2010), 153.

13 Halvor Moxnes, *Putting Jesus in His Place: A Radical Vision of Household and Kingdom* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2003), 149.

14 Ibid., 150.

15 Ibid.

16 Ibid.

17 Ibid.

18 Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Truly Our Sister: A Theology of Mary in the Communion of Saints* (New York: Continuum, 2003), 168; Mary F. Foskett, "Mary the Mother of Jesus," 426, in Benjamin H. Dunning, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of the New Testament, Gender, and Sexuality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).

19 Casey, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 152; Johnson, *Truly Our Sister*, 147.

20 Johnson, *Truly Our Sister*, 147.

21 Matthew 13:55: "Is not this the carpenter's son? Is not his mother called Mary? And are not his brothers James and Joseph and Simon and Judas?" and Mark 6:1-3: "Where did this man get all this? What is this wisdom that has been given to him? What deeds of power are being done by his hands? Is this not the carpenter, the son of Mary and the brother of James, Joses, Judas, and Simon, and are not his sisters here with us?"

22 Carol Meyers, "Woman," 156–61, in *Encyclopaedia Judaica* Vol. 21, 2nd ed., Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik, eds. (Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2007).

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27 Ibid.; see Jean Zumstein, "The Purpose of the Ministry and Death of Jesus in the Gospel of John," 340, in Judith M. Lieu and Martinus C. de Boer, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Johannine Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

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29 Marcella Althaus-Reid, "When God Is a Rich White Woman Who Does Not Walk: The Hermeneutical Circle of Missiology in Latin America," *Theology and Sexuality* 1 (1994): 55–72.

30 Nicquel Terry Ellis, "'You don't get over nothing like this': Mother of Tamir Rice Says Moving on Has Been Painful," *USA Today* (June 23, 2020). https://www.usatoday.com/in-depth/news/2020/06/22/tamir-rices-mother-fights-racism-america-and-police-brutality/3116710001. Accessed November 1, 2020.

31 Richy Maria Jacob, "Where Is Amadou Diallo's Mother Now?" (May 9, 2020). https://www.thecinemaholic.com/amadou-diallos-mother. Accessed November 1, 2020.

32 Diana Spalding, "When George Floyd Called out for His Mama, Mothers Everywhere Answered" (June 4, 2020). https://www.mother.ly/news/george-floyd-called-for-mothers-everywhere. Accessed November 1, 2020.

33 Watching televised protest marches in the days that followed the murder of George Floyd, I saw a woman holding a poster that read: "When George Floyd called out for his mama, he called for mothers everywhere." See also Vanessa Magic, "When George Floyd Called for His Mama, I Felt Pain—Because I'm Someone's Mama" (June 10, 2020). https://www.cbc.ca/parents/learning/view/when-george-floyd-called-for-his-mama-i-felt-pain-because-im-someones-mama. Accessed November 1, 2020.

# The Racial Crucible

## The Movement for Black Lives as Spiritual Invitation

**By Karen Teel**
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> It is galling indeed to have stood so long, hat in hand, waiting for Americans to grow up enough to realize that you do not threaten them.—James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time*

> When I was a child, I used to speak like a child, think like a child, reason like a child. But when I became an adult, I put childish ways aside.—Saint Paul, 1 Cor. 13:11

In the United States today, many people, including whites, are eager to affirm that racism is wrong. Moreover, we white people are increasingly aware that racial inequity not only is "people being mean to each other," as Alicia Garza once put it, but consists of inequities built into our social structures.[1] The "race problem" in the United States has never been the presence of various kinds of people. The problem is anti-Black racism and violence. This is a "whiteness problem."[2] Scholars have amply documented the history that brought us here and the many measures by which US society systematically excludes the Black community from optimal opportunity, health, and wealth outcomes. By now, US Americans of goodwill know that much needs to change.

Yet many whites have not changed our behaviour. If racism is wrong, then why aren't more white people—most of whom are Christians—actively fighting to abolish it? Why do so many of us remain unwilling or unable to imagine actions beyond signing statements and protesting? If we want equity, why don't we create it? A wide range of persuasive explanations has been proposed: conscious racism, unconscious racism, ignorance, miseducation, apathy, laziness, selfishness—in Christian terms, sin. It can be difficult for individual whites to process these ideas; even when we are receptive, we don't know where to start, and we tend to get stuck in feelings of guilt, shame, and helplessness. Arguments that racial justice benefits us and aligns with Christian values likewise fail to spur us to act. Still, I refuse to concede that we are hopeless.

In teaching undergraduates, I observe that many whites respond better to ideas that describe our whiteness than to ideas that we perceive as shaming us for it. For example, Robin DiAngelo's notion of *white fragility* names—thus making it possible to manage—the defensive reaction common in whites confronted with straight talk about racism and white supremacy.[3] George Yancy's concepts of *white opacity* and *unsuturing* argue that whites can do anti-racist work once we accept that we can never fully overcome our racism.[4] Such thinkers urge us to cultivate self-knowledge regarding our whiteness. Pulling no punches, they instill hope that we are not alone and can do better.

This essay proposes another such idea: the *racial crucible*. I borrow the concept of the crucible from psychologist David Schnarch, who calls his distinctive approach to family therapy "crucible neurobiological therapy."[5] Investigating race relations through this lens, I find that they evince some striking similarities to healthy human relationships, as well as crucial differences. Both help to illuminate affective dimensions of whiteness. As Shannon Sullivan says, "My concern is *spiritual* in that it examines what psychosomatically animates white people in their pursuit of racial justice."[6] I contend that our current racial context in general and the Movement for Black Lives in particular offer white US Americans an urgent spiritual invitation to grow.

In coining the phrase *racial crucible*, I am not inventing a new phenomenon but attempting to name something that already exists, as did Peggy McIntosh with *white privilege*, Kimberlé Crenshaw with *intersectionality*, and Robin DiAngelo with *white fragility*. African Americans like David Walker, Ida B. Wells, and James Baldwin, who in important ways know white people better than we know ourselves, have been urging us to grow up for centuries. Christian theological warrant for treating the racial crucible as urgent comes from the ancient and pervasive emphasis on growth in spiritual maturity.[7] Today, Black activists hold the most mature and realistic US perspectives on race, and they are inviting white people to enter our racial crucible.

Using Schnarch's theory to extend conventional Christian ideas about spiritual growth, I contend that in the current climate of increasing racial awareness, many US whites have reached a point where we need to grow. First, I situate Schnarch's approach within

the larger context of psychological theory and therapy and note crucial differences between US race relations and healthy interpersonal relationships. Then I discuss three of Schnarch's core concepts—gridlock, the crucible, and self-confrontation—showing how they illuminate white attempts to transcend the historical limitations of whiteness as an identity of domination. I conclude with gratitude to the Movement for Black Lives for inviting white people to undertake this spiritual journey and demanding that we do so with integrity. While I cannot do justice here to the psychological and spiritual resonances between crucible theory and the quandary of whiteness, I hope to convey a sense of their depth and power.

