

Chapter 4: Reproductive Injustice as Social Sin: Mapping Sin Discourse into Debates about Fertility Decisions

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Narrative¹

In the early 1990's I taught high school in New York City, where I met Miriam during one summer school session.² She needed summer school to finish her high school graduation requirements after missing a semester to have a baby. Miriam juggled school, work, and child-care needs. She dealt with conflicting familial, societal, and ecclesial responses to her teen pregnancy, parenthood, and unmarried status. Miriam experienced desires for a good life, further education, and to be like other teens, love for her child, and the weight of her responsibility. She felt confusion, shame, anger, and distress about being treated as a single teen mother by society, some family members, and her church community.

Miriam asked and wondered: "Yes, I had sex. But I didn't use birth control and I didn't have an abortion. Why am I being punished?" Miriam experienced whispers about herself, roadblocks to finishing school set up

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² Her name has been changed to the name of another teen mother, Miriam of Nazareth. Miriam of Nazareth is from a different era and a different culture, yet the stories of Miriam of Nazareth's pregnancy carry echoes of how unmarried women of all ages and centuries have been treated. It bears prayerful reflection and consideration, asking 1) if her fleeing to see Elizabeth was an ancient version of escaping gossip; 2) if faith, history and hindsight help us uplift one teen mother as a model for motherhood (even if overidealized), can we consider what models of grace contemporary teen mothers offer?

by others, stigma for being an unmarried mother, trouble getting food stamps, and little aid from her church. Despite various difficulties, she succeeded in summer school, finishing her high school requirements.

Introduction

German theologian Klaus Demmer argues that moral theologians have a responsibility to carry forward, reflect upon, and incorporate into their theologizing stories from people's lives.³ To what and whom we attend shapes our theological imaginations, providing embodied reality to our moral norms. Embodied reality tests our moral norms' capacity to foster justice, mercy, compassion, love, and healing. Demmer's invitation to consider how people's lives intersect with, inform, and illuminate moral theory leads me back to Miriam's story as a framing narrative for this essay. Miriam's story is both unique and universal. Considered through the lens of social sin, it yields new insights detailing communal responsibility, the need for communal conversion, and the urgency of reproductive justice.

Decades later, I am struck anew by Miriam's resilience, dedication, courage, shame, anger, questions, and faith. Back then, I was focused on teaching the course material and accompanying Miriam in her goal to finish high school. Now Miriam's insights and questions regarding how she broke one Church teaching (no sex outside of marriage) and abided by other Church teachings (no birth control and no abortion) become important in the reproductive justice discussion. For me, Miriam's story raises many questions. Among them: How do we hold together the complexity of a constellation of norms and teachings with their effect on our lives? Why do communities emphasize an individual's sin while often neglecting graced actions? Why do communities often highlight their communal "charitable actions" while ignoring their own sinful complicity in social sin?

³ Klaus Demmer, MSC, *Living the Truth: A Theory of Action*, trans. Brian McNeil (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2010), 1–5.

In Miriam's case, people focused on the fact she had sex, got pregnant, and did not marry her child's biological father—the sins, if you will. Yet, most ignored that she also abided by two other Church teachings—no birth control and no abortion. Her Catholic high school administrators chose to emphasize the sins rather than how Miriam followed Church teachings. Seeing her decision to have the baby as problematic, they barred her from attending her graduation ceremony, fearing it would send the wrong message. I wonder, who gave and who received the wrong message?

The messages Miriam received included: Do not have sex. If you have sex do not use birth control and do not get pregnant. If you have sex and get pregnant, do not have an abortion. Staying pregnant will be hard. Keep your pregnancy out of high school, but do not drop out. Be ready to work for your food stamps, housing vouchers, and other forms of social support because, as a mother receiving social support, you must not be lazy.⁴ Attending school does not count for your work requirement.⁵ By barring Miriam from graduation at her all-girls Catholic high school, the other high schoolers received the same message.⁶

The way Miriam became a mother broke the societal and ecclesial norms for motherhood for contemporary late twentieth-century US life: finish high school, maybe go to college, get married, then enter into

⁴ On the stereotype of the welfare queen, see Dorothy Roberts, *Killing the Black Body: Race, Reproduction, and the Meaning of Liberty* (New York: Vintage, 1997, 2017), 17–20.

⁵ Another option in the 1990's for young women in the U.S. context, was 'go visit' relatives usually for 6 to 9 months. For a sociological analysis of social changes affecting how people looked at teenage pregnancy over a period of decades in the twentieth century, see Kristin Luker, *Dubious Conceptions: The Politics of Teenage Pregnancy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996). For a critique of women's experiences in Ireland, see Suzanne Mulligan's chapter in this volume, "Thinking about Reproductive Justice in Contexts of Violence," 148–177.

⁶ This was the same message my classmates and I received at our all-girls Catholic high school in Michigan in the early 1980's. Some classmates of mine had abortions, and others hid their pregnancies; those who concealed their pregnancies avoided the public discipline and shame of missing graduation, which had been imposed for other "perceived" infractions such as too many absences due to illness. This concern about sending the wrong message still exists in the twenty-first century.

parenthood. If you get pregnant and are unmarried, you should get married to the biological father. Like many women before her, Miriam stepped outside of approved boundaries and norms. Because she did, her pregnancy was less celebrated than those mothers whose pregnancies stayed within the prescribed boundaries. Miriam, herself, was less celebrated. Like other women who step outside the “proper scripts” for motherhood, Miriam experienced attempts at shaming, scapegoating, and dismissing of her story and insights.⁷ In other words, Miriam’s teen motherhood was seen as problematic, not sanctified. Miriam embodied two different binaries for women: 1) good mother/bad mother and 2) women as pure virgin (Mary) or the cause of sin (Eve).⁸

Nevertheless, Miriam told me her story, like other women continually tell their stories. By doing so, she shattered these binary options imposed by sexism. The experiences of women and their theological insights are taken seriously in some spaces. Subsequently, women contribute to a more robust, encompassing framework for the theological work of rectifying reproductive injustice and bringing forth life-affirming healing. Implicit in Miriam’s story is the reality of sin: her sins, the sins of individuals who interacted with her, and the sins of the communities to which Miriam belonged. Accurately naming reproductive injustices and advocating for reproductive justice requires more comprehensive attention to the various

⁷ Variations of Miriam’s experience appear for unmarried women working in Catholic institutions when they get pregnant. They must worry that they will be fired, losing their livelihood, along with any shaming, judgement, and lack of support for their pregnancy. The story of Naiad Reich is an example of an unmarried pregnant woman fired from a Catholic institution. See Emily Reimer-Barry, “Another Pro-Life Movement is Possible,” *Catholic Theological Society of America Proceedings* 74 (2019): 21–41, 21.

⁸ Rachel Sophia Baard, *Sexism and Sin-Talk* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2019), 57–107. Baard in two chapters explores how perspectives on Eve and Mary are shaped by patriarchy. They become a “dual image of the patriarchal feminine,” which when allowed and followed “also participates in the dehumanization of women.” See also, Elisabeth T. Vasko, “‘Mad Mothers, Bad Mothers’: Resisting Stigma and Embracing Grace as Dis-ease,” *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics* 37, no. 1 (2017), 141–159. Vasko does not discuss Eve or Mary, but she deftly defines and challenges the heteropatriarchal vision of ‘good mothers.’

sins underlying reproductive injustice. Therefore, the theological work around reproductive injustice includes re-thinking sin-talk.⁹ Specifically, it involves naming as concretely as possible the intersecting network of communal sins influencing individual moral decisions.

