

A large, abstract image of a stained glass window with many colorful, irregular pieces in shades of blue, purple, orange, and red, set against a dark background.

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Dear friends,

The peace of Christ be with you! You are holding in your hands the 13th edition of the Augsburg Youth Theology Institute journal. This volume contains 26 essays from 26 high school youth who participated in our 2017 Augsburg Youth Theology Institute. They are in alphabetical order by the author's last name.

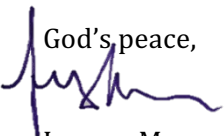
Our theme was, *God's Mosaic: Diversity as Good News*. The students spent the week exploring the inevitability and importance of diversity from a sociological, theological, and biblical perspective. Dr. Tim Pippert (Augsburg University) taught our sociology track, Dr. Mary Lowe (Augsburg University) taught our theology track, and Dr. Eric Barreto (Princeton Seminary) taught our Bible track. Some of the big themes the students wrestled with in class included race, class, gender, privilege, Black theology, Mujerista theology, Liberation theologies, Womanist theology, Disability theology, etc. Needless to say, the students' minds were blown.

In addition to classroom learning, students spent time engaged in hands-on learning around the Twin Cities. We approached the importance of diversity from a number of other angles. Jim Bear Jacobs, a local leader in the Native American community, met us at the memorial for the Dakota internment camp in Ft. Snelling State Park. He told us the story of Pike Island as the place the Dakota people believe the world began. He also told us how that same area was used as an internment, or concentration camp, during the U.S. Dakota war of 1862. He names this place as both a place of *genesis* and a place of *genocide* – two very distinct ways to think about diversity. We also rolled up our sleeves and helped remove an invasive plant from the Coldwater Spring park near Minnehaha Falls as we learned about the importance of biodiversity. Lastly, pastors Luisa and Patrick Cabello Hansel hosted us at St. Paul's Lutheran Church in Minneapolis' Phillips Neighborhood to show us the mosaics they are making with neighborhood youth and installing around the neighborhood to reclaim and beautify the space.

We also had a lot of fun together and ate some really great food!

This journal is a gift to you from a group of 26 teenagers who opened themselves to God's spirit and faithfully dove into some really tough issues. Please read the essays in this journal with an open heart and an open mind. Allow yourself to be impressed by the questions these young people are asking. Allow yourself to be curious with them. They are wrestling with important topics in these essays that our congregations must face.

Allow this gift to be a blessing to you as you turn these pages and take in these words.

God's peace,


Jeremy Myers, PhD
Associate Professor of Religion
AYTI Program Director

Love Thy Neighbor:

How Should the Christian Community React to Immigration

Sarah A. Aman, Aberdeen, SD

Throughout history, the Christian community has been unwelcoming to immigrants. For the most part, Christians have not purposefully discriminated against immigrants, but instead, Christians have been afraid to change their ways. Anyone who has ever heard a joke about Christians changing light bulbs knows all too well just how hard it is for the Christian community to change. However, without change, the Christian faith could become irrelevant to many and deemed as hateful or exclusive. Why is it so hard for the Christian community to accept immigrants when Christians can look to many places in the Bible to find guidance on “loving thy neighbor” (Matthew 22:39-40, NRSV)?

Therefore, the first area of the Bible the community can look to for guidance is Jeremiah 29:1-7. In this passage the prophet Jeremiah writes a letter to the exiled Jews in Babylon. He tells them,

“Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat what they produce. Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease. But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare”(New Revised Standard Version Bible, Jer 29:4-7).

One reading this passage could interpret this scripture as the Bible condoning immigration. This should be an example of how people in exile should be able to live within a Christian community. Although these people were exiled from their homeland, the Lord has given them a new place to live that is prosperous and welcoming.

First, Jeremiah 29:1-7 can be examined as a passage about emigrants living in exile. For a very long time, scholars examined the exile of the Jewish people and destruction of Jerusalem as a singular event. In reality, however, the exile of Jewish people was not a singular event but rather a long string of events that occurred. It is very important that people within the Christian community understand that exile doesn't happen once and then end, but continues for a very long time and may never end. People in exile don't always need a place just to stay for a year, but a place to build their new lives. Professor Lim says it best:

“This recent research has made sufficiently clear that there was no singular exilic experience. To assume that all Israelites were weeping by the rivers of Babylon under duress from foreign captors is simply inaccurate. Neither should one assume that every Israelite was able to climb the Babylonian social ladder and influence the royal court in the manner of Daniel and his friends, what these approaches reveal is that migration, while impacting groups, affects people differently at an individual and family level. In addition, generations within families may have experienced the exile in markedly different ways. For the poor peasant, exile may not have meant geographical relocation but rather colonization by the Babylonian economic empire. For a Judean youth from a class of social elites, exile may have meant living in a Jewish enclave in Babylon and exercising a relatively free existence. These differences are expressed” (Lim, 5).

For the most part, biblical exile is not akin to current modern exile, but the way exiles were treated as welcome friends, not foes, should be set as an example for modern Christians to emulate.

Secondly, Jeremiah 29:1-7 can be examined in relation to cultural ideas within migration. For the most part, only the first and second generations of immigrants are able to have distinct cultural ties with a certain place. The first generation is usually a generation of adults who grew up in their country of ancestral origin and emigrated as adults. The second generation was born in the country their parents immigrated to. However, there are a distinct middle group of immigrants often referred to as generation 1.5 that don't feel the cultural ties to either place as strongly. They were teens when they emigrated from their home land. The 1.5 generations often have conflicting cultural views; they have strong ties to their homeland but also strong ties to their new home. This generation is often forgotten or overlooked. In his letter, Jeremiah wrote, "Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease" (Jeremiah 29:6-7, NRSV). Biblical scholar John Ahn believes he was referring to generation 1.5 in these lines. People of generation 1.5 tend to marry within their own culture, but many biblical scholars tend to interpret this passage as Jeremiah encouraging the Jewish immigrants to intermix with and embrace the Babylonians and their culture.