## Relationship Theories and Race Relations

Much conventional wisdom about significant personal relationships—romantic, friendly, or familial—can be summarized in the word "attachment." Attachment theory identifies the need of babies to bond with their caregivers and extrapolates it to frame the human drive for connection throughout our lives.[8] Anyone familiar with the broad contours of family therapy will recognize the idea that a key dimension of mutual relating consists of the parties "validating" each other's feelings. To connect with my partner, the theory goes, I should use "I statements" to share my feelings. If I do it well, then my reasonable and well-meaning partner should affirm that what I say makes sense, and vice versa. The assumption is that we are entitled to our feelings and feelings are rooted in facts, so if we are sufficiently open, honest, and receptive, a mutually acceptable resolution will emerge and intimacy will deepen.[9] In attachment-based couples' therapy, the therapist helps each partner to understand what the other is saying, aiming to make both feel "heard." We learn to expect our loved ones to reflect our feelings back to us positively and make us feel secure.

Schnarch argues that while this "other-validated intimacy" is a lovely feature of healthy long-term relationships, it has limited rather than absolute power.[10] For one thing, partners are least able to offer other-validated intimacy when in conflict; we cannot rely on it when we most need it.[11] For another, overdependence on other-validated intimacy encourages a "reflected sense of self": we get our self-image from our partner's positive attitude rather than developing an internal sense of our worth. This can cause trouble. If we believe that the paramount expression of love is other-validation, and our self-esteem depends upon it, then when our partner does not validate us, our self-image tanks, along with our confidence in their love.[12]

Further, Schnarch identifies the time when other-validated intimacy characterizes most of our meaningful self-disclosures as part of the beginning phase of a relationship rather than its culmination.[13] For Schnarch, committed partnership is an elegant system designed to push partners to grow.[14] Imagine that you are dating someone new. Getting to know one another, you talk a lot, bonding over everything you have in common and ideas on which you agree. Next you work your way through issues on which you can easily compromise. By this natural process of elimination, you are left with issues on which you disagree. If you do not tackle them, you have nothing new to discuss. For engaging, original conversation to continue, you must develop the maturity to discuss issues around which you will not want to validate each other.

Schnarch concludes that other-validated intimacy is not the only vital form of intimacy. "Self-validated intimacy," in which partners articulate their own feelings and maintain their own emotional equilibrium while remaining positively connected to each other, is also essential to a healthy and satisfying relationship.[15] In an act of self-validated intimacy, I am emotionally intimate with my partner regardless of how they respond. By validating myself, I control my disclosure, identity, and self-worth rather than relinquishing that control. Self-validated intimacy means controlling ourselves, not each other. Our respect for one another's courage and integrity, and our delight in each other as unique individuals, grows as we witness each other's growth.[16]

For Schnarch, other-validated intimacy does occur frequently and provides reassuring connection for highly differentiated couples.[17] But it is self-validated intimacy that drives the relationship forward and fuels partners' mutual interest. Schnarch says, "Self-validated intimacy is the means to *two* ends: becoming more of a person and developing a more resilient intimate relationship."[18] Accordingly, Schnarch's "crucible neurobiological therapy" teaches clients to increase their "differentiation," or self-knowledge, growing their ability to confidently, truthfully, and respectfully assert themselves.[19] Though Schnarch works with couples, the principles apply to any relationship: parents and children, siblings, even co-workers. Today the counselling field hosts a lively debate over the benefits of differentiation-based therapy, such as Schnarch's "crucible therapy," vis-à-vis conventional attachment-based therapy.[20]

It is common to view US race relations as a family conflict. James Cone once explained to Bill Moyers, in a discussion about lynching, that his faith empowered him never to give up on white people because we are family: "[The white man is] a bad brother, but he's still your brother."[21] I contend that many difficulties arise in interracial interactions because white people approach them with attachment expectations. Instead of

honestly examining and disclosing our own whiteness, as a differentiation approach would prescribe, we demand heavy doses of other-validation. We want Black people to tell us how wonderful we are and how much they appreciate us just for showing up. We want them to reflect our whiteness positively back to us by reassuring us that they do not believe we are racist. The problems that need solving, however, are racial inequity and discrimination, and white people still are reliably (albeit unwittingly) socialized into racism. Yet when Black people direct us to these problems, we wail, "But I don't mean to be racist! I mean well!" We behave as though our intentions, rather than dismantling racial inequity, are the point. Why demand such trust without earning it? We do this because we prize other-validation, even if inauthentic, as the gold standard of relationships, and we refuse to move forward without it.

This is no mere distraction. At a deep level, whiteness as cultural identity, our sense of well-being and normalcy, depends on a "reflected sense of self."[22] White people get our identity from Black people. Schnarch observes, "In poorly differentiated families … everyone's supposed to stay in his assigned 'seat' so someone can maintain the 'self' he's established in relationship."[23] White people began establishing our "self" in the colonial era, when European elites defined whiteness in opposition to Blackness, imagining that the inferior status that we assigned to non-white people reflected our superiority. Today we are powerful not because we earned the right to lead but because we stole the labour and land—in Schnarch's terms, we "borrowed the functioning"[24]—of Black, Indigenous, and other people of colour. When non-whites claim power, that scares us because we see power as a limited commodity gained by taking. If they have some, then we must have lost it. Racial inequity is a perfect example of a crisis that arises from a "situation we've created" and can be solved only by going through, rather than around, the problem.[25]

Race relations are inherently conflictual. And, as noted, other-validated intimacy typically is not forthcoming in conflict. Whites have fooled ourselves into thinking that other-validated intimacy characterized our relationship with Blacks because historically Blacks had to acquiesce to white supremacy and flatter us in order to survive.[26] Now that we have begun to profess that all races are equal, we still want Black people to affirm our racial virtue. But since our racial virtue is aspirational at best and delusional at worst, many Black people's integrity will not allow this. The current protests signify what racial protests have always signified: Black people are refusing to continue pretending that US race relations are peaceful and equitable, and they are rightly demanding change.

No wonder the average, well-meaning white person struggles to proceed. No way will we get other-validation in this situation. And cultivating a "solid self" and engaging in self-validated intimacy will be painful, given that white history is replete with horrors we must face in doing so.[27]

In contending that differentiation theory can illuminate white people's racial stance, I proceed with caution. US race relations do not parallel the development of any healthy relationship: consenting adults pursuing a mutual romance, or a loving parent raising a child. European Americans have long fantasized that our connection with African Americans is such a nurturing association, but the opposite is true. US race relations began with whites enslaving Blacks, continued with white practices of segregation and lynching, and endure in white-crafted social institutions such as mass incarceration, health care disparities, and police and vigilante brutality. This relationship is not loving but abusive. The murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, and others expose this reality to the point where many can no longer pretend otherwise.

Part of the growing up that white people must do, individually and collectively, is to face this fact. To develop an authentic self that aligns with reality,[28] we must abandon the colossal and torturous feats of self-deception that characterize US whiteness. We must face, for example, the fact that our white slaveholding ancestors (biological or not) were generally well-meaning people and that we inherit aspects of their worldviews.[29] At times, this feels like losing ourselves. Moreover, the most respectful way to undertake this painful work is among ourselves, which can feel antithetical to how relationships usually proceed. Yet without it, we are unprepared for genuine racial intimacy.