Considering sin-talk's import for all reproductive injustice remains impractical. Therefore, I will not provide ethical analyses related to individual reproductive decisions. Nor will I classify different moral reproductive quandaries women navigate into distinct sin categories. Instead, I apply feminist theologian Elizabeth A. Johnson's insight that the symbol of God functions,¹⁰ shaping our theological imaginations and worldviews to the question of sin and reproductive injustice. The symbols of sin function. Therefore, seeking reproductive justice necessitates moving beyond categorizing individual sins for confession and instead analyzing how sin-talk functions to shape our moral-theological imaginations and subsequent attempts to address reproductive injustice.¹¹ Considering how sin-talk functions can deepen our understanding of intersecting realities that lead to reproductive injustice, thus opening new possibilities for justice.

The argument of this essay moves from category to cartography to seek clarity about what is at stake in conversations about sin and reproduction within the Catholic context. Section one outlines theological landscape changes that influenced discussions of reproductive justice and sin-talk. Section two provides the background on the metaphorical nature of language, how it works, and why it matters for theology. By way of example, I delineate how several words in this essay's title capture layers of meaning, assumptions, and frameworks about reproduction. Section three explores changes in sin-talk in the new theological landscape. Specifically,

⁹ Beard, *Sexism and Sin-Talk*. I adopt this language of sin-talk from Beard.

¹⁰ Elizabeth A. Johnson, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse* (New York: Crossroad Publishing Co., 1997).

¹¹ On categorizing sin for confession, see John Mahoney, "The Influence of Auricular Confession," *The Making of Moral Theology: A Study of the Roman Catholic Tradition* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1987), 1–36.

it investigates how sin-talk functions metaphorically in scripture and is followed by a theological grappling with the complex interplay between individual and communal sin. The conclusion argues that employing a metaphorical structure for sin-talk reveals new possibilities for honoring women's moral agency. It maintains the reality of individual sin, while holding communities culpable for their sins of fostering and permitting reproductive injustice. Throughout sections three and four, I propose options for a communal examination of conscience to better foster reproductive justice.

Section One: Sin and Changing Theological Landscapes¹²

Conceptually, 'sin' attempts to describe multi-faceted and complex aspects of the human condition and of human behavior. Sin has been categorized as mortal, venial, omission, or commission, and described as sinning in thought, word, and deed.¹³ While valuable, our understanding of these categories and how they often shape our imaginations rely on an older theological landscape. While an incomplete description, this older theological matrix includes the following features: visions of women as misbegotten males,¹⁴ whose essential nature is motherhood;¹⁵ categorizing sinful actions to prepare for confession;¹⁶ Catholic theologians who are almost exclusively priests and male;¹⁷ a patriarchal, hierarchical ecclesiology

¹² While each shift or movement named below has significance, listing the various features of the older and new landscapes must suffice for this essay.

¹³ Richard M. Gula, S.S., *Reason Informed by Faith: Foundations of Catholic Morality* (New York: Paulist Press, 1989), 106–122. See the Catholic prayer, the *Confiteor*, for the description of sinning in thought, word, and deed.

¹⁴ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 92, a. 1.

¹⁵ John Paul II, *Mulieris Dignitatem*. Note: Pope John Paul II's letter is only one example of essentializing women as mothers.

¹⁶ Mahoney, *The Making of Moral Theology*, 1–36. Mahoney looks at rise of the manuals detailing sins to aid confession.

¹⁷ Charles E. Curran, *The Catholic Theological Society of America: A Story of Seventy-Five Years* (New York: Paulist Press, 2021). While this book chronicles one professional society of

and an inward facing church with a defensive posture to the world;¹⁸ and the initial development of Catholic social thought (CST) aimed at addressing social injustice.¹⁹ In this worldview, despite CST, individual sin is the primary focus.

Theological movements from the nineteenth to the twenty-first century began to question and even challenge these theological foundations.²⁰ While the effects have not been fully realized or manifested, changing assumptions about women, ecclesial authority, conscience, and power invite us to question whether we are using outdated maps while the landscape around us is changing. This newer theological landscape challenges the older one and can result in different responses to injustice.²¹ Women are recognized as created in *imago Dei*, worthy of respect with full moral agency and a plurality of vocations.²² There is a renewed emphasis on conscience development and aiding moral decision-making by people.²³ Acts matter in the context of a person-centered approach, and naming sins helps identify areas for growth in discipleship. Catholic theologians are

theologians, its trajectory as a theological society of mostly male clerics to mostly lay theologians can be traced in other societies as well.

¹⁸ Bishop De Smedt of Bruges, Belgium, critiqued this view of the church on December 1, 1962, during the first session of the Second Vatican Council. In Xavier Rynne, *Vatican Council II* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1999), 113.

¹⁹ For an overview of the development of Catholic social teaching and its documents, see Thomas Massaro, *Living Justice* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2024), 35–56.

²⁰ See John W. O'Malley, *What Happened at Vatican II* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), 1–92.

²¹ See for example, Christina A. Astorga, *Catholic Moral Theology and Social Ethics: A New Method* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2014).

²² Ann O'Hara Graff, ed. *In the Embrace of God: Feminist Approaches to Theological Anthropology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1995); M. Shawn Copeland, *Enfleshing Freedom: Body, Race, and Being* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2009); Mary Catherine Hilkert, *Speaking with Authority* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2008); Susan Abraham and Elena Procario-Foley, eds., *Frontiers in Catholic Feminist Theology: Shoulder to Shoulder* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2009).

²³ See *Amoris Laetitia*, nos. 37, 42, 222, 300–303; Anne E. Patrick, *Conscience and Calling* (London: Bloomsbury T & T Clark, 2013); and Kathryn Lilla Cox, *Water Shaping Stone: Faith, Relationships, and Conscience Formation* (Minneapolis: Liturgical Press, 2015).

increasingly lay and experience various types of committed partnerships and family responsibilities (including parenting children).²⁴ The church is lurching toward living a global, synodal, dialogical participation of the People of God ecclesiology.²⁵ Vatican II advocated and encouraged more openness to the world, to other academic disciplines, and to other religions and the truths they offer.²⁶ Catholic social teaching articulates how institutions constrain moral agency even as the principles of Catholic social teaching offer support, structure, and wisdom for social justice.²⁷ Other shifts influencing theology include neo-capitalist constructions of the family in the USA, growing acknowledgment of sexism in Catholicism, the sex abuse crisis in the Catholic Church,²⁸ increasing awareness of Catholic complicity in racism,²⁹ and more in-depth medical knowledge of how the reproductive systems and pregnancy work, complicating reproductive decisions. There is also increasing attention to how culture functions to promote or hinder moral formation.

²⁴ For a description of the changing demographics of moral theologians, see James F. Keenan "What Happened at Trento 2010?," *Theological Studies* 72, no. 1 (2011): 131–149. Katarina Schuth has documented changes in seminary faculty over the decades. See, for example, Katarina Schuth, *Seminaries, Theologates, and the Future of Church Ministry* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1999).

²⁵ The Synod on Synodality with meetings in Rome in October 2023 and 2024 represents this halting ecclesial change post-Vatican II. See Gerard Mannion, "Beyond Hierarchyology: Congar, Pope Francis and the Council's Unfinished Liberation of Ecclesiology," in *The Promise of Renewal: Dominicans and Vatican II*, ed. M. Attridge, D. Dias, OP, M. Eaton, and N. Olkovich (Adelaide: ATF Theology, 2017), 51–77.

²⁶ See *Gaudium et Spes*, nos. 36, 42, 44, and 54; *Nostra Aetate*, no. 2.

²⁷ For example, Christine Firer Hinze, *Radical Sufficiency: Work, Livelihood, and a U.S. Catholic Economic Ethic* (Washington DC: Georgetown University Press, 2021); Daniel J. Daly, *The Structures of Virtue and Vice* (Washington DC: Georgetown University Press, 2021).