The book of Ruth also has advice on how to accept immigrants. The answer is look to Boaz; Ruth meets Boaz in chapter 2 and he treats her with kindness and compassion. Boaz's kindness is shown in Chapter 2, verses 9-13,

" 'I have ordered the young men not to bother you. If you get thirsty, go to the vessels and drink from what the young men have drawn.' Then she fell prostrate, with her face to the ground, and said to him, 'Why have I found favor in your sight, that you should take notice of me when I am a foreigner?' But Boaz answered her, 'All that you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband has been fully told me, and how you left your father and mother and your native land and came to a people that you did not know before. May the Lord reward you for your deeds, and may you have a full reward from the Lord, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come for refuge!' Then she said, 'May I continue to find favor in your sight, my Lord, for you have comforted me and spoken kindly to your servant, even though I am not one of your servants'." (Ruth 2: 9-13, NRSV).

Boaz provides Ruth, a foreigner, with food and safety. In this time period, the way Boaz treats Ruth would have been highly controversial. However, is that not how helping the poor and immigrants are viewed in our modern society? If modern day people were in Boaz's shoes would they treat this "inferior person" as kindly as Boaz treats Ruth? The true answer is that most people wouldn't treat a person such as Ruth kindly at all; this is an unfortunate reaction to a real problem. The Christian community must work to be more like Boaz and welcome people who are down and out into the community with kindness and shelter.

How then can the Christian community truly welcome immigrants? There is not simply one answer but many. Christians should invite friends of all races and nationalities to join them at a church event. Another great way to welcome in immigrants to a congregation is to offer translated sermons or sermons in other languages. Holding community outreach events especially in poorer areas can bring more diversity to a church. However, the number one way to bring diversity into a church is through discussion. Discussion is the only way to truly change a congregation or a community for the better. Honest, thoughtful discussion can open closed hearts and heal old wounds. Humans are social creatures that thrive off of interacting with others. The best way to open someone's heart to a person they fear is to show them that their fear is driven not by concern for the goodwill of others, but instead by not wanting to feel uncomfortable or different. As much as humans thrive off of social experiences they wither and die when they let fear take over. Simply setting fears aside and opening one's heart to wholesome caring conversations would be the best first step to making real lasting changes.

From here onward, the next thing for Christians to do is to begin to make changes within their own churches and communities by welcoming others and reacting to immigration in a positive way instead of a negative way. If the Christian community begins to make changes maybe the light bulb joke

will be just a little less true because, after all, Christians can change if they work to communicate efficiently and eliminate fears. The time is now to make changes and welcome others. This is not a problem for another generation; this is a problem for everyone from ages 4 to 400. Now is the time to make changes and love thy neighbor!

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My God vs. Your God: God is Individual

Rosella Birgy, Hopkins, MN

In the Jewish and Muslim faiths, one is not allowed to draw God. However, in Christianity, there is no such rule. For centuries, God and Jesus have been depicted as white, asexual, European, males. This image may be the frontrunner of popular culture but that does not mean it is accepted by all, especially amongst minorities who do not relate to this representation of God. Different people imagine God differently based on the attributes they find comforting. Regardless of personal theologies, there are not superior or inferior ways to look at God. What is God's sexuality? Does God have a sexuality? Is God a man or a woman or non-binary or something even beyond that? What is God's race? Is God disabled? These are questions I constantly struggle with and society constantly debates.

Several theologies agree that the compassionate God suffers with the oppressed by being one of them. This is the foundation for many liberation theologies including Latin American Liberation theology, Black Liberation theology, Queer Liberation theology, and Disability Liberation theology. In Genesis it says, "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them" (Genesis 1:27, NIV). I believe this verse is a basis for the validity of all liberation theologies--stating that we are all created in the likeness of God and are thereby entitled to interpret this "likeness" according to our own personal beliefs. For example, nonconformist theologian/minister Matthew Henry believed that this likeness was that, according to his book *Exposition on the Old and New Testaments*, "the soul of man that especially bears God's image" (Henry, 1708) versus a likeness in physical appearance.

The first widely-known form of liberation theology was Latin American liberation theology which came to prominence in the mid-20th century in Latin America where the lower class or lower economic brackets of society attempted to redefine the role of the (Catholic) church in their society. For a long time, the church was actively supported and fostered by the beliefs of the upperclass--this system was backed by a type of Social Darwinism, believing that those who were rich were being rewarded for their goodness by God, and those who were poor would remain poor. Latin American liberation theologians, headed by Peruvian minister/theologian Gustavo Gutierrez, sought to implicate social justice in the church and bring comfort and encouragement to those in poverty who were neglected by the church. Latin American liberation theology was built on the grounds that the poor and oppressed were God's favored people, and that Jesus in his coming had been one of them, poor and humbled, and loved them more due to it--like how a mother pays more attention to a child who is sick, and therefore needs her more than the other children. In Latin America, this theology not only spurred a more inclusive church, but social justice movements for the impoverished-- attempting to care for *all* socio-economic groups of people, as they were all children of God.