Further, in the therapeutic context, Schnarch can generally assume that the partners are committed to improving their relationship, that each believes they stand to lose something if they fail, and that failure is an option. None of these assumptions hold for race relations. Blacks generally tend to be more motivated to improve race relations; many whites fail to see how doing so benefits us. Also, when whites avoid racial equity work, we remain unfairly advantaged while Blacks remain unfairly disadvantaged. In terms of power, our positions are profoundly unequal. Moreover, whites and Blacks coexist whether we want to or not. Common relationship wisdom says that if your partner repeatedly ignores your I-statements, or won't stop abusing, you set reasonable boundaries and move on. Black people don't have that option. Race relations confound many assumptions that can hold for mutually chosen relationships.

For all these reasons, whites aspiring to antiracism must consciously resist the temptation to think of ourselves as participating in a version of attachment-based relationship therapy with Black people, with other-validated intimacy as the goal. Many of us behave as if this is the case, refusing to move forward unless Black people affirm our good intentions. It is precisely where Schnarch's theory eschews other-validation—demanding that individuals develop self-knowledge and integrity, and emphasizing that genuine intimacy often generates profound discomfort—that his ideas map onto white US Americans' struggle to mature racially. This essay is not couples' counselling. This is a therapeutic intervention into white people's avoidance of our own whiteness.

## The White Racial Quandary as Opportunity to Grow

Now we are prepared to hold up several core elements of Schnarch's "crucible theory" as a prism to illuminate many white US Americans' current racial stance. Since Schnarch practises marital-sexual therapy, his cases involve couples working through sexual desire problems, framed as opportunities for growth. In particular, three concepts illuminate the racial moment in which many white people currently find ourselves: gridlock, the crucible, and self-confrontation. I begin with an example to illuminate white people's racial quandary. The point is not to eroticize race relations—that is another topic,[30] and for that matter, committed partnerships can be quite unromantic—but to provoke insight into white spiritual positionality by investigating basic relationship dynamics. As the Movement for Black Lives announces, the stakes are as high as ever.

### *Gridlock*

Recall our dating couple, who began their relationship by reciprocally validating everything they shared. The same may happen in their sexual relationship. Partners can enter monogamy with a repertoire of mutually acceptable sexual behaviours and build their sex life around them. When they become bored with their routines, they must face the fact that trying new things will make one or both of them uncomfortable.[31] The relationship's natural progression creates constructive pressure on partners to evolve.

They don't always move forward. Some couples put up with boring or infrequent sex, in-law trouble, misalignments in parenting philosophy, or other major difficulties for years.[32] For example, Self may wish to introduce a new sexual behaviour. If Self has been socially conditioned to believe that Self should not desire this behaviour, or to fear that Partner will disapprove of Self for suggesting it, Self may not want to reveal this desire to Partner or even admit it to Self.[33] Self faces an uncomfortable choice: Self can put up with sexual boredom (both Self's and Partner's), or Self can confront Self's reluctance to express this desire and grow the maturity required to do so. If Self and Partner refuse to choose between learning to self-validate and ending their relationship altogether, then they remain stuck at this point in the relationship's development.

When partners stay together, jointly engaging in this refusal, Schnarch calls it "gridlock."[34] Gridlock may be noisy and combative, or partners may project indifference to mask their fear of choosing between loss and growth. If they feel alienated, it is because they are "emotionally fused" that they are miserable.[35] If they were disconnected, they would not care about each other's opinions.[36] As it is, they fear that any change will destroy their connection. Their belief that the absence of other-validation around the difficult topic signifies a lack of love keeps them from exploring new possibilities for relating.

Gridlock also occurs among Christians in theological dilemmas, and translating the concept into this context can evoke the power dynamics that ideally are absent from romantic partnerships but that come into play with the issue of racial equity. Consider the Roman Catholic Church's stalemate over the issue of opening priestly ordination to women. The arguments on both sides are well-established. To break gridlock, discussion would have to shift to an honest confrontation between the desire of church leaders to maintain an all-male priesthood and the desire of Catholic women to undertake ordained ministry. Since both sides believe that their desire reflects God's will, the question is decided by the fact that men who do not want change control the decision-making power. Women cannot unilaterally force the issue; they can break gridlock only by leaving, which many are not willing to do. The two sides coexist in the church, refusing to cede their mutual home.

Racial inequity presents a parallel dilemma. Blacks and whites coexist in the US, both claiming it as home, our alienation betraying our centuries-old "emotional fusion." Schnarch's "classic signs of emotional gridlock," quoted here in full, could have been written to describe racial impasse:

- Constant, repetitive arguments.
- You can't agree to disagree about the issue.
- Increased communication provides no solution, and often makes things worse.
- You feel like you have no room for compromise or negotiation because your integrity is on the line.
- Apologies or "repair attempts" are unsuccessful.

- You and your partner frequently have hurt feelings.
- You feel alienated and cut off from each other.[37]

One of Schnarch's principles is that both committed partners have the power unilaterally to change the balance of the relationship, because by choosing to grow, each can force the other to choose between growing and losing the relationship.[38] Like women and men in the church, however, Blacks and whites do not share power equitably. (Indeed, the fact that white people have excessive power is part of the problem.) Black people cannot force white people to grow; they can only invite us. We have always had the option to dismiss Black suffering and can continue to do so with no obvious cost to ourselves. The Movement for Black Lives is calling us to grow even though the situation cannot pressure us to do so. For white people, therefore, developing racial maturity may require greater personal resolve than successfully navigating a committed partnership.[39]

Whites realize that our approach to racial inequity requires a massive overhaul, yet we fear growth. Black activists are refusing to baby us and demanding that we grow ourselves up. Can we acknowledge the choice we face? Will we stop insisting on other-validated racial intimacy and shift to self-validated racial intimacy by honestly confronting what whiteness means to this country and to us personally? Can we muster the integrity to bring our actions in line with our professed hope for racial equity?

Indulging our uncertainty over how to proceed, white people remain in a state of self-authorized gridlock. Given our history, this is hardly surprising. Schnarch's wry observation about outsized expectations for other-validated partner intimacy also fits racism: "If you're well-adjusted to ill-fitting beliefs that permeate society, you're going to have trouble."[40] White people have reached a point at which we must grow if we want our relationship with Black people—and ourselves—to move forward. To maintain our self-respect, we must enter the crucible and confront our limitations.

### *The Crucible*

For Schnarch, the only way through gridlock is for one or both partners to seize the opportunity to enter the crucible. This is the dynamic period of self-reflection in which they confront their fears and limitations and decide to behave differently. Introducing "the concept of the sexual crucible," Schnarch notes, "A crucible is a resilient vessel in which metamorphic processes occur; a secondary meaning refers to Christ's crucifixion. Both apply to the therapeutic crucible, recognizing that marital conflict is often the crossroad of personal development."[41] Schnarch explains, "Marriage is the procrustean bed in which we can develop and enhance our psychological and ethical integrity. It can be the cradle of adult development."[42] In the crucible, we "settle down and 'take the hit',"[43] pushing through our embarrassment and discomfort and accepting our need to change.