²⁸ Julie Hanlon Rubio and Paul Schutz, *Beyond 'Bad Apples': Understanding Clergy Perpetrated Sexual Abuse as a Structural Problem & Cultivating Strategies for Change*, 2022, www.scu.edu/ic/programs/bannan-forum/media--publications/beyond-bad-apples/.

²⁹ Bryan N. Massingale, *Racial Justice and the Catholic Church* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2010); Vincent W. Lloyd and Andrew Prevot, *Anti-Blackness and Christian Ethics* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2017).

These new and still emerging theological landscapes shape and influence how we conceptualize and respond to reproductive injustice. I argue that the newer theological landscape holds possibilities for more just reproductive policies and norms. Therefore, bracketing venial or mortal sin-talk and stressing sin-talk that illuminates both personal and communal complicity in reproductive injustice are important. Theological ethicists have begun bridging Catholic social teaching about the common good and moral theology's attention to individual sin informed by the feminist insight that the personal is political (communal) and the political (communal) is personal. Attention and respect are given to experiences of intersectionality and interconnection, with analysis of what mutual self-sacrifice, self-gift, and the importance of self-love in a Christian worldview means.³⁰

Within this shifting landscape, where theology speaks to and advocates for reproductive justice, the facts of fertility and pregnancy matter. Older theological frameworks paid little attention to the fact that menstrual cycles, pregnancy, and menopause bring with them consequences on various bodily systems (circulatory, endocrine, digestive, to name a few). Women recognize and experience the reality that their reproductive capacity is also about health care. In some newer theological frameworks, scientific advances and understanding about reproduction inform theological work. However, recent political decisions and laws in the US around reproduction point to scientific ignorance at best, and even worse, willful disregard of scientific knowledge to further both political and theological agendas. Sadly, the fact that reproduction is about women's healthcare is still too often ignored in many discussions of reproductive injustices.³¹

³⁰ Grace Ji-Sun Kim and Susan M. Shaw, *Intersectional Theology* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2018); Erin Lothes Biviano, *The Paradox of Christian Sacrifice: The Loss of Self, the Gift of Self* (New York: Herder & Herder, 2007).

³¹ See the chapter in this volume by Emily Reimer-Barry, "Catholic Health Care and Reproductive Justice: Whose Conscience has Priority when Conscience Claims Collide?," 358–390.

Furthermore, the belief held by many people in societal, cultural, and ecclesial circles that women can easily get pregnant, stay pregnant, and bring the pregnancy to term, giving birth to a healthy new human being needs correction. Women's stories of pain, loss, suffering, and hardships around getting pregnant, staying pregnant, bringing a pregnancy to term, or the ambiguity around pregnancy and whether pregnancies are even wanted, prove the myth of pregnancy's ease wrong.³² Additionally, infertility inflicts upon women a different tension around motherhood, church teaching, and societal expectations.³³

Discussions, laws, and theological norms regarding reproductive justice must remain grounded in biological facts for both pre-natal life and women, effects on women's health, and their moral agency in reproductive decisions. Anything less diminishes and objectifies women.

This objectification and diminishment of women's agency starkly appears in the United States of America's tortured history legislating women's fertility. On the one hand, some women have been seen as incompetent and incapable of being mothers, leading to coerced sterilization either forcibly or without their knowledge.³⁴ On the other hand, courts or state assemblies legislate that women must be mothers by severely limiting or outlawing abortion.³⁵ Thus, they negate women's own

³² Nadine Pence Frantz and Mary T. Stimming, *Hope Deferred: Heart-Healing Reflections on Reproductive Loss* (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 2005).

³³ Mercy Amba Oduyoye, "A Coming Home to Myself: The Childless Woman in the West African Space," in *Liberating Eschatology: Essays in Honor of Letty M. Russell*, ed. Margaret A. Farley and Serene Jones (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1999): 105–120; Kathryn Lilla Cox, "Toward a Theology of Infertility and the Role of *Donum Vitae*," *Horizons* 40, no. 1 (2013): 28–52.

³⁴ See Roberts, *Killing the Black Body*, 8–10, 56–103; Harry Bruinius, *Better for all the World: the Secret History of Forced Sterilization and America's Quest for Racial Purity* (New York: Knopf, 2006); Rebecca M. Kluchin, *Fit to be Tied: Sterilization and Reproductive Rights in America, 1950–1980* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2009); John J. Clifford, SJ, "Marital Rights of the Sinfully Sterilized," *Theological Studies* 5, no. 2 (1944): 141–158.

³⁵ Guttmacher Institute, "Abortion Policy in the Absence of Roe," April 24, 2023, www.guttmacher.org/state-policy/laws-policies.

determination in consultation with healthcare professionals about their health conditions or readiness and ability to be mothers. In both instances other people control women's reproductive potential, diminish women's moral agency, and promote women's dehumanization.

Despite patriarchal attempts to control women's reproductive capabilities under the guise of 'celebrating motherhood' and protecting the unborn, pregnancy, motherhood and children are insufficiently envisioned and supported. Unwed pregnant women and pregnant teens are usually shamed, as Miriam experienced.³⁶ Pregnant working women frequently lack needed accommodations like extra bathroom breaks with easy accessibility. Paid parental leave in the US is either non-existent or woefully

³⁶ Moving beyond rhetoric, the federal government of the United States of America in 2022 included in the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2023 the Pregnant Workers Fairness Act (PWFA). Signed by President Biden, the PWFA went into effect on June 27, 2023. The PWFA guarantees "reasonable accommodations" for pregnant workers working for employers with more than fifteen employees. However, reasonable accommodations cannot cause "undue hardship" for the employer. Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton sued the federal government over the PWFA saying 1) it puts an undue financial burden on the Texas government to enact this law and 2) the law was unconstitutionally passed. On February 27, 2024, the *Texas Tribune* reported that the federal court in Lubbock, Texas, ruled in favor of Texas AG Ken Paxton stating that the Pregnant Workers Fairness Act was unconstitutionally passed and thus invalid. The Federal government should appeal this ruling. This lawsuit, along with other recent Texas actions related to abortion and medical procedures needed by pregnant women, indicate a disregard for women, their agency and health while pregnant, as well as pre-natal life. See U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, "What You Should Know About the Pregnant Workers Fairness Act," 2023, www.eeoc.gov/wysk/what-you-should-know-about-pregnant-workers-fairness-act; Liz Morris and Cynthia Thomas Calvert, "Pregnant Workers Fairness Act," American Bar Association, September 7, 2023, www.americanbar.org/groups/labor_publications/labor_employment_law_news/issue-summer-2023/pregnant-workers-fairness-act/; Matthew Choi, "Federal Judge Rules Against Pregnant Workers in Win for Paxton," *The Texas Tribune*, February 27, 2024, www.texastribune.org/2024/02/27/ken-paxton-proxy-votes-congress/.

inadequate.³⁷ Food insecurity affecting children is on the increase.³⁸ More recent theological writing on CST speaks to the dynamic between cultural, structural systems, and the interweaving and interrelatedness of the human beings that make up these communities.³⁹

Our theological landscape includes the concepts used to describe human reality. How we name, describe, and analyze experiences and actions matter. Thus, examining how language functions in naming, describing, and analyzing reproductive injustice in a shifting theological landscape is the next step.

Section Two: The Metaphorical Nature of Theological Language and Why It Matters

Anselm's definition of theology as faith seeking understanding has value.⁴⁰ However, difficulties arise with Anselm's definition when 1) the propositions themselves are not questioned and are presumed to fully capture reality, and 2) it is believed that precise enough language for norms and faith statements provides clear instructions for discipleship. These difficulties obscure how language functions, in general, and the effort to fully grasp or describe encounters with God.