Dr. James Cone, a leading Black Liberation theologian, argues that God is black because there is no alternative. "Either God is identified with the oppressed to the point that their experience becomes God's experience, or God is a God of racism.... The blackness of God means that God has made the oppressed condition God's own condition," (Cone, 63-64). To summarize Dr. Cone's beliefs, if God is not black--if God does not identify fully with the condition of the oppressed like one that lives among them, then He is a God of racism. Thus, in order to believe that God is a compassionate Savior, God must be black.

Queer liberation theology uses much of the same underlying reasoning of Latin American theology and Black theology to prove its point. Robert E. Goss, a queer theologian, states in his book *Queering Christ: Beyond Jesus Acted Up* that Easter brings about a time of queer sexual liberation, that when Jesus is raised from the dead, He joins God in his pursuit of justice and compassion. Thus, "God made Jesus queer in solidarity with us...to say that Jesus the Christ is queer is to say that God identifies

with us and our experience of injustice” (Goss, 167-168). If God is a God of all people, and a God of acceptance and justice, God *must* be queer.

Disabled theology compares the broken and unhealed body of Christ (following the crucifixion, when *He reveals Himself to the disciples) to those with disabilities in the world. In the words of Nancy Eiesland, author of *The Disabled God: Toward a Liberatory Theology of Disability*, “the church has been the ‘city on the hill’--physically inaccessible and socially inhospitable [to those with disabilities].”

All of these theologies are groundbreaking--thought up and written down by different people groups for different audiences. And while some of them may be controversial in society, they are as valid and legitimate as how I see God--as a God who despite all His diverse children, relates to me as much as He relates to any other person. He is God and God cannot be put in just one box, or category. He cannot be put into *any* category. Whatever your interpretation of the Bible may be, you must remember that we each have our biases which--no matter how subtle they may be, make an impact on the way we perceive God and His Word. But I believe it can be agreed that above all, God is our Father. He created us in His image--individually and according to His design--and no matter what anyone may think, we were created equally.

The God I believe in--and the God that through His sufferings I can see--is a God that is compassionate and died for all of our sins, which are all equally sinful (James 2:10-11, NIV). By being our compassionate Father, He has saved all of us and therefore has experienced our trials with us. God, in His mercy, is what we need him to be--whether that be a refuge, an ally, or one who suffers alongside us. And we, as brothers and sisters in Christ, ought to try to do the same.

**I have used male pronouns to describe God, but as this paper proves, we can't even begin to imagine the endless parts of God's identity that are beyond us.*

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All Are Welcome Here?

Dylan Boorsma Bergerud, Edina, MN

“The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy.” (Martin Luther King Jr.) God desires in each individual a passion to confront and challenge the controversies existing in our daily lives. James 4:1 tells us that “What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you?” (NRSV). God’s passion is our passion. Our passion for justice comes at a time when race relations are at a unique point in the history of contemporary America. Despite the fact that it has been 50 years since the passing of the civil rights act, many problems still persist in today’s society. The clear cut segregation of the 1960’s has morphed into modern systemic racism. Designed to cut people of color out of the picture, it is a challenge we must all confront in order to honor God’s creation. Religion, as it stands today is viewed by many as a uniting force among people, but has historically served as an impediment to the success of racial equality. This essay explores the intersection between race and religion in contemporary America. It asks three primary questions: what is the real definition of race? Do religion (Christianity) and religious communities alleviate or perpetuate pre-existing racial tensions? And what does “All are welcome” really mean when it comes to my local congregation? Exploring these three questions, one discovers that religion and race are intertwined, and that by accepting and embracing diversity as God intended, we can alleviate the racial tensions that have consumed the United States in the past and work to fix these problems in the future.

Using the Bible as a guide, God creates humanity to be the reflection of his image. God’s infinite wisdom and capabilities are reflected in the different personalities and abilities of each individual. In Genesis 11, we learn that up until this time there was a singular language. However God in his almighty power condemned the people’s disobedience by imposing many different languages, so that they could not communicate to build a tower against God. “The confusion scattered people far and wide amongst the Earth as God intended” (Genesis 11:10, NRSV). The tower of babel creates the first idea of “race” within the Bible. Although “race” is never mentioned directly in the Bible, this story provides evidence for how different toned people were created. In this way God embraces diversity by spreading people out and making them unique and different, as he had intended. Through all this God sees that diversity is good, and so is cherished. This shows God’s acceptance of diversity and following in his path as his image, we should accept it as well.

Defining race allows us to better understand the problems facing our society today. The dictionary definition of “race” is “a class or kind of people unified by shared interests, habits, or characteristics” (Merriam Webster). However does this definition truly define what “race” means? Traditional, or Primordialist views would say that race is 100% biological, and that your genes determine your race. However, in contrast, a constructivist viewpoint would say that race is a social construct made to define people. Ultimately a true definition falls somewhere in between both categories. “Race” is a social construct we talk about as though its real, and it creates a nature of belonging with those who are similar to us.

Digging into Matthew 7:12, we see that God desires us to treat one another the way we would like to be treated. However, in spite of this, people of color have been mistreated in the United States since the 1600’s. If God desires us to truly love another why are we unable to recognize each person as not only an individual but also as a child of God?

Race, as it stands today, is viewed by many as a social construct. A social construct view of race is called racial constructivism.

“Racial constructivism is the position that holds that as society labels individuals as belonging to certain racial groups (regardless if they are justified to) and that belonging to racial groups entails differences in resources, opportunities, and well-being, the concept of race must be conserved, in order to facilitate race-based social movements or policies, such as affirmative action, that compensate for socially constructed but socially relevant differences’.” (Motley, 12)

This approach to race is important because it takes into account cultural experience and how culture plays a role in not only someone's identity, but also success in the modern world. Prior to this, the most common view on race was called primordialist. This view did not include cultural experience but instead was a view in which race was only determined by skin color and anyone who had black skin color was considered a "negro". The census during that time, in line with the Jim Crow laws asked people, "Are any of your grandparents people of color?" (Census.gov). This was historically significant as it led to the segregation of people of color, beginning the cycle of poverty that still exists in our world.