Recall our sexually stalled-out couple. When Self realizes that Self needs to grow, Self may respond fearfully by attacking Partner, giving in to Partner, or fleeing from Partner; or Self may calm down and grow while staying connected to Partner.[44] By taking Self through the crucible, the latter route can lead to "self-validated intimacy." After working through various fears and insecurities, Self informs Partner of Self's desire to introduce a new sexual behaviour and stands by Self's right to propose it regardless of Partner's response. Now Partner must choose between agreeing and risking the possibility that Self may choose to leave the relationship to maintain Self's integrity.

This illuminates a difference observed earlier between relationships and race relations: in an equitable partnership, only one partner has to enter the crucible to break gridlock and open up new options. This is because, when Self grows and announces their new stance to Partner, the options available to Partner change: Partner can no longer choose to do nothing and keep things as they were.[45] If the issue is important enough, Self may require Partner to choose between losing the relationship altogether and entering their own "crucible," where they must calm their own fears and grow to meet Self's new maturity with their own integrity.[46] But in an inequitable relationship, as we saw with the example of the church, the less powerful partner can make their desire known but cannot compel the more powerful partner to choose between loss and growth. The more powerful partner can perpetuate gridlock indefinitely. Likewise, Black people can make it difficult for white people to ignore the fact that change is needed, but they cannot compel us to cooperate.

Happily, we can still proceed. For Schnarch, it is possible to enter the crucible by choice, even when the relationship does not pressure you to do so. If you want to grow, you can take the opportunity to construct your own "crucible of self-confrontation":

> Constructing your crucible involves extracting your unresolved personal issues embedded in your gridlocked situation and confronting them as an act of integrity. You do this unilaterally, without counting on your partner to do likewise, and without getting lost in what he is or isn't doing. … You focus on yourself instead of 'working on your relationship' or trying to change your partner. You stop trying to make your partner listen, validate, or accept you; you listen to yourself. It's not easy,

> but this act of integrity is possible when you let the best in you run the show.[47]

Well-meaning white people are realizing that we need to change. To evade our racial crucible is to remain willfully in self-authorized gridlock. It's time to grow ourselves up.

### *Self-Confrontation*

In Schnarch's words, the crucible is where we engage in "self-confrontation," honestly facing our fears, failures, and limitations—our "unresolved personal issues"—and "holding onto ourselves" as we decide to do things differently.[48] In our example, Self self-confronts to cultivate a more mature sexual self and the courage to communicate it to Partner. This can open up new possibilities for relating; the relationship may gain a path forward where previously none seemed to exist.[49]

At this moment in US history, thanks to Black people's efforts, many white people are becoming aware of our need to be white differently. But Black people do not have the power to compel us to choose between loss and growth, and other than attending protests and donating money, many of us are not sure what to do. We should enter our racial crucible and begin to confront ourselves.

There are many possible starting points. We can research our white ancestors and family histories. We can investigate our racial privileges. We can interrogate our racist thoughts and beliefs. We can read, watch shows and movies, reflect, and talk with other white people as we process the shame and disappointment that inevitably accompany realizing the extent to which whiteness means domination. Weaning ourselves off the reflected sense of self that comes from people-of-colour validation, we can use our social power to transform the institutions to which we already belong: our workplaces, professional organizations, churches, schools, and community organizations.[50]

While uncomfortable and intimidating—we may fear that endless guilt will attend an honest reckoning with our whiteness—this work is necessary if we want to build relationships with people of colour. It may encourage us to think of it as a gift to them, lessening their burden of dealing with our unexamined whiteness. But we should not expect them to thank us, nor depend on their approval to assure us that the work is worthwhile. We do this work because integrity demands it. The confidence that comes from doing the right thing builds our self-respect and our readiness to collaborate.

If growth, integrity, and self-respect are healthy and productive, then why don't more white people self-confront with regard to our whiteness? Schnarch notes that we can always avoid self-confrontation, and often do, even in intimate relationships. And for many white people, our relationship with our partner means more to us than our relationship with Black people. The cost of avoiding our racial crucible is hidden from us.[51] White people collectively have never had a good relationship with Black people, so we don't know what we are missing. Racial tension is so normalized in our society that we have no idea what it would be like if it were gone.[52]

Those afraid that entering the crucible will mean endlessly reliving gruesome aspects of the past may be relieved to know that Schnarch's approach anchors in the present. Examining the past can be useful; dwelling on it is unnecessary. Far from being defined by it, we "resolve the past in the present" by responding to current dilemmas in constructive ways that change who we are and how we see ourselves.[53] I become the person I want to be by growing myself up and acting like that person, not by endlessly lamenting that I am not that person yet. One of Schnarch's clients grasped the difference: "Doc, I finally got it. You don't *think* your way to a new way of living. You *live* your way to a new way of thinking."[54] Differentiation is a lifelong process, and perhaps most hopefully, our work benefits our children: "Families gain or lose differentiation over generations according to the successful struggles of their members to develop."[55]

While self-confrontation may devolve into armchair activism, done rigorously it can correct our views and push us to act. For example, perhaps we have failed to advocate for financial reparations for slavery because we know that no amount of money could adequately compensate Black people for this crime, and we assume that reparations are about punishing white people and placating Black people. Yet if we face the past, the present, and our own insecurities, we come to see that allocating resources to systematically deprived communities is not about guilt. Rather, it is about growing up enough to admit "that *we* would not like to live the way we compel [Black people] to live."[56] Once we grasp this injustice and our participation in it, we may be moved to work with Black people to create a more equitable society for everyone, like the Georgetown University students who recently voted to pay a fee to fund reparations for descendants of 272 people sold by the Jesuits in 1838 to keep the college solvent.[57] This is about being the people we want to become, the people we mistakenly believed we already were. It is about creating the future in which we want all our children to live.

## Conclusion

The activists driving the Movement for Black Lives are engaging in powerful acts of self-validated intimacy.[58] They are done reflecting back to white people our distorted picture of ourselves as thoroughly wonderful, compassionate folks who are doing the best that could possibly be expected of us. They had to cater to our fragile egos to survive slavery, they had to do it to survive segregation and lynching, and they have to do it to survive the "colour-blind" United States of today. Movement for Black Lives activists insist that Black people have a right to thrive collectively, as a matter of course, not only as scattered individuals who beat the odds. Have we finally reached a point in US race relations where Black people can challenge white people to do better and have a fighting chance of being heard and heeded, rather than killed?

White people who believe that relationship health always manifests in other-validated intimacy may refuse to listen. We have a long tradition of declining to enter our racial crucible. But if Schnarch is correct, the purpose of relationships is not to make us comfortable but to make us grow. In fact, he argues that "sin isn't about unconfined desire—it's our refusal to desire and grow, our refusal to believe in ourselves, and our willingness to live below our potential."[59] Racial self-confrontation can push us beyond our sinfully inadequate ways of relating to Black people and to our own whiteness.

No reasonable person today questions whether Black people who resisted enslavement were right to do so. The fact that a few fought violence with violence does not mean that the cause of freedom was wrong. Likewise, no reasonable person today disputes that those who marched against segregation and lynching during the mid-20th century were right. White people who are ashamed that our ancestors were on the wrong side of history can begin to "resolve the past in the present" by doing the right thing now. Indeed, many of us would like to believe that we would have been among the very few whites who fought for Black freedom during previous eras. To make this true, we must accept the spiritual invitation of the Movement for Black Lives to enter the racial crucible, confront ourselves, grow ourselves up, and join the work for racial justice. Heeding the call, we may attempt "to rewrite the family's legacy."[60]

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1 Alicia Garza, speech at the University of San Diego, February 2015.