As theologian Robert Masson writes, "Words prompt for meaning rather than capture it. Language is an underspecified tip of a giant iceberg of underlying and mostly unconscious cognitive processes of

³⁷ See two chapters in this volume: Kate Ward, "Never Just a Choice: Three Theoretical Approaches to Economic Constraints on Family Formation," 55–89, and Karen Peterson-Iyer, "Reproductive Justice and Agricultural Labor Migrants," 257–289.

³⁸ M.P. Rabbitt, L.J. Hales, M.P. Burke, and A. Coleman-Jensen, "Household Food Security in the United States in 2022," U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service, 2023, www.ers.usda.gov/webdocs/publications/107703/err-325.pdf?v=7814.4.

³⁹ See Kate Ward, "Never Just a Choice."

⁴⁰ St. Anselm, *Proslogion*, in *Anselm of Canterbury: The Major Works*, ed. Brian Davies and G. R. Evans (Oxford: Oxford University Press, Reissue Edition, 2008)

categorization and metaphorical mapping.”⁴¹ This iceberg includes the various relationships and encounters with people, the intricate reality we call culture, values we hold, things we have been taught, feelings, wounds we carry, dreams, longings, and everything that encompasses a person’s worldview. Metaphorical mapping shows and teases out the various ways ideas and concepts overlap, influencing each other and our views in previously unforeseen ways. Sometimes this mapping creates new landscapes of meaning, subsequently shifting our worldviews.

God-talk and its accompanying theological disciplines seek to elucidate these revelatory shifts in comprehension and worldviews within religious frames. Thus, Masson argues that “[t]heology can be thought of as the effort to make sense of the revelatory understanding in terms of its tectonic and novel mapping.”⁴² Geologically, when the tectonic plates under the earth’s surface shift, visible landscapes can change. Likewise, when our theological language changes, our internal and external landscapes transform in both subtle and drastic ways. Initially, any difference might go unrecognized. Yet, when we encounter something new that disrupts our current worldview, rearranging the ground beneath us, we need to make sense of it and to reconstruct a worldview that provides meaning, structure, and purpose.⁴³ Transformation or conversion can occur with implications for action.

Where Masson explores the implications of metaphorical thinking and conceptual blends for systematic theology, moral theologian Thomas Kopfensteiner analyzes the implications of metaphorical thinking for moral norms. Following Paul Ricoeur, Kopfensteiner applies the insight

⁴¹ Robert L. Masson, “Foreword,” in *Putting God on the Map: Theology and Conceptual Mapping*, ed. Erin Kidd and Jacob Karol Rinderknecht (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books/Fortress Academic, 2018), xii.

⁴² Masson, “Foreword”, xiv.

⁴³ See, for example, Robert L. Masson, *Without Metaphor, No Saving God: Theology after Cognitive Linguistics* (Leuven: Peeters Press, 2014); Also see the whole collection of essays in *Putting God on the Map*. Another alternative is to retreat and reinforce prior worldviews that cannot hold newness.

that metaphors both reveal and conceal something about the reality or truth they are ascribing to normative claims. Kopfensteiner argues that normative claims reveal and conceal insights about reality, how we are to act, and what being a disciple means. Norms contain an element of indeterminacy because of their metaphorical structure and the need to be applied in new situations with new contexts. Therefore, norms require ongoing interpretation, often yielding new insights.⁴⁴ Thus, passive reception of normative claims is insufficient. We must arrive at, understand, and apply a norm in our lives within the confines of human fulfillment understood as the call to discipleship. This ongoing endeavor, fashioning and deepening lived discipleship, contains individual and communal components.

Such a task is not new for Christian disciples. As Klaus Demmer points out, the first disciples constructed meaning regarding God's revelation in Jesus. So, too, must today's disciples for a new era and new people. While Christians believe that God reveals the fullness of truth, our finitude means our grasp of truth is partial, mediated, and incomplete.⁴⁵ Therefore, our lives of discipleship require a continual process by which we evaluate meaning, our value system, and obligations to God, others, and self, ultimately manifested in our actions.⁴⁶

While past experiences and awareness ground and yield moral insight, insight also develops through new experience.⁴⁷ Certain experiences, whether positive or negative, tear the fabric of people's lives, rippling beyond one moment. They disrupt a worldview, touch us deeply, and involve some form of reweaving the fabric of our lives in the attempt to structure a meaningful way to re-engage the world. Our capacity for critically examining and reflecting on our experiences helps us recognize

⁴⁴ Thomas Kopfensteiner, "The Metaphorical Structure of Normativity," *Theological Studies* 58, no. 2 (1997): 335–336.

⁴⁵ Cf. 1 Corinthians 13:12.

⁴⁶ Klaus Demmer, "Sittlich Handeln aus Erfahrung," *Gregorianum* 59 (1978): 661–690, 686.

⁴⁷ Demmer, "Sittlich Handeln aus Erfahrung," 662.

how certain events disrupt worldviews and structures of meaning. Critical examination and reflection also facilitate the necessary reweaving and meaningful re-engagement with the world. However, we must remain mindful that seemingly common or similar experiences can yield different moral interpretations or applications of relevant norms. Our capacity for analysis of, reflection upon, and acknowledgement of varied applications of norms remains crucial for moral dialogue.⁴⁸ Hopefully, attentiveness to these features of developing moral insights opens us up to moral insights that expand beyond our own experience.⁴⁹

Masson, Kopfensteiner, and Demmer remind us that our theological language, moral norms, knowledge, and grasp of revelation remain partial and incomplete. No one holds all answers to reproductive injustice or moral truth. This fact necessitates ongoing mutual reflection and discernment when seeking a deeper, richer, more textured approach to reproductive justice.

This reflection and discernment include consideration of how language functions in reproductive conversations. For example, the original title for this essay used the phrase ‘fertility choices.’ Choice means to select among options, the act of choosing a thing. While women do choose a course of action related to their reproductive capacity, naming this as a ‘choice’ does not fully capture this reality. This is because ‘choices’ also frequently reference daily activities like which fruit to buy or what I am having for dinner. Consequently, using ‘choice’ language when theologically analyzing reproductive injustice contributes to minimizing the contexts, circumstances, and the depths of thought, emotional wrestling, and considerations women bring to bear on their reproductive decisions. ‘Choice’ language allows people to argue wrongly that women do not think deeply or have the capacity to make their own decisions around reproductive matters. Labeling a life-altering event a ‘choice,’ rather than a moral decision, gives different weight to the action being undertaken.

⁴⁸ Demmer, “Sittlich Handeln aus Erfahrung,” 680, n. 49.

⁴⁹ Demmer, “Sittlich Handeln aus Erfahrung,” 681.

My increasing discomfort with the language of ‘choices’ when discussing reproductive injustice, led to the phrase ‘fertility decisions’ in the title. Even if only implicitly aware of our internal perspectival shift, saying ‘fertility or reproductive decisions’ acknowledges that women are not simplistically choosing between ‘options.’ ‘Fertility decisions’ language requires refocusing on and considering women’s moral agency in their complex, arduous reproductive decision-making processes.