Returning to the central question, religion has played a large role in the setback for racial equality. White Churches in the south during the 1900-1960 era used biblical verses in order to set-back and restrict the rights of people of color. Despite this, many people think churches still plays a big role in communities of all races. Churches act as communities providing support and providing a place for everyone. But is this really true? What does all are welcome really mean? And how welcoming is my local congregation?

Edina Community Lutheran Church is a Lutheran church located in Edina, Minnesota, a town which is "81 % White" (Census.Gov). We have a big sign that says all are welcome here. However, despite this, our congregation struggles with appearing diverse. Very few, if any, people of color attend our church, and under 3% of members are people of color. Many times I hear it's all about location, however that is simply not true as edina has 19% non-white residents. Therefore I must ask myself, are we truly welcoming? In his article *Positive Functions of the Undeserving Poor*, Herbert Gans explains that poverty of people (Often people of color, due to the cycle of poverty, in which the education, Justice, and housing markets are setup to trap people of color in an endless cycle where they can't succeed) serves as a benefit for those who are in power.

"Furthermore many well off Americans think that the number of poor people who behave in these ways (Badly) is far more than it actually is" (Gans, 269)

This quote highlights the crux of the discussion because even though we say that all are welcome we have been trained to think that people below us in standing are not capable people and they do not belong with us. God's vision of everyone treating each other with respect is thrown out thanks to a preconceived notion that people who are poor or undeserving are not hard working and are lazy. Although we put on our best act of trying to be welcoming in the end we fail because we are not perfect beings. Ultimately to create change in our churches and in our lives we need to follow what the Bible says. "After all what does the lord require of you but to act justly, love mercy, and live humbly with your god." (Micah 6:8, NRSV). Amen.

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Diversity In the Church

Alex Calle, Minneapolis, MN

My name is Alex Calle and I was fortunate enough to be part of the Augsburg College Youth Theology Institute (ACYTI) program held at Augsburg College. We learned about a lot of important things that are usually ignored by society. One topic we hit was diversity, and it was something that interested me, so I decided to take it a step forward and talk about it specifically in the Church.

A diverse Church is a better church, because it helps us make friends across differences, takes away the fear of people's differences, and gives us the chance to grasp other cultures. In this paper, I will be talking about the importance of diversity within a church, which includes culture, ethnicity, age, disability, and status, and also the challenges of obtaining a diverse Church. This issue of diversity has really been ignored within the Church which is wrong, because there are so many benefits. For years now, churches have been occupied by the same race even when we share the same religion, and it's time to change that! "It is appalling that the most segregated hour of Christian America is eleven o'clock on Sunday morning." (Martin Luther King, Jr.)

The Church is not only a place to worship, sing, and learn, it's also a place to meet new people and make new friends. Imagine being in a church with multiple races: you may identify them as "different" due to skin color, or the language they speak, but these people have a story just like you. You can share these stories and sooner or later you will create a bond, and no longer will you seem them as different or a stranger, but you will see them as a friend, someone you can share and laugh with, someone you can trust, someone you know will be there to support you in your losses. Isn't this what God wants, all of us to be united? "I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another in what you say and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly united in mind and thought" (1 Corinthians 1:10, NIV). "How good and pleasant it is when God's people live together in unity!" (Psalms 133:1, NIV). We are all God's people! It doesn't matter if you are a newborn, a teen, an elder, or someone with a disability. It doesn't matter if you are poor or rich. In God's vision we are one!

Something that may scare you from making a friend whom is "different", is a past experience with one. For example maybe you met a white person who was racist, or have been scared of African Americans for the stereotypes social media has created, or maybe it's a Hispanic with tattoos- you may think he is a gang member, or has been in jail. Just because a person from a particular race did something, doesn't mean they all do/are. One big thing that puts different races in a bad image is social media. I have seen many stereotypical things on it, like African Americans are robbers, all Muslims are bombers, and so forth. These awful racial posts create fear, and bad images toward races. The point I am trying to make is we should always look at someone with a positive, clear mind; we should not assume who they are for the way they look or dress. By doing so we are able to take away the fear we created.

Lastly, if we make friends with the diversity within the Church, it will give us the chance to grasp other cultures. You get the chance to experience their foods, traditions and music. This will give you a taste of how things are in different parts of the world, and it will also allow you to share your own culture as well. Not only this, but it could potentially mean having a bigger community, which means more stability for the church, and more hands to help in fundraisers, and other church related occasions.

Now let's talk about the challenges. How do we get our church diverse? What if the church is too far away? How do we overcome the language preference and barrier? These are very good questions, and we need answers. Here are my opinions on how we can solve them. One thing we can do is put signs out saying, "All Are Welcome" in different languages so people can be enticed to go as they see their preferred language written on the sign. For the church being too far, we can make a sacrifice on taking an extra 5-10 minute drive, like c'mon Jesus died on the cross for us can't we at least take a few minutes more to get to a Church? If all Churches were Diverse we wouldn't have that problem. Now for the

language preference and barrier, we can have bilingual Masses, sure it may make the mass longer, but we can make the sacrifice on staying a little bit longer at the church, “And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.” (Hebrews 13:16, NIV). For the language barrier, we can offer English Classes, so others can learn and make it easier for them to communicate. The English Class can also attract people, because many want to enrich their English language.