2 George Yancy, "Guidelines for Whites Teaching About Whiteness," in Stephen D. Brookfield and Associates, *Teaching Race: How to Help Students Unmask and Challenge Racism*, 19–41 (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2019), at 24.

3 Robin DiAngelo, *White Fragility: Why It's So Hard for White People to Talk about Racism* (Boston: Beacon, 2018).

4 George Yancy, *Look, a White! Philosophical Essays on Whiteness* (Philadelphia: Temple, 2012), ch. 6; George Yancy, "Introduction: Un-Sutured," in *White Self-Criticality Beyond Anti-Racism: How Does It Feel to Be a White Problem?* ed. George Yancy, xi–xxvii (Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2015).

5 David Schnarch is a therapist and researcher whose first book is clinical: *Constructing the Sexual Crucible: An Integration of Sexual and Marital Therapy* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1991). This essay draws primarily on two subsequent books in which Schnarch translates his findings into reasonably accessible prose for psychologists and laypersons: *Passionate Marriage: Keeping Love & Intimacy Alive in Committed Relationships* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1997/2009) and *Intimacy & Desire: Awaken the Passion in Your Relationship,* 2nd ed. (Evergreen, CO: Sterling, 2009).

6 Shannon Sullivan, *Good White People: The Problem with Middle-Class White Anti-Racism* (Albany, NY: SUNY, 2014), 12.

7 Schnarch's "sexual crucible" is rich with spiritual implications. Schnarch spends relatively little time discussing these, yet they are a consistent theme, particularly in his earlier work. *Constructing the Sexual Crucible* begins with a chapter entitled "Leaving the Promised Land" and ends with "Sexuality and Spirituality," including discussion of Christian attitudes. The final chapter of *Passionate Marriage*, "Sex, Love, and Death," invokes the religious concept of self-transcendence.

8 John Bowlby pioneered attachment theory in the late 1900s; it informs many therapeutic approaches.

9 Schnarch deems this "idealized" intimacy-development plan unrealistic (*Passionate Marriage*, 101–103).

10 Schnarch, *Passionate Marriage*, 108–11.

11 Ibid., 109.

12 See ibid., 115.

13 This paragraph draws on Schnarch's discussion in ibid., 116–19. Schnarch describes the rising and setting of one couple's "emotional honeymoon" in ibid., 103–105.

14 See ibid., 44.

15 Schnarch explains how this view is "fundamentally at odds" with dominant concepts of intimacy; for example, see ibid., 112. Schnarch describes how shifting from other- to self-validated intimacy can resolve gridlock in *Intimacy & Desire*, 120–21, and *Passionate Marriage*, ch. 4.

16 Integrity is a key theme for Schnarch, and his definition maps well onto the situation of whites working toward racial maturity: "Integrity is … living according to your own values and beliefs in the face of opposition. It is also the ability to change your values, beliefs, and behavior when your well-considered judgment or concern for others dictates it" (*Passionate Marriage*, 47–48).

17 Ibid., 109.

18 Ibid., 119.

19 "Differentiation is your ability to maintain your sense of self when you are emotionally and/or physically close to others—especially as they become increasingly important to you. … Differentiation is the ability to stay in connection without being consumed by the other person" (ibid., 56). Differentiation is not synonymous with individualism or independence (ibid., 67). Schnarch identifies four distinct elements of differentiation (*Intimacy & Desire*, 72).

20 Schnarch, *Intimacy & Desire*, 378.

21 Bill Moyers Journal, "James Cone on the Cross and the Lynching Tree," November 23, 2007, https://billmoyers.com/content/james-cone-on-the-cross-and-the-lynching-tree. Accessed August 27, 2020.

22 "When we have little differentiation, our identity is constructed out of what's called a *reflected sense of self*. We need continual contact, validation, and consensus (or disagreement) from others. This leaves us unable to maintain a clear sense of who we are in shifting or uncertain circumstances. … Because our identity depends on the relationship, we may demand that our partner doesn't change so that our identity won't either" (Schnarch, *Passionate Marriage*, 59).

23 Ibid., 60.

24 Schnarch explains borrowed functioning in ibid., 66–67, and *Intimacy & Desire*, 44–46.

25 Schnarch, *Passionate Marriage*, 51.

26 W. E. B. Du Bois is best known for articulating the phenomenon of "double consciousness" in *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York: Penguin, 1996; originally published by A. C. McClurg & Company, 1903).

27 "Once we realize that intimacy is not always soothing and often makes us feel insecure, it is clear why we back away from it" (Schnarch, *Passionate Marriage*, 39). On the "solid self," see also ibid., 117, and *Intimacy & Desire*, 72.

28 This is Schnarch's first task of differentiation. See especially *Intimacy & Desire*, 72.

29 Sullivan, *Good White People*, 70–72.

30 See Bryan N. Massingale, "The Erotic Life of Anti-Blackness," in Vincent W. Lloyd and Andrew Prevot, eds, *Anti-Blackness and Christian Ethics*, 173–94 (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2017).

31 See Schnarch, *Passionate Marriage*, 151.

32 Schnarch calls these "integrity issues" (ibid., 47). I offer the basic example that follows to illustrate key concepts in Schnarch's theory; his portraits of couples are more complex.

33 Ibid., 151.

34 Schnarch discusses gridlock in *Passionate Marriage*, ch. 4, and *Intimacy & Desire*, ch. 4 and 5.

35 Schnarch, *Passionate Marriage*, 55.

36 Ibid., 58.

37 Schnarch, *Intimacy & Desire*, 81.

38 Schnarch, *Passionate Marriage*, 47.

39 "Meaningful endurance" is another of the tasks of differentiation. Schnarch, *Intimacy & Desire,* 72.

40 Schnarch, *Passionate Marriage*, 42.

41 Schnarch, *Constructing the Sexual Crucible*, xv–xvi.

42 Schnarch, *Passionate Marriage*, 47.

43 Ibid., 368.

44 Ibid., 118–19.

45 Ibid., 121–24.

46 Ibid., 47.

47 Ibid., 334.

48 Ibid., ch. 12.

49 "If you stop being so reactive, situations often move on in ways you don't anticipate." Ibid., 296.

50 Resources abound. One place to start is Layla F. Saad, *me and white supremacy: Combat Racism, Change the World, and Become a Good Ancestor* (Naperville, IL: Sourcebooks, 2020).

51 Avoidance has a cost. As Schnarch tells one resistant client, "You don't have to confront yourself here, but you don't have infinite choices." Schnarch, *Intimacy & Desire*, 228.

52 This applies to couples also; Schnarch assigns exercises to surface and release tension between partners. See *Passionate Marriage*, ch. 6, and *Intimacy & Desire*, 278–85.