On the other hand, the title retains the term ‘debate’ despite my preference for the term dialogue. Dialogue indicates a willingness to hear, consider, and be influenced by the truth of what others say about their experiences, perspectives, and thoughts when engaging in conversation or decision making. However, women who bear the burden of health risks, economic effects, and other challenges from reproductive injustice find themselves participating in ‘debates’ rather ‘dialogue’ to arrive at reproductive justice. Too many people in various social settings, legislative halls, and theological conversations still arrive with preset perceptions of women, their thoughts, experiences, and how their agency should be used. The term ‘debate’ captures the fact that too many people think they have the answers to others’ reproductive decisions. They dictate what is to be done and see their role as mandating courses of action rather than listening to the people most affected. While ‘debates’ look different depending on the reproductive area under consideration, ‘debates’ obscure women’s anguished stories of reproductive injustice, and how their stories are all too often ignored, even in ecclesial spaces.⁵⁰

More fundamental than the words used in this essay’s title is a needed re-examination of our language around reproductive injustice and sin. Comprehending that the symbolic (Johnson) or metaphorical (Masson) language for God functions in shaping understandings of God and revelation also means considering the implications of language for sin-talk. Analyzing reproductive sin-language as metaphorical reveals what hides in our shared words—differing worldviews, life experiences, positionality,

⁵⁰ See Kate Ward, “Never Just a Choice.”

cultures, hopes, and more. These undercurrents, when exposed, help explain existing tensions when applying norms and principles in the pursuit of reproductive justice.

The next section begins with sin-metaphors in scripture because scripture is a foundational text for a Judeo-Christian worldview. Stepping back and identifying scriptural metaphors, rather than simply scriptural definitions, provides a different starting point for sin-talk. Metaphors shape our imagination and provide insights into our reality. Scriptural metaphors with their tributaries and filaments provide additional insight into the human condition we call sin.⁵¹ The additional perspectives provided by scriptural metaphors for sin open new venues for analyzing reproductive injustice. For example, the metaphors highlight the more personal component of communal sin embedded in the structural sin that CST addresses. The next section concludes by using theological work that explores the interconnection between individual moral agency and communal structures that limit, constrain, and culturally shape our moral agency.

Section Three: New Sin-Talk: Pathways from Scripture and Theological Ethics

Feminist theologian Rachel Baard writes, “God-talk and grace-talk cannot bypass sin-talk, since God speaks the word of grace into the concrete pathologies we encounter in human existence and is heard from within those experiences. The theologian therefore cannot bypass reflection on the painful matters that go by the name of ‘sin.’”⁵² Her work is “premised upon the recognition that words have power, and perhaps more so when those

⁵¹ Terry Wardlaw argues that this approach has implications for translating the various notions for sin in the Hebrew Bible and for understanding their transition into the New Testament. See Terry Wardlaw, “Translating ‘Sin:’ What Does the Old Testament Have to Say?,” *Notes on Translation* 15, no. 4 (2001): 17–36.

⁵² Baard, *Sexism and Sin-Talk*, 3.

words have doctrinal status.” For Baard, “feminist conversation on sin-talk is therefore centered on the question, how does sin-talk create a script that people perform?”⁵³

A metaphorical approach to sin-talk provides one method for interrogating the script that people perform. Consciously attending to the metaphorical structure of sin-talk language illuminates a network of concepts generating a worldview. Or as Joseph Lam notes, “Sin is a cultural notion, constructed within the norms of a particular society, and deriving its significance from a place in a broader linguistic-conceptual framework.”⁵⁴ This broader linguistic-conceptual framework is both spoken and written.

Therefore, Gary A. Anderson can argue that scripture contains “metaphorical pictures” of sin and forgiveness that shape and arise from specific “cultural and linguistic circumstances.” This in turn yield narratives that are related yet “not predetermined by their underlying metaphors.”⁵⁵ In other words, biblical narratives can be interrogated for their relevance and import given the underlying metaphors. Our interpretations of the narratives and their foundations can vary, subsequently affecting actions and decision-making by moral agents. Ideally, then, various metaphors for sin and forgiveness will be placed in conversation with each other. This provides a more comprehensive map of sin, forgiveness, and the narratives they tell us, with important implications for reproductive justice.

Four metaphorical schemas for sin in the Hebrew Bible are particularly pertinent to reproductive justice conversations: 1) sin as a burden, 2) sin as

⁵³ Baard, *Sexism and Sin-Talk*, 3.

⁵⁴ Joseph Lam, *Patterns of Sin in the Hebrew Bible: Metaphor, Culture, and the Making of a Religious Concept* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 2.

⁵⁵ Gary A. Anderson, “From Israel’s Burden to Israel’s Debt: Towards a Theology of Sin in Biblical and Early Second Temple Sources,” in *Reworking the Bible: Apocryphal and Related Texts at Qumran*, ed. Esther G. Chazon, Devorah Dimant, and Ruth Clements (Boston: Brill, 2005), 3.

a stain, 3) sin as debt or accounting, and 4) sin as directional.⁵⁶ Burden describes human experience of sin as a weight, heavy, and transferable by us. Scripture tells us God has the capacity to and does ease or relieve the burden. The burden can also be transferred to another and carried away.⁵⁷ Lam notes that sin as a burden is multi-faceted, speaking to actions, guilt by the actor, and potential punishment.⁵⁸ Considering sin as a burden within the context of oppression, injustice, and social sin raises questions. For example, what burdens do we put on others or which sins of ours do we transfer to others? How do we translate the belief that we are created as *imago Dei*—in the image of a God who relieves burdens, who shares burdens, who accompanies the suffering—into actions relieving, sharing, and accompanying women with their burdens related to reproductive decisions? For in a system of injustice and oppression, women's burdens are often placed on them by others—whether by people or by the way institutions and systems operate.

Sin as debt or account contains the idea of keeping a record with God as the record-keeper, the one who passes judgement. Sin as debt or account reminds us that sins endure and require payment. God is the judge, and only God decides what constitutes repayment or whether to forgive the debt.⁵⁹ However, not all suffering is the result of our own actions. Some suffering is put upon us by others, despite our innocence.⁶⁰ When we judge reproductive sins, do we account for the way our actions cause suffering? What accounting does the community need for their inability to support mothers and all parents with paid parental leave, a living wage, adequate food, shelter, and other necessities to raise the children society and

⁵⁶ See Joseph Lam, *Patterns of Sin in the Hebrew Bible*, and Gary A. Anderson, "From Israel's Burden to Israel's Debt."

⁵⁷ Anderson, "From Israel's Burden to Israel's Debt," 3–9.

⁵⁸ Lam, *Patterns of Sin in the Hebrew Bible*, 5, 208.

⁵⁹ Anderson, "From Israel's Burden to Israel's Debt," 18–20; Lam, *Patterns of Sin in the Hebrew Bible*, 5, 208–209.

⁶⁰ Anderson, "From Israel's Burden to Israel's Debt," 16–18.

churches deem intrinsically good? What debt is owed to those suffering injustice at the hands of others?

Directional metaphors include time, space, and movement. They focus on the moral agent's progress, regression, or conversion to following God and God's ways. They can capture intentionality as well.⁶¹ Using this lens, missing the mark is both a definition and a directional metaphor.⁶² The community can ask: Where have we missed the mark in fighting reproductive injustice? Where have we failed to live the corporal and spiritual works of mercy in the context of suffering due to reproductive injustice?

Lam explains that "metaphors of 'stain' or 'impurity' present sin as inherent intrusions into some defined sphere or as disruptions of a pristine state." These metaphors "work implicitly by conveying sin's approval and disapproval, its consequences and remedies."⁶³ Blood is used as an image for sin as a stain and as a source of life within Hebrew Scriptures and New Testament theologies. For example, Jesus' giving of his life blood is seen as purifying and cleansing, a sacrifice for our collective sins, and the giving of new life. Yet, for women, sin, stain, and women's embodied experience of reproductive bleeding are conflated.⁶⁴ Women's blood which can give life, also renders her unclean. Hence rituals exist(ed) for women's purification and cleansing. As a result, any women's pregnancy, talk of reproductive bleeding, or reproductive changes, transgresses the patriarchal taboos regarding blood and challenges the mythical ideal of female sexual purity as non-bloody. Reproductive justice movements also help destigmatize and normalize pregnancy and menstruation.