In conclusion, having a diverse Church has a lot of pros, but faces many challenges that we can overcome with hard work. Remember, we are all God’s people and God wants us to be united. He wants us to share love with one another, and worship in harmony. He created us with different physical traits, but that shouldn’t stop us from loving others.

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The Bible Should Put Love into Hearts

Lois Campbell, Willernie, MN

In our predominantly Christian society The Bible is always viewed as the words of God. In reality, the Bible was written by humans who were sinners. It is claimed that God spoke through these humans, but who is to say what words belong to them and which words belong to God. Also, scholars believe that only seven out of thirteen letters under Paul's name belong to him. In the end, The Bible says being gay is an abomination, and condones sexual assault.

A commonly heard Bible verse towards the queer community states "You shall not lie with a male as with a women; it is an abomination" (Leviticus 18:22, ESV). This verse has created hate in Christian's hearts. The verse is a part of the 'Holiness Code' from Leviticus 17-26. This code also stated that wearing garments of two fibers, eating shellfish, getting a tattoo, and working on the holy day is an abomination. All of these are sins in The Bible, yet there is more hate towards gays than there is towards a person working on the holy day. Also, every sinner has God's grace, even if we do not deserve it and our actions will not change that. A pro-gay sign also read "Leviticus also said 'no haircuts' but I guess we are skipping that one."

"And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself" (Matthew 22:39, KJV). These words were spoken by the holy son himself. Is a gay human undeserving of your love, because they are simply gay? As Christians, it is our job to love God and all people, for they are all our neighbors. "On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets" (Matthew 22:40, KJV). There is no proven way to stop being gay. Love on the other hand, can stop homophobia. We need to fill everyone's heart with the love of Jesus. Then, we will be filled with the same compassion towards others as Jesus was. Jesus loves everyone regardless of who they are or the sins they have committed. He only cared about how to put love into their hearts. As followers of Jesus, let's follow his example.

Another bible verse that Mary Lowe mentioned in class at the Augsburg College Youth Theology Institute (ACYTI) was Genesis 19:1-29, the story of Sodom and Gomorrah Destroyed. She said how people will always talk about the homosexuality in the story, but fail to mention how the father offered up his two virgin daughters. The story starts by stating that "The two angels arrived at Sodom" (Genesis 19:1, NIV), the father, Lot, does call them men, but who is to say that the father did not just assume that, for the angels could be genderless or just look like men. Then in Genesis 19:5 "the men of Sodom, both young and old, all the people to the last man, surrounded the house; and they called to Lot, "Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us, so that we may know them." At this point Lot offers up his two virgin daughters. In no way is this story about sex between two loving people. This story is very clearly about gang rape. The men of Sodom wanted to gang rape the angels and were blinded. "If someone tells you what a story is about, they are probably right. If they tell you that is all the story is about, they are definitely wrong" (Gaiman). If someone tells you this story is about homosexuality they might be right, but that is not the only thing it is about. It is about possibly forced homosexual and heterosexual acts. It is about a family trying to protect angels.

The story of Sodom and Gomorrah is about women being their father's property. When reading about sexual assault in The Bible it's treated more as a violation of one's property than an assault. "If a man happens to meet a virgin who is not pledged to be married and rapes her and they are discovered, he shall pay her father fifty shekels of silver. He must marry the young woman, for he has violated her. He can never divorce her as long as he lives" (Deuteronomy 22:28-29, NIV). This verse speaks for itself, the woman was forced to have sex against her will and now will be married to that man and who is to say she won't be raped again. Also, if a woman was raped in a city, it is her fault for not crying out and she shall be stoned to death along with her rapist (Deuteronomy 22:24-25, NIV).

Our current society wouldn't allow a woman who was raped in a city to be killed for justice let alone let her rapist be killed. The Bible has both the laws in Deuteronomy and Leviticus. So why are

Christians wanting gays gone, but not wanting people who are raped gone as well? Our society has thankfully turned on what The Bible says about sexual assault, but stills condemns gays based on The Bible. God did not want our hearts filled with hate; the devil on the other hand does.

God wants our hearts filled with love. The song "We are the Body" by Casting Crowns powerfully says what needs to be said. The chorus reads: "But if we are the body, Why aren't His arms reaching? Why aren't His hands healing? Why aren't His words teaching? And if we are the body Why aren't His feet going? Why is His love not showing them there is a way? There is a way, there is a way," and the end is, "Jesus is the way" (Casting Crowns). In the end, we are the body of the church and the body of God. It is our job to show people the way of God, not the way to the door. For if we show someone to the door, we also show the God-given gifts inside of them to the door. "Now if the foot should say, 'Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,' it would not for that reason stop being part of the body" (1 Corinthians 12:15, NIV). Now if the queer should say, "Because I am not a heterosexual, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. They are a part of the body of Christ and Christians should not condemn them based on The Bible when the bible also condones sexual assault. Now if the sinner should say, "Because I am not a saint, I do not belong to the body," they would not for that reason stop being part of the body. Remember that we are all sinners in our own way, so if you still believe being gay is a sin, remember that Jesus dined with the sinners, loved the sinners, and put love into the sinners' hearts.

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Disability and the Power of Love

Anna Carroll, White Bear Lake, MN

“Hey guys, look at this! I got Sean to swear!” “Hey guys, you should see Sean do this dance I taught him.” Quite often people use Sean for attention because he has Down Syndrome. Because of his amazing personality, he likes to make everyone happy, even if that means swearing or doing a sexual dance. Sean is frequently tricked into thinking that because these guys are teaching him things and including him, that they love and appreciate him. Unfortunately, they do not do it because they love and value him, they do it for their own enjoyment and it ends up getting Sean in trouble. Whether or not we live into Jesus’s commandment of loving one another has an overall impact on our disabled siblings in Christ.