53 See *Passionate Marriage*, 42–43, 318.

54 Ibid., 32.

55 Ibid., 63.

56 James Baldwin, "The White Problem," in Randall Kenan, ed., *The Cross of Redemption: Uncollected Writings*, 88–97 (New York: Vintage, 2010), at 95.

57 Adeel Hassan, "Georgetown Students Agree to Create Reparations Fund," *The New York Times*, April 12, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/04/12/us/georgetown-reparations.html. Accessed August 31, 2020. Georgetown's administration decided instead to raise money via donations; see Rachel Swarns, "Is Georgetown's $400,000-a-Year Plan to Aid Slave Descendants Enough?" *The New York Times*, October 30, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/10/30/us/georgetown-slavery-reparations.html. Accessed August 31, 2020.

58 "When you've achieved a high level of differentiation … you're more capable of expressing who you are in the face of neutral or even negative responses from your partner" (Schnarch, *Passionate Marriage*, 107).

59 Ibid., 400, drawing on the Jesuit Sebastian Moore. This definition aligns with feminist and queer theological critiques of the Christian devaluation of human sexuality, such as Patrick Cheng's discussion in *From Sin to Amazing Grace: Discovering the Queer Christ* (New York: Seabury, 2012).

60 Schnarch, *Passionate Marriage*, 69.

# Catholics in 2020

## The Test of Our Times

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### Introduction

This view of Catholics in 2020 was crafted for discussion by the San Francisco Dignity Chapter and shared on the morning after the death of Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsberg. Thus, its focus is on what LGBTIQA+ Catholics can do as one segment of the Catholic community.

I have two basic assumptions that make my views easier to understand. First, I assume that LGBTIQA+ Catholics are Catholics. Whatever I write about LGBTIQA+ Catholics, I mean about Catholics in general. We are not some subspecies of Catholics, some also-ran, wanna-be Catholics: we are the real McCoy, whether the institutional church likes us or not. We are not queer Presbyterians, queer Jews, or other equally wonderful people of faith. Rather, we choose to be Catholic, and by our being Catholic we embody what Catholic is. So when I refer to 'Catholics in 2020' I mean the whole community as focused through us. Second, 'The Test of Our Times' is what Catholics have faced over the millennia. Psalm 137:4 asks, "How shall we sing God's song in a strange land?" What a strange land we are living in these days. LGBTIQA+ efforts are one kind of divine song.

How do we live the values of love and justice when Earth itself is in serious peril, when an infectious disease runs rampant with no global solution in sight, according to scientists? How do we find our way in a growing economic crisis? YELP reported recently that 60% of the businesses that closed during the pandemic are closed for good—that deepens the gap between those with money invested and those without this month's rent. How do we act as people of faith and integrity when racism and white supremacy are given encouragement at the highest levels of government? In the face of these challenges and others, I look to and at queer Catholics, not as the saviors of the world, but as responsible citizens teaming up with others to "make all things new" (Rev. 21:5). I analyze the situation of Catholics in 2020 by looking first at local and national work. Then I turn to international work and even intergalactic work—a bit tongue in cheek—to imagine the future.

I do not define 'Catholic' as necessarily related to the church. The institutional Roman Catholic Church has proved itself time and again incapable of carrying the freight of the Gospel in the 21st century. I prefer to focus on people as church both to highlight what LGBTIQA+ folks are doing as one subset of that big umbrella community called 'Catholic' and to underscore the collective responsibility to do more.

I spoke at Dignity's 50th anniversary convention in Chicago in the summer of 2019.[1] I recently reread that lecture in order to see what has happened in a year. It reads like something from another era, maybe right after the Council of Trent or the Council of Chalcedon! In 12 short months, things have changed 180 degrees.

Remember the good old days when Catholics got together in groups for liturgy and engaged in social justice projects—what I call sacrament and solidarity? Remember when we held socials and dinners, went to movies? Recall the times when people travelled to one place or another to share a meal, engage in discussion, or attend a conference? The modes have changed—conferences come to us—but Catholics are still finding reliable ways to worship and new expressions of faith in a time of pandemic.

### Local Efforts

The pandemic changed everything, beginning at home. Many people are still at home most of the time. But like people of other religious stripes, Catholics have gone to great lengths to be religious in hard times.

Zoom masses are common and come in many styles. Some parishes put their priest on display alone or with an acolyte to consecrate what they think only a priest can consecrate. By contrast, many Dignity groups, like many women-church groups and other base eucharistic communities, worship in ways that reflect a community-centred, inclusive, welcoming theology without losing any of the power of the Eucharist or of the community gathering. They include sharing bread and wine, each participant with their own at home. How we worship reflects our theology, so the range of practices is wide. Not all are satisfactory to

anyone, but the very fact of their variety attests to the importance of being open to many choices.

One such group is the New York City–based "Come to the Table" community, ably animated by Patricia Russell.[2] It started as a small Catholic group connected to New York Dignity. It advertises as follows: "Welcome to Come to the Table: Catholic Worship for All. We are drawn now into community where we believe that Jesus is present in the 'breaking of the bread'—where no one is outcast and no one is without value and no one is excluded from the feast. God is found in the ordinary and mundane. Join us for our celebration of the Eucharist as we rejoice in our lives as proud Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and Intersex persons and our friends." The LGBT Center in New York City where this little group used to meet is closed, but on Zoom, "Come to the Table" averages 40 to 50 people, more than double or triple what they used to have in person, for lively, lovely liturgies. These people are meeting the test of our times.

Dignity members all over the country are ministering to people and keeping the flames of community burning. Dignity DC has a long list of its offerings, from the Rosary to the Eucharist, from social hours to faith-sharing groups, from ways to reach out to those who might be lonely to offering funding to those in need. These people have not skipped a pastoral beat all year. They are meeting the test of our times online and in prayer.

Many queer Catholics were early adopters of technology and bring their technical skills and talents to bear for the common good. These practices allow groups to de-emphasize—some would say to delete or at least reimagine—the role of clerics, who are not seen as necessary to liturgy, including Eucharist. The medium of Zoom emphasizes instead the centrality of the community gathered. Everyone was welcome in these church communities before the pandemic, and everyone is even more welcome now.

LGBTIQA+ Catholics have had to be theologically astute over the years—especially women-identified people—to be able to be 'church' at all. So these groups are not just livestreaming the confection of the sacred mysteries as if the mass were a play or an opera. Despite tech glitches or occasional awkwardness, these groups seek to engage and connect people, to pray together in thanksgiving and in sorrow, to be together across the miles. LGBTIQA+ Catholics have learned to do so through the HIV/AIDS pandemic and through the Vatican's many challenges and affronts. Some people in these groups are among those who have been fired from Catholic institutions because of their same-sex marriages, for example. Being fearless and calling out injustice are, sad to say, learned behaviours in these groups.

Notably, many women's religious communities, like queer Catholic groups, have moved perforce to handling their own wakes and burial services. In some religious communities in 2020, the Easter Triduum was conducted without benefit of clergy. For example, one group, following a Zoom prayer service, substituted a real dinner for the Holy Thursday Eucharist. They invited their sisters to what they imagined might have been akin to the first Eucharistic experience, namely, enjoying a meal together.