However, sin as stain reminds us of the enduring nature of sin—it is hard to extricate, to get out. It lives on through generations and in

⁶¹ Lam, *Patterns of Sin in the Hebrew Bible*, 15, 208.

⁶² Wardlaw, "Translating 'Sin,'" 23, 30–33.

⁶³ Lam, *Patterns of Sin in the Hebrew Bible*, 15, 209.

⁶⁴ For a positive retrieval of menstruation and female bleeding, see Doris M. Kieser, "The Female Body in Catholic Theology: Menstruation, Reproduction, and Autonomy," *Horizons* 44, no. 1 (2017):1–27.

embodied form. We see this enduring nature of sin in systemic, generational racial injustice. Because of the enduring nature of sin, we must confront it and its lingering effects. Enduring sin slowly eviscerates individuals and communities leading to death. Only by acknowledging sin's endurance can we begin moving from death to life.

Rachael Baard writes that “authentic sin-talk is the language of *pathos* and not only of pathology, born from a prophetic *ethos*, aimed at denouncing that which is death dealing, and at affirming life.”⁶⁵ Contemporary moral theologians grappling with sinful complicity in social structures shape sin-conversation in new ways, illuminating alternative possibilities for acting well and addressing injustice. A few examples will need to suffice.

Julie Hanlon Rubio retrieves the principle of cooperation with evil from moral manuals to analyze complex questions of complicity in far-flung, world-wide systemic systems of injustice.⁶⁶ Some manualists used the language of cooperation with evil, others cooperation with sin. The manualists are concerned with helping people determine if and how their engagement with the sins of others might be cooperation and sinful too.⁶⁷ The manualists with the principle of cooperation were attempting “to balance the reality of limited power and influence with the desire of individuals not to participate in the sins of those with whom they interact in public life.”⁶⁸

Rubio's retrieval of the principle of cooperation with evil shifts the context from confession and individual contexts to accountability for public, political advocacy aimed at resisting and transforming social sin and

⁶⁵ Baard, *Sexism and Sin-Talk*, 153.

⁶⁶ Julie Hanlon Rubio, “Moral Cooperation with Evil and Social Ethics,” *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics* 31, no. 1 (2011): 103–122, and “Cooperation with Evil Reconsidered: The Moral Duty of Resistance,” *Theological Studies* 78, no. 1 (2017): 96–120.

⁶⁷ The manualists do not spend time precisely defining the category evil even though many use the term. Their concern is defining when cooperation is sinful. Thank you to Julie Hanlon Rubio for an email exchange about the manualists and their use of the term “cooperation with evil.”

⁶⁸ Rubio, “Cooperation with Evil Reconsidered,” 105.

sinful structures—the very social and sinful structures within which we act and participate. Rubio considers how individuals can make moral decisions for acting in spaces of communal sinfulness as well as foster much needed transformation. Drawing on the incisive work of womanist theologians and Black Catholic theologian M. Shawn Copeland, Rubio highlights their challenging reminders that we have a responsibility to do more than avoid sin. We must resist evil.⁶⁹ Because when it comes to structural sin “we bear some responsibility for the evil even when we cannot eradicate it alone.” Thus, any talk of solidarity with others means we have an “obligation to act.”⁷⁰ This means individuals and communities must ask what troubles them about structural evil, interrogate the structural evil they accept, and reflect upon what they fail to resist.⁷¹ Other questions include: Who suffers and is oppressed?⁷² What is our complicity in systemic reproductive injustice? How can we limit our participation in injustice? What acts of resistance do particular injustices demand?

The questions about troubling, accepting, resisting, and complicity directly reference actions, while implicitly pointing behind the actions

⁶⁹ Rubio in her work uses the language of social sin, structural sin, and evil when talking about social issues. The womanists and black theologians also use the language of evil when discussing social injustices. Thus, evil in these instances refers to the pervasive, embedded, systemic sinfulness, oppression, injustice in our structures, institutions, cultures, and societies. Therefore, the language of evil captures a depth of corruption requiring transformation different than a single instance of a sinful act.

⁷⁰ Rubio, “Cooperation with Evil Reconsidered,” 104–112.

⁷¹ The three questions about troubling, accepting, and resisting come from Rubio’s reading of womanist theology. Rubio, “Cooperation with Evil Reconsidered,” 110.

⁷² The Korean notion of *han* also explores the oppression resulting from social sin in a specific context. A more in-depth study is beyond this essay. See Andrew Sung Park, *The Wounded Heart of God: The Asian Concept of Han and the Christian Doctrine of Sin* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993); Kevin Considine explores intercultural implications of *han* for understandings of sin and addressing various forms of injustice for the sinned-against. See for example, Kevin Considine, “*Han* (恨) and Salvation for the Sinned Against,” *New Theology Review* 26, no. 1 (2013): 87–89, and “Kim Chi-Ha’s Han Anthropology and its Challenge to Catholic Thought,” *Horizons*, 41, no. 1 (2014): 49–73. I want to thank Hoon Choi for introducing me to the scholarship on *han*.

towards motivations, affections, and attitudes. Darlene Fozard Weaver, arguing that sin is irreducibly relational,⁷³ looks beyond sinful behaviors to sinful dispositions and attitudes. She contends that sins of omission have roots in various sinful attitudes shared by all because of a communal moral worldview and expectations.⁷⁴ Where Rubio's questions help us identify sins of omission, Weaver connects the roots of individual sins of omission in shared (communal) worldviews and expectations. Therefore, individuals and communities must ask: What dispositions, attitudes, perspectives, and theological concepts contribute to sins of omission and need uprooting? And what dispositions, attitudes, perspectives, and theological concepts contribute to transformation, thus needing cultivation?

In both moral and immoral actions, we enact our human freedom. In her 2023 CTSA plenary address, Weaver explores the role of freedom in a morally diverse world.⁷⁵ Weaver discusses freedom and various elements required or affecting freedom's enactment: charity, justice, honesty, self-examination, forbearance, fortitude, and building a culture of nuance. It seems to me that these same features are some of the dispositions, attitudes, perspectives, and theological concepts needed for reproductive justice.

Arguing that our freedom is both individual and communally situated and enacted, Weaver writes: "Human freedom is yoked to responsibility to, for, and with others, and this dynamic of freedom and responsibility lies at

⁷³ Darlene Fozard Weaver, "Sin and the Subversion of Ethics: Why the Discourse of Sin is Good for Theological Anthropology," in *T & T Clark Handbook of Theological Anthropology*, ed. Mary Ann Hinsdale and Stephen Okey (London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc., 2021), 100; Darlene Fozard Weaver, "Freedom in a Morally Diverse World," *CTSA Proceedings* 77 (2023): 23, ejournals.bc.edu/index.php/ctsa/article/view/16959.

⁷⁴ Weaver, "Sin and the Subversion of Ethics," 105. A sin of omission means sinning by inaction.

⁷⁵ Weaver, "Freedom in a Morally Diverse World," 19. She defines moral diversity as including "not only the fact of moral disagreements but the plurality of ways of life, which our conceptions of goodness too often fail to convey." Furthermore, "Moral diversity is both a consequence of and an occasion for the exercise of freedom. . . . [O]ne's decision about what to make of instances of moral diversity is always also a decision about one's own moral commitments and a decision about how to relate to moral others."

the heart of freedom's integral relation to an objective moral order."⁷⁶ In other words, we have responsibilities and obligations towards each other for bringing about a just, moral order. This includes the sphere of reproduction.