Disability theology is a lens of theology, often identified as a form of liberation theology. Disability theology challenges social systems that violate the intentions of God by dehumanizing people with disabilities (Wilder). The ideas that disability theologians critique are that people with disabilities pollute, disability is a result of sin, forgiveness and healing are interrelated, and that disability is often used as a metaphor to include all persons, but this ignores the real disabled body (Wilder). Theologians of disability also accept that they have a different view of bodies, science, and disability than the biblical others. In addition, they believe that bodies are good gifts of God, they do not bear sin, nor are they unclean (Lowe).

In scripture, disabilities are viewed as deriving from sin, disabilities are thought to be spread through touch, and the healing of disabilities is a result of forgiveness. Stories throughout the bible that associate sin and disability include Mark 2- the Paralytic, Matthew 8- the Centurion’s Servant, Mark 7- the Deaf Mute, and John 5- the Man at the Pool of Bethesda. In John 5, Jesus found a man lying by the pool of Bethzatha. Jesus asked him, “Do you want to be made well?” The sick man answered, “Sir, I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up; and while I am making my way, someone else steps down ahead of me.” Jesus said to him, “Take up your mat and walk.” And he did. The man was healed, but later Jesus adds, “See, you have been made well! Do not sin anymore, so that nothing worse happens to you” (John 5:2-16, NIV). Here, Jesus is saying that if the man were to sin again, he could once more become disabled. In these passages, the way that disability is perceived is that it is inherently wrong and needs to be healed.

How do these negative depictions of disability affect how people with disabilities are treated in the church today? Emma, a young woman that attends a church in St. Paul, suffers from severe depression. Before she became open about her diagnosis, the church did not often mention mental illness. Once Emma spoke up and asked for help, her church accepted her completely and now has regular conversations about mental illness. In fact, I first met Emma when she came to my church with her youth pastor to share her story with our confirmation leaders. In sharing her personal experience with depression, we were able to learn more about how depression may impact the youth in our church. A girl at my church, St. Andrew’s Lutheran Church, Hannah, has a physical disability regarding her legs. She told me that she has had no problem feeling like she belongs in the church. Hannah sings in the choir, she is a counselor and is in the band at church camp, and she is in the worship band for Vacation Bible School as well. Sean (previously mentioned), and his family attend Shepherd of the Hills Lutheran Church. They rarely attend because Sean keeps their family busy but when they do attend, Sean is accepted with open arms. Sean’s mom, Leslie, mentioned that he is so welcomed due to his outgoing personality.

On the contrary, not everyone with a disability is treated this way. For example, according to Nancy Eiesland, having a disability is difficult in the church, especially regarding the Eucharist. She mentions in *Encountering the Disabled God* that receiving the sacrament has become more of a solitary experience, despite the positive intentions of the church. The church tries to tailor to disabled bodies by offering them the sacrament at their seat but this reinforces the disability instead of embracing it.

If the bible regularly condemns disability, then why are some churches so accepting? Although many stories in the bible do associate disability with sin, there are also passages that mention loving and including all people for who God made them to be. In Psalm 145:8-9, it says “The Lord is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and rich in love, the Lord is good to ALL; he has compassion on all he has made” (Psalm 145:8-9, NIV). These verses state that the Lord loves all, disabled or able-bodied. Also mentioned in the bible in Isaiah, it is said that Jesus understands suffering (Isaiah 63:9, NIV). In order to understand someone else’s suffering, many theologians believe that one must experience the same conditions, meaning that, in fact, Jesus is or at one point has been disabled as well. Despite the negative depictions of disability in the bible, the bible also teaches us to love our siblings in Christ as Christ himself does.

After meeting a disabled sibling in Christ, new perspectives and ways of thinking start to open up. For example, before I met Sean I did not know how to treat someone who was different from me beyond just having differing interests. Sean has taught me that people with disabilities are no different than any able-bodied person and that they should be loved and treated with the same respect as anyone else. I have seen the consequences that Sean has faced when his brothers and sisters in Christ not only just pretend to show him that love and respect, but also abuse the love he returns and take advantage of him. Despite the challenges he might face, he finds people who love and support him and he finds ways to spread that love he receives in an even greater way. Through Sean, Emma, Hannah, and Nancy, I have learned that whether or not you live into Jesus’ commandment of loving one another has an overall impact on our disabled siblings in Christ.

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Womanism: The Solution for the Modern ELCA Church

Anna Erickson, St. Paul, MN

What does it mean to be a woman in the modern church? What does it mean to be black or African in the modern church? What does it mean to be both? In a world of unrecognized white privilege, classism, and racism, worship has not only become blatantly homogenous, but also unaware of relevant issues within its foundation. It is in this age, that a black or African American woman's theology is becoming a subject of discussion, because in retrospect, she is uninvolved in majority of the feminism, as well as African American theologies. It is in this age, that womanist interpretations of scripture are the solution the church needs to effectively deal with racism.

At this point you may be wondering, what exactly is womanism? When I have discussed this essay topic with friends and members of the ELCA church, I often get a response along the lines of, "is that the same as feminism?" or, "you must know a lot about that". Others just assume that I misspoke, meaning to say feminism. By definition, womanism is the "second wave feminist movement in regards to black women" (St. Clair, 55). It became a way to introduce the difference in struggles between a black and a white woman, and is becoming increasingly important as it evolves into multiple viewpoints.