So COVID-19 has given many blessings as well as curses. It is doubtful that these groups will revert to old ways; inviting a male ordained priest to preside at the Eucharist may well be a thing of the past as women take on increased sacramental responsibility. This is especially true in some motherhouses, where it is dangerous for everyone's health to admit more people, even for mass. Thus, a Eucharist without a priest remains a Eucharist without a priest, as the late theologian Tad Guzie would say, in the end, a Eucharist.

These new ways of being church are not everyone's first choice. But especially for people who are immuno-compromised and/or elderly, and those who really cannot or should not go out, they are wonderful options. Just as ramps that serve people with mobility challenges are helpful to anyone rolling a suitcase, so, too, having an online way to participate in worship is good for everyone.

Many parishes are finding that even with reduced capacity and reservations, many people are not coming to church. A recent study published in *America* magazine reports that mass attendance is spotty at best. With the pandemic, numbers are even lower:

> Mass attendance before the pandemic, when 13 percent of Catholics said they attended Mass weekly, another 20 percent attended at least once a month, and 67 percent attended no more than a few times a year. Sixty-three percent of young adult Catholics who used to attend Mass weekly said they now watch Mass on television or online "somewhat" or "very often," as did 36 percent of those who attended Mass at least once a month before the pandemic.[3]

The report continues to note:

> The respondents saying that they plan to attend Mass less often in the future cut across all categories of prior attendance. Of the weekly attenders, 31 percent said they will be attending Mass less often when things return to normal, compared with 42 percent of monthly attenders and 35 percent of those who used to attend a few times a year or less often.[4]

Do the math. Those are pretty paltry numbers of people planning to be at church on the parish model. Our ways of worshipping and engaging in social change work are more important than we realize, signalling a new moment in American, if not global, Catholicism.

I predicted this change early on in an article in the *National Catholic Reporter*, "Catholic Progress *in Extremis*."[5] One NCR columnist wrote that he was "horrified" by my analysis, accusing me of taking advantage of a bad situation to advance a theo-political agenda that favours inclusion.[6] In fact, he got it backwards: these groups are responding to the test of our times by adding to, not subtracting from, the ways of being Catholic. The events of 2020 have simply proved me right.

Things will not ever be the way they were before. Returning to 'normal' is pie in the sky. Lots of new thinking and new practices are necessary in the whole community when it comes to the future of Catholic life, especially letting many options for worship and sacrament co-exist. For example, how do we enlist young people who work for justice, like the ones who work in a local parish food pantry? They are living their faith with each bag of groceries they assemble for those with food needs. Thanking them for being active, whether they go to mass or not, is a way of including them in the fold. 'Catholic' looks many ways, too.

## National Efforts

LGBTIQA+ groups and their colleagues are part of larger movements for justice beyond LGBTIQA+ issues. At the national level, DignityUSA is deeply involved in meeting the test of our times when many church officials are doing the opposite. Queer Catholics are stepping up as religious leaders.

Timothy Cardinal Dolan's phone call with President Donald Trump, praising him for his leadership and then continuing the thought on a Fox News interview, was just the start. Several priests have made clear that voting for the 2020 Democratic presidential ticket meant voting against life. It is *déjà vu* of the 1984 presidential election, when John Cardinal O'Connor spoke against Geraldine Ferraro and Walter Mondale for the same reason. The problem is that some people take these clerics seriously, and progressive candidates lose elections by small margins, some of them created by these kinds of clerical intrusions.

Dignity, along with other member groups of the Women-Church Convergence, launched "An Open Letter to Catholic Voters and All Voters for Justice in the United States from Women Church Convergence, July 2020."[7] It is simple: The Convergence asks everyone to vote their conscience (not what clerics tell them to do); vote for an inclusive social justice agenda without prioritizing any one issue, especially abortion, as the bishops would have it; and encourage others to vote. While various member groups of Women-Church Convergence focus on particular issues, the Convergence affirms that the bishops are welcome to vote and speak for themselves, but they do not speak for other Catholics, as several have tried to do. After all, the Roman Catholic Church is a non-profit organization, not a political action committee or even a lobby group, so endorsing candidates is dicey business and probably illegal.

Dignity executive director Marianne Duddy-Burke and I (on behalf of the Women's Alliance for Theology, Ethics and Ritual, WATER) worked with former US ambassador to the Vatican Miguel Diaz and his Loyola University colleague, professor of Moral Theology Hille Haker, in writing and circulating a critical response to a report by the Commission on Unalienable Rights.[8] That group called for religious freedom to stand as the priority right in the world, shaping US foreign policy accordingly and subordinating all other rights to it.

The Commission is led by another former US ambassador to the Vatican, Mary Ann Glendon, who anchored the Vatican's anti-woman delegation at the UN Beijing meeting 25 years ago. The Commission operates under the direction of Secretary of State Mike Pompeo. The issues are subtle and complicated, but, in sum, if religious freedom trumps all other human rights, then anti-LGBTIQ actions and anti-woman actions are justified. This is a serious matter for Catholics to ponder, since its implications are wide ranging over moral and ethical issues in the public forum.

Leadership by LGBTIQA+ people needs to be equally encompassing. We are not single-issue people; a fulsome reading of the gospels does not admit of such narrowness. We stand in the vanguard of those who understand the complex, messy ways in which an interstructured analysis works. As one theologian colleague wrote to me recently, "You feminist theologians were talking about 'kyriarchy' years ago, and what we now know it means is that all forms of oppression are interstructured." I replied, "Yes, my friend, we were and we did see how the pieces of oppression fit together. Now we know that some immigrant women are allegedly given hysterectomies against their knowledge and will because they are poor, young, brown, and on the road. This is a deep concern for us."

LGBTIQA+ Catholics and allies are doing anti-racism work and opposing white supremacy, learning how primarily white and white-run organizations need to change to reflect the richness of contemporary diversity. Reparations for the problems white people

have caused people of colour over generations tops these organizations' agendas. Many Catholics who are committed to social justice engage as people with relative privilege. Spending some of that privilege to change economic systems that oppress animates part of the work. Likewise, those who are cisgender can support, learn from, and be led by trans people, especially trans women of colour. There is no better place to start all of this new work than in groups like Dignity, which have proved themselves trustworthy over time.

At the international and, yes, even intergalactic levels, there is work afoot. This analysis is not focused primarily on what the institutional church is doing. Nevertheless, it was heartening to learn that Pope Francis met with a group of Italian parents of LGBTIQA+ people and was quoted as saying of their children, "The Church does not exclude them … It loves your children as they are, because they are children of God."[9] These are lovely, consoling words for devout parents to hear. However, the institutional church still lacks the deeds that one day might make these papal words mean something. Meanwhile, in greener pastures, there is work being done.

A German synod explored LGBTIQA+ issues in a favourable light.[10] Yet even if such documents are adopted, synods in a top-down church do not have the final word on anything. Well-intended Catholics from the Amazon learned this the hard way at their synod. Their requests for married priests and women deacons in their region came to naught when Pope Francis had the final say.

It is important to praise the good work some people are doing, like the conversation between the Global Network of Rainbow Catholics group in Mexico and three clerics who acknowledged the importance of that group's work. Nonetheless, exceptions prove the rule, and the institutional Roman Catholic Church remains quite closed and inflexible or, at best, not supportive of any deviance from its rules.