Weaver examines fundamental frameworks for communal worldviews. Megan K. McCabe contextualizes the influences of communal worldviews, expectations, and sins on individual actions when she analyzes rape culture. McCabe writes, rape "is the extreme manifestation of gender norms and expectations that construct femininity as sexual availability and masculinity as sexual aggression and dominance."⁷⁷ Rape is an individual sin contextualized by the social sin of a rape culture.⁷⁸

McCabe's analysis and questions regarding rape culture apply to reproductive injustice. Reproductive injustice has both individual and social sin manifestations. Social conditions and patterns normalize and obscure instances of reproductive injustice. Women are to be sexually available and bear the burdens of unwanted and unasked for pregnancy, even when raped.⁷⁹ Male sexual aggression and dominance extends beyond physical violence into the very enacting of laws that protect their violence. When lawmakers pass laws restricting abortion access to women whose pregnancy's result from rape, this both normalizes pregnancy from rape and obscures the violence endured by females of all ages.⁸⁰ Gendered norms

⁷⁶ Weaver, "Freedom in a Morally Diverse World," 22.

⁷⁷ Megan K. McCabe, "A Feminist Catholic Response to the Social Sin of Rape Culture," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 46, no. 4 (2018): 635.

⁷⁸ Pope John Paul II, despite essentializing tendencies in his theological anthropology, also says rape is an individual sin, with complicity by society. John Paul II, *Letter to Women*, no. 5. See also Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, nos. 54, 282.

⁷⁹ See Erika Bachiochi, "The Uniqueness of Woman: Church Teaching on Abortion," in *Women, Sex, and the Church: A Case for Catholic Teaching*, ed. Erika Bachiochi (Boston: Pauline, 2010), 37–55, at 50: "Aborting an unborn child conceived through rape makes the child, rather than the rapist, ultimately responsible for the grievous violence perpetrated on the woman."

⁸⁰ Normalizing pregnancy from rape means we do not understand how prevalent rape is, how many pregnancies result from rape, and thus do not grasp the insidious way violence is woven

and patterns of normalized violence and injustice also appear in ecclesial treatment of women's reproductive health, in the inability of female migrant workers to receive adequate health care and protection from sexual aggression, in sex trafficking where victims are criminalized.⁸¹

McCabe's contention that social transformation of rape culture "requires theological and ethical treatment in order to consider what is necessary to make possible social transformation away from beliefs, behaviors, and expectations that place women in the role of the desired object"⁸² also applies to reproductive injustice. Lawmakers, ecclesial leaders, and community members are shaped by a reproductive injustice culture that prevents meaningful acknowledgement that structures, norms, and laws foster injustice and harm.⁸³ This makes change difficult but not impossible. Social transformation fostering reproductive justice must also dismantle beliefs, behaviors, and expectations that place women in the role of passive receivers of reproductive decisions made for them by others and focused on women's "individual sin." Social transformation would recognize women's full human dignity, capacity, and capability to discern and make moral decisions. Additionally, communities would commit to support the financial, spiritual, mental, and social needs of women around their reproductive decisions. Social transformation would eliminate laws that penalize women for pregnancy and/or limit their

into the fabric of reproductive decisions by women. Given the recent push for no exception abortion laws, there are attempts to quantify the number of pregnancies resulting from the rape of women. See Selena Simmons-Duffin, "Raped, Pregnant and in an Abortion Ban State? Researchers Gauge How Often it Happens," *National Public Radio*, January 24, 2023, www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2024/01/24/1226161416/rape-caused-pregnancy-abortion-ban-states.

⁸¹ See in this volume Eric Genilo, SJ, "Risking Women's Lives, Denying Women's Experiences: CDF Statements on Sterilization in Catholic Hospitals," 334–357. and Peterson-Iyer, "Reproductive Justice and Agricultural Labor Migrants," 257–289.

⁸² McCabe, "A Feminist Catholic Response to the Social Sin of Rape Culture," 646.

⁸³ McCabe, "A Feminist Catholic Response to the Social Sin of Rape Culture," 651, n. 10. I adopt her insight about changing rape culture to reproductive justice.

agency and would pass laws that hold men accountable for acts of dominance and gender-based violence.

McCabe offers the themes of interruption, solidarity, and conscience as a means of changing culture. She applies Edward Schillebeeckx's concept of negative contrast experiences and Johann Baptist Metz's dangerous memory as forms of interruption that can help transform a toxic culture of sexual violence.⁸⁴ These concepts also work for transforming a culture of reproductive injustice, a transformation to which this collection of essays contributes. The essays interrupt narratives that reproductive injustice does not exist. They disrupt narratives that moral decisions around reproduction are easily decided. They challenge the myopic focus on the unborn developing human being, arguing for concrete facts rather than idealized abstractions when advocating for women's agency and reproductive moral decisions. The essays within this collection offer dangerous memories of alternative narratives of women's experiences, challenging everyone to see differently, to notice a different landscape requiring new responses. Hoon Choi's essay provides an alternative narrative from a male perspective helping cultivate a new landscape that demands attention to men's responsibilities.⁸⁵

McCabe's second offering, solidarity, requires something of the community. Standing by, doing nothing in the face of injustice belies our complicity as Rubio, following womanist theologians, points out. Rubio writes, "There is a strong sense of the duty to act, not to avoid culpability, but to avoid cooperating with the social structures that harm vulnerable persons whose connections to me are undeniable. I cannot be in right relationship with God if I am involved in denying the rights of others. It is impossible to disconnect their lives from mine."⁸⁶ Solidarity requires practices that disrupt and resist the cultural beliefs and standards that

⁸⁴ McCabe, "A Feminist Catholic Response to the Social Sin of Rape Culture," 652–653.

⁸⁵ See in this volume Hoon Choi, "Fatherhood, Reproductive Justice, and Strategic Invisibility of Men," 122–147.

⁸⁶ Rubio, "Cooperation with Evil Reconsidered," 111.

support reproductive injustice. The call for resistance to evil and cooperation with injustice referenced above would be one practice to adopt. For example, not firing single pregnant women from their jobs in identifiable Catholic spaces would be a disruptive practice and a step towards accompaniment of women in their reproductive decisions.⁸⁷

Likewise, Weaver's work on attitudes and dispositions provides guidance for living in solidarity. What in our communities' worldviews foster our complicity and inaction? What attitudes and dispositions provide venues for relieving burdens, generosity of spirit, and compassionate accompaniment? Weaver challenges us to practice interrogating our beliefs and attitudes that hinder solidarity. For example: Do we think single or teenage mothers deserve no financial support, and if so, why? We must ask what communal dispositions, attitudes, worldviews, and expectations about women, unmarried pregnancy, infertility, or abortion decisions contribute to stigma rather than understanding, support, and reproductive justice.

McCabe follows many contemporary theologians when she argues that conscience helps moral agents navigate what is practically required to implement practices that work toward changing a toxic, harmful culture. Listening to conscience "is the mature expression of moral agency to make real the commandment to love God, self, and neighbor in the particular, concrete circumstances of day-to-day life."⁸⁸ Conscience connects the work of interruption to the work of solidarity and thus it "challenges and guides individuals to pursue their role" in the work of transforming a culture of reproductive injustice.⁸⁹ This conscience work cannot remain the work of

⁸⁷ Single pregnant women in Catholic institutions often risk losing their jobs, jeopardizing their capacity to care for themselves and the pre-natal life they carry. See, for example, Maria Sole Campinoti, "New Jersey Supreme Court Rules in Favor of Catholic School that Fired a Teacher for Having Premarital Sex," *CNN*, August 16, 2023, www.cnn.com/2023/08/15/us/new-jersey-catholic-school-premarital-sex-firing/index.html.