Womanism was first announced through the author Alice Walker, with the creation of the term womanist. Her book, *The Color Purple*, as well as *Our Mother's Gardens*, began the discussion of a black feminist, and her idea of being 'womanist', being courageous and willful, or acting like a real woman. She uses womanism as an umbrella term, saying that feminism is but a component to the whole of womanism. She, as a black woman sees feminism differently, saying, "The focus of the feminist theology is not on gender based inequality, but race and class based oppression" (Walker). There is a certain exclusion to the feminist movement that, in many cases, goes unrecognized. The refreshing term of womanism gives African women a theology of their own. Alice Walker's most famous quote regarding the difference is, "Womanist is to feminist as purple is to lavender".

From this initial ideal, black or African women have begun to differentiate their thinking. Through this, the Africana womanism has created a new meaning to the movement. Africana womanism was introduced by Clenora Hudson-Weems, who dissociates herself with feminism because of its "eurocentric values and ideas". Africana womanism differs from Walker's womanism. It is much more focused on the African American women's experience of slavery. Hudson-Weems claims that it is impossible to conform womanism into feminism, no matter how inclusive the feminism movement claims to be, because of their inexperience with slavery and racism. This also applies to the intersectional feminist, who claims to advocate for all women of color.

Africana womanism has many elements, including the use of African males in its definition. Hudson-Weems rejects the feminist portrayal of 'men as the enemy', and claims that a womanist desires to coexist. Feminists have this built resentment towards men because of the white women's, as well as their counterpart (the white male's), lack of additional hardship. The white female and white male in American history never had to work together against a common hardship, like the African Americans have had to work towards freedom, as well as civil rights.

With recent political movements, new and evolving feminism, and a strong sense of classism in our modern society, a very recent face of womanism has appeared, naming themselves the black feminists. Though the term womanism isn't used in its title, it is still involved in the struggles of exclusion and discrimination that black women face. The face of black feminism is very new, first initiated by Pearl Cleage. Africana womanists tend to separate themselves from this movement because black feminism is much more focused on western struggles. Its drive came from the exclusion that the Women's Movement developed, because it became focused on the struggles of the white women and didn't think about the black experience. Black feminism also sprung from the Black Liberation Movement, which still managed to have sexist ideals.

So how does all of this fit into the modern church, specifically the ELCA? As a congregation, the ELCA church claims a wholeness and openness to all people in the Christian community. Within their organization they make this idea clear, saying, “In Christ none of us lives in isolation from others. Jesus is our peace and has broken down the walls that divide us – walls of judgment, hatred, condemnation and violence – and has made us into one, new human community” (Ephesians 2:14-15, NRSV). In everyday worship, this statement hasn’t taken on a whole lot of action.

Martin Luther King Jr. once said that most segregated hour of Christian America is eleven o'clock on Sunday morning. Although nearly 50 years have passed since this was claimed, worship still seems to be more comfortable when we are surrounded by those who look like us, or rather, worship becomes more uncomfortable when you are surrounded by people you cannot physically relate to. Think about the church you attend. How many people of color are in regular attendance? As a Lutheran church member, I know how easy it is to think that your church is all accepting and all accommodating. The real issue with this thinking is the belief that stating that you are all accepting is solving all issues of racial segregation.

The ELCA church is very progressive in its multiple theologies. It has adopted the theology of “theologians on a cross”, which essentially is to recognize hardship. The second strong theology of the church is “justification through grace”, which is pretty self-explanatory. Both of these theological standpoints come from Martin Luther himself and are the foundation to the ELCA worship and interpretation of scripture. The good news is that we’re looking on the bright side. The bad news is that we overlook other theologies, because we assume the grace we preach about is sufficient.

This is where womanism, in all forms, and the ELCA church meet. Womanist theology is revolved around a person of constant struggle. Authors like Alice Walker and Maria W. Stewart preach about their faith redemption, and how it all had to do with Christ Jesus. Womanist theology is about the acceptance Jesus held within him. He could always be seen with the poor and the weak, and in the state of the perpetual fight that African American or black women feel, this is the connection to the grace the ELCA church preaches about. It is best put by the work *What If I Am A Woman?* by Maria W. Stewart, when she says “Tis not by the works of righteousness That our own hands have done, But we are saved by grace alone, Abounding through the son” (Stewart, 210).

This theology exists. It understands the black struggle, it understands the woman’s struggle. We preach about unending grace, but there are members within our congregation who cannot even grasp this power because their place in scripture isn’t defined by our current theology. To preach about this theology is to involve all Christians, despite color, despite gender, and despite class. To give God a place in everyone’s heart is to understand a difference between us, between our struggles and experiences, and to preach about it. Investing in the womanist theology is our gift. It is the gift for our benevolent and merging congregation.

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Finding Hope in the In-Between

Kye Hobart, Wichita, Kansas

In many situations, it may seem easiest to think according to the binary, according to the simple black and white thoughts. This is how many people used to think about social and political issues, and many people still do. People think that an issue must go one way or another, that there can be no compromise or mix of the two sides. Thinking between or outside of the two sides would be a form of hybridity, a topic discussed in the Theology class taught by Professor Mary Lowe during the Augsburg College Youth Theological Institute. According to Patrick Cheng, who discusses hybridity in accordance with “queer incarnation” in *Queering Christianity: Finding a Place at the Table for LGBTQI Christians*, “Hybridity refers to the middle or third space between two binary poles” (52). In this essay, I will discuss three examples of hybridity that we experience in our world and in Christianity. Queer people, Jesus, and Holy Communion all exist in areas beyond the binary. That is, they live between two categories or ideas. I will be talking specifically about queer people who identify with sexualities or gender identities other than the binary, people who are not straight or gay, cisgender or transgender. Since all three – queer people, Jesus, and Holy Communion – share the commonality of living in hybridity, queer people can find hope in the hybridity of Jesus, and experience comfort through the physical representation of hybridity in Holy Communion.