The Theological and Spirituality committees of the Global Network of Rainbow Catholics consist of international colleagues engaged in new ways of being church. They are rooted in LGBTIQA+ experience but include people of all backgrounds. The Theological group (of which I am a member) has put out a call for liturgies and rituals of same-sex unions, marriages, and the like involving Catholic people. A collection of these celebrations will be published online so it will be easy to see how many and varied are Catholic sacramental expressions. These liturgies and rituals will be available in many languages and from many contexts.

In a similar way, the Spirituality group is gathering prayers and reflections from Catholics around the world that will also be published and used for worship and devotion. These are wonderful examples of our common efforts as global Catholics to create, chronicle, and socialize resources for future generations.

Another notable advance is the global attention now paid to specific places where Catholic officials are harming LGBTIQA+ people. The latest example is Poland, where the bishops have issued a strong and outmoded statement against so-called gender ideology and radical feminism, praising gender complementarity and calling for annulments of marriages in which people have transitioned.[11] The Polish LGBTIQA+ Catholic group Faith and Rainbow Foundation has led the way to counter the bishops' calls for reparative therapies, for current teaching on LGBTIQA+ people to be considered 'infallible,' and other egregious nonsense. Because of groups like GNRC, which Dignity helped to create, a coordinated global response is possible that simply did not previously exist.

A third advance in global LGBTIQA+ work is the marked increase in leadership by women-identified people, young people, and people of colour. Numbers are nowhere near parity, but the early patterns of white cis male leaders are being questioned and changed. This is not trivial in a religious tradition that has patriarchy baked into it. Such groups are growing more diverse in an effort not to replicate the old ways. Even though there is not agreement on many points and strategies within and among progressive groups, many groups work together to be church in new ways even as some simultaneously try to transform the old structures.

On the intergalactic front, I marvel as NASA lays out its new agenda to land a woman on the moon, and to explore Mars and maybe Venus, where suspicious signs of life were detected of late. Yet, looking ahead, what visionary Catholic work is ongoing? My crystal ball is broken, and with COVID, it is hard to get it fixed. Still, I envision that given how flexible, resourceful, forgiving, and creative LGBTIQA+ Catholics have needed to be to call themselves Catholics in the face of bald opposition like that of the Polish prelates, such groups stand in a strong position moving forward.

These groups know and admit their mistakes made in strategies for welcome and inclusion, including the white supremacy and racism that have plagued the movements. This self-critical reflexive practice helps to assure that future generations will not make the same errors. At the same time, they create new forms of church, new ways to be church without blueprints or maps. Their imaginative work requires enormous

patience and serious organizing, but it works, as the deep changes in many Catholic people's views on same-sex love and marriage attest.

## Conclusion

There is general Catholic consensus that Creation is one, and that Earth is a living organism depending on human care and cooperation. There is reason to suggest that the rest of the galaxy may be similar. The saving grace is that humans are not in complete control, leading to the possibility that all was created in goodness, by goodness, for goodness. Hopefully, that same goodness will sustain more than a galaxy if we embrace the test of our times.

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# Book Review

# An Ongoing Quest

Michael Welker, ed. *Quests for Freedom: Biblical, Historical, Contemporary*, 2nd ed. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2019, xv+446 pp.

This book is the fruit of an international dialogue about concepts of freedom. The dialogue took place in Düsseldorf, Berlin, and Heidelberg over several years and involved mostly biblical scholars and theologians from Germany, Finland, Scotland, the US, South Africa, the Czech Republic, and Hong Kong. The 21 essays in this book are grouped under five headings: freedom and domination, self-determination and concepts of freedom, freedom as given and shaped by God, freedom as ethos of belonging, and the dialectics of freedom and modernity. In her introduction to the first part, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza argues that discussions of freedom need to be grounded in references to historical and contemporary contexts of slavery and servitude. Ron Soodalter's opening chapter states that roughly 27 million people are enslaved worldwide and that in the United States, the majority are located in agricultural slavery, sexual exploitation, and domestic servitude. With this backdrop, the rest of the essays examine how freedom is understood in biblical and ancient traditions, in theology, in church teachings, and in contemporary discussions.

Several chapters discuss freedom in the Hebrew Bible, portraying God as a source of human freedom. Patrick Miller observes that while freedom and liberation are multifaceted phenomena in Scripture, the tradition of the Exodus functions as a kind of lens through which freedom is perceived and discussed. A number of essays are devoted to Paul's complex notion of Christian freedom. Schüssler Fiorenza criticizes idealistic readings that take Paul's metaphors and concepts at face value. She critically questions how Paul's arguments affected the status of slave wo/men in the early church. Others acknowledge the limitations of Paul's circumstances and practical judgments but prefer to lift up his understanding of freedom in Christ and how to realize it through resistance to bondage and praxis.

Cyril Hovorum traces how freedom was understood by Eastern theologians like the Cappadocians as freedom to choose, but also as an inner freedom from passions and sin. The latter is a gift of both Christ and the Spirit—achieved through cultivating the virtues. Hovorum does not mention Gregory of Nyssa's opposition to slavery. Friederike Nüssel notes that Christian freedom was a major topic for Martin Luther but was not mentioned much by Evangelical theologians through the 16th and 17th centuries. He observes that the Enlightenment triggered a reflection process that changed this theological and discursive absence and then examines how freedom is understood in the theologies of Karl Barth and Wolfhart Pannenberg. Jindřich Halama provides a thought-provoking study of how freedom was viewed and practised in the Czech Reformation. Francis Schüssler Fiorenza examines how the notion of universal human rights emerged at the United Nations and in Roman Catholic social thought as a response to atrocities during World War II. Some of these rights were violated by the Bush administration's response to 9/11. Michael Welker concludes the book with an essay on the Holy Spirit and human freedom that shows a developing ethos of biblical law rooted in love, hope, and faith.

This important and timely collection of essays parallels different notions of freedom at the heart of many conflicts in civil societies today. The Black Lives Matter movement is a quest for freedom from systemic racism. Conversely, Donald Trump is an icon of freedom to some white nationalists, supremacists, and elites. In Canada, a somewhat similar conflict simmers between resurgent Indigenous communities and racialized minorities on one hand, and defenders of the social status quo on the other. These essays provide important resources for academics, clergy, students, and activists who seek to engage in debates around these conflicts from a Christian perspective. Jews and Christians inherit the Exodus as an ongoing project with universal horizons. In the Exodus traditions, freedom is realized initially through liberation from oppression and then through the creation of a community characterized by the rule of law, justice, and mercy. As Larry Hurtado argues, the characteristic New Testament understanding that freedom is exercised in love for others challenges the possessive individualism of Western societies and autocratic dictatorships.

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*Critical Theology: Engaging Church, Culture, and Society* is published quarterly by Novalis © Novalis 2020.





**Subscriptions:** Canada: $16 • International: $33 (postage and taxes included).
**To order:** Periodicals Dept., Novalis, 1 Eglinton Avenue East, Suite 800, Toronto, ON M4P 3A1

Tel: 1-800-387-7164 Fax: 1-800-204-4140

ISSN: 2562-0347

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Printed in Canada