⁸⁸ McCabe, "A Feminist Catholic Response to the Social Sin of Rape Culture," 654.

⁸⁹ McCabe, "A Feminist Catholic Response to the Social Sin of Rape Culture," 655. Again, I apply her insights to reproductive injustice.

individuals. We need to develop practices of communal discernment and formation of conscience. As scripture and the theologians used in this section have shown, communities shape culture, influencing and forming the individuals in them who act. Thus, individuals and communities must work to transform the cultures and structures enabling reproductive injustice.

Conclusion

I began with Miriam's experience of reproductive injustice, as a single, teen mother. Her experience and the questions raised about navigating the sins of both individuals and communities in reproductive justice conversations highlighted the limitations of traditional sin talk in the context of reproductive injustice. An overview of changing theological landscapes influencing sin-talk indicated the value of considering the metaphorical nature of language, specifically sin-talk. This led to a review of several scriptural metaphors for sin with implications for sin-talk when analyzing and seeking solutions to reproductive injustice. Using various theologians, who describe various dimensions of social sin, I argued for seeing reproductive sin as a form of social sin. Perceiving reproductive sin as social sin necessitates social transformation for reproductive justice.

Social transformation is required because the dehumanization of women and ignoring of their moral agency has been institutionalized in social systems and laws, as well as in ecclesial teachings and structures. This results in part from an intellectual tradition where sin-talk and conscience formation primarily focus on individual avoidance of sin instead of a focus on communal fostering of justice, prudential judgement about acting in conflict situations, or navigating disagreements about magisterial teaching. For Christians, this means revisioning discipleship as individuals in community and in relationship, also recognizing that communities act collectively as disciples.

Discipleship's demands are rigorous, challenging, and ongoing, as we are called to love all and from this love pursue justice. We can start by listening to people most affected by unjust laws, practices, and cultural norms, seeking their knowledge about what structures need transformation. Authentic listening and dialogue means turning away from fixating on another's named or perceived sin which permits me to ignore the complexity surrounding reproductive injustice and my contribution to unjust structures, systems, and cultures. While seeking justice, we need to contextualize individual decisions within communal spaces, acknowledging systems of oppression and the harm they do to people's moral agency.

Jesus challenges the community 'judges' and 'onlookers' to examine the planks in their own eye, their hearts and motives, and their sins (e.g., Matthew 7:3–5, Luke 16:14–15, John 8:2–11). Jesus's invitation to examine assumptions, motives, and sin extends to us. Considering how we, as 'onlookers' and 'judges,' contribute to reproductive injustices illuminates our communal malformation. Mapping communal complicity shows what needs conversion. Individual women cannot navigate reproductive injustice alone. Eradicating injustice and creating more just cultures for people making reproductive decisions is a communal endeavor.

Returning to Miriam's story we can ask: What does a revised sin-talk that pays as much attention to communal complicity in reproductive injustice and social sin as to individual sin do for her?⁹⁰ What would a changed vision look like for her? What new message might she receive? The community might ask her: What burdens are you carrying? Which ones can we lift or help you carry? She would find a community reflecting upon and rectifying their contributions to her burdens. Her burdens would be lightened and shared by her community. They would provide childcare, assistance with food, and other necessities, so she could focus on school and her child, rather than worry about their survival. However, this support would need appropriate dispositions and attitudes by those

⁹⁰ Thank you to Mary M. Doyle Roche who suggested returning to Miriam's story in the conclusion and asking what a revised sin-talk would do for her.

providing aid so that Miriam's sense of isolation and punishment would be lifted as well.

It can be argued that Miriam missed the mark and strayed from the moral path of avoiding pregnancy as an unmarried teen. Did her school need to keep her from graduation as a form of accounting and payment for her sins, sins she perceived as offset by her decision to become a mother? Being allowed to attend graduation would function as a form of solidarity—a sign that her community stands with her to continue with her education while raising a child. New sin-talk means that Miriam's school administrators would also consider how they strayed from the path of discipleship. The administrators strayed by adding to Miriam's burdens instead of easing them, and by not acknowledging and supporting her hard decision to become a teen mother once pregnant.

The questions posed in section three and in this brief revisiting of Miriam's story can form the basis for a communal examen of conscience around reproductive justice.⁹¹ Additional examen questions include: What ideas, norms, conceptions, ideologies, theologies, values, commitments, attachments, obligations, and emotions frame and shape the rules and regulations we put in place? Who benefits? Who is left out? Who is marginalized? Who is put front and center? How are we socialized (formed) to view each other, to view what matters in terms of reproductive injustice? What have we overlooked in our considerations? Participating in an examen of conscience helps in naming and analyzing how communities 1) sin, 2) bear culpability for and contribute to another's sin, and 3) participate in unjust systems. All three have valuable repercussions for addressing reproductive injustices. Examen form the basis for asking for forgiveness and enacting change for justice. These examen could find

⁹¹ Ignatian discernment with its examen offers one model that can be adapted for communal discernment. See Jesuit Conference of Canada and the U.S., "The Ignatian Examen," www.jesuits.org/spirituality/the-ignatian-examen/ for various applications of the examen. Various religious communities who have structured communal practices for discerning new leadership, such as the Benedictines, could provide education and models for ecclesial and other communities for discerning new directions around reproductive justice.

liturgical expression for example, in the penitential act, the prayers of the faithful, communal rites of reconciliation, Stations of the Cross, or retreats structured around reproductive concerns.

We are in a liminal space with the opportunity to see our past truthfully for what it was, to name as accurately as possible our present reality, and decide to shape a more just, equitable future around reproductive decisions. We continue to live in this liminal space—a space filled with relief, hope, compassion, empathy, commitment to truth, and a focus on justice. It is also a space fraught with trepidation, despair, anger, anxiousness, fear, lies, deceit, and death. It is a space that requires undertaking attempts to answer the question of how we learn to recognize, name, acknowledge, and begin repairing our malformation, especially when the systems that form us also contribute to our malformation and to our sinfulness.

While broken and sinful, we all yearn to belong in community. And one purpose of sin-talk is healing, bringing people back into community, creating wholeness and re-connection.⁹² When we forget our own broken sinfulness by seeing others as more sinful, barring them from communities and Eucharistic communion, we are not disciples calling all to Christ.⁹³ Instead, we rupture the community. Boundaries and norms can provide a life-giving and protective service. However, they can prevent solidarity and authentic encounters that transform people. Boundaries and norms can

⁹² Baard, *Sexism and Sin-Talk*, 153.

⁹³ Reconsidering sin-talk has both liturgical and sacramental implications. For example, how does the sacrament of confession or reconciliation need adaptation for communal sins? How can the clerical dynamics which structure our sacraments be reconceived? Exploring these and other questions is beyond the scope of this essay. However, the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith recently provided specific guidance regarding single mothers and the sacraments in a letter responding to an email from Bishop Ramón Alfredo de la Cruz Baldera. Single mothers should have access to the sacraments and the support of their pastors and ecclesial communities. See Prefect Víctor Manuel Cardinal Fernández, “Letter to His Excellency, the Most Reverend Ramón Alfredo de la Cruz Baldera, Bishop of the Diocese of San Francisco de Macorís (Dominican Republic) Regarding Access to Eucharistic Communion for Single Mothers,” December 13, 2023, www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_dff_doc_20231213_risposta-madri-single_en.html. Thank you to Emily Reimer-Barry who sent me the link to this letter as it came out during the revisions of this essay.

bar people from communion with each other. Boundaries can thus render the Body of Christ an incomplete wasteland instead of the fertile space of life-giving possibilities in the Spirit. May the Miriams in our midst find in us, individually and communally, life-affirming spaces.



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