People of queer sexualities and gender identities can live in a state of hybridity in several different ways. Some queer people live between the binaries of straight and gay, or male and female. They may identify with a sexuality or gender that is somewhere between or outside of the binary sexualities and gender identities. Queer people who identify with a sexuality or gender identity beyond the binary challenge the restraints of the binary that often force people to be “either or”. Society as a whole is the biggest enforcer of binary poles, telling individuals that they must be on one side or the other of a spectrum. By challenging the binary and living in hybridity, queer people can push back on the limitations society has set and enforced for so long. Queer people also embody hybridity in the way that they may challenge “the false binaries of sexuality and spirituality” (Cheng, 59). Not all people who identify with the same sexuality are of the same religious beliefs, nor do all people of a certain religion identify with one sexuality. Queer people of faith are an example of hybridity where sexuality and spirituality intersect. Therefore, many queer people constantly live in the in-between, with a mixture of identities, rather than identifying with solely one identity or another. By living outside of the binary, queer people of faith have many gifts to offer to both the larger church and the world. In being both queer and a person of faith, they may have experiences and ideas to share that other people could not bring to the table. Those who live in the in-between should be celebrated and supported, rather than being criticized or suppressed.

Hybridity can also be found in the incarnation of Jesus Christ. Jesus lives between the binaries of being human and being divine. Instead of being one or the other, or being half and half, Jesus is both divine and human “without confusion or change, [and] without division or separation” (Donald Davis qtd. by Cheng). Jesus came to the earth as one hybrid being so that humans may be set free from their sins and enveloped in the love of God. The complexity of Jesus’ state as a hybrid “threatens the powers and principalities of Jesus’ time, and it results in his torture and execution” (Cheng, 59). Queer people who embody hybridity have faced similar reactions fueled by fear of the unknown that lead to actions of hatred, including verbal threats and intimidation, as well as physical abuse that has even led to death for some queer people. As shown by both Jesus and queer people who live beyond the binary, people often react harshly and negatively to that with which they are unfamiliar.

Aside from relating to Jesus’ hybridity, some queer people identify with the full embodiment of Christ. Some believe that Jesus, taking on human flesh, was a sexual being, and possibly homosexual. Some transgender people identify with the resurrected Christ, connecting Jesus’ resurrected body to that

of a transgender person who has had gender reassignment surgery. Others take on the incarnation to mean that “we bear Christ within us – the part of God that is instilled in us to bring forth from ourselves the offspring of Christ-ness” (Bohache, 28). Overall, queer people can find hope in both the hybridity and incarnation of Jesus Christ. Both queer people of faith and queer people who do not identify with one sexuality or gender binary, can relate to Jesus in that he was also a hybrid who lived outside of the binary despite how society treated him. Hope can be found in the idea that Jesus is just like some queer people in that they both live lives of hybridity, and that Jesus received God’s love because of his hybridity. The incarnation brings hope through the idea that Jesus was human like we are. Jesus’ hybridity was a gift, just as the hybridity of queer people is, showing that living in between the binary, though often condemned by society, is something to be proud of.

Lastly, the Lutheran understanding of communion, through the idea of consubstantiation, makes communion a source of hybridity. According to the Columbia Electronic Encyclopedia, consubstantiation represents the idea that “there is a change by which the body and blood of Christ join with the bread and wine” (Q1, 1). To Lutherans, the Eucharist is not bread and wine or body and blood. The Eucharist does not transform from bread and wine to body and blood. Instead, as Martin Luther asserts, Christ is in, with, and under the bread and wine. The two categories coexist, rather than requiring that the Eucharist fall under one category or another. As they may find hope in the hybridity of Jesus, queer people can find comfort in the hybridity of communion. In the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, communion is a time where all are welcome to receive the body and blood of Christ. It is a time where all may find God’s love and acceptance. Regardless of whether one lives a life of hybridity, communion is an often weekly gift of hybridity that all may receive.

Though it may not be an obvious commonality, queer people, Jesus, and communion are all connected by the notion of hybridity and the idea that hybridity applies to each of them. All three live somewhere in between or outside of two binaries. Some queer people identify with sexualities other than straight or gay, and some queer people identify with genders other than male and female. Queer people of faith also live lives of hybridity, as their spirituality and sexuality are not mutually exclusive parts of them. Jesus was a living example of hybridity through the incarnation, when he lived as someone who was both fully human and fully divine. Lastly, the Lutheran tradition of consubstantiation leaves the Eucharist to embody hybridity in the way that it is both body and bread, both blood and wine. By looking to Jesus’ experiences as a human form of hybridity, and experiencing the hybridity of communion as a place of safety, queer people can embrace their hybridity and celebrate it for the gift that it is.

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God's Empathetic Being through Christ's Humanity

Elizabeth Hoversten, Viroqua, WI

I am a seventeen year old vocal Christian youth, and I am proud to be so. I believe and stand up for these beliefs publicly. I believe in a loving all accepting God; unfortunately many people take religion at face value. I am always nervous around new people because I don't want them thinking that I am the stereotype "Christian" who is a queer hating, insensitive, racist. I recognize that this is harsh and not the truth for all Christians but in the current climate this is the dominant perception of what a Christian believes. I am an accepting person who loves my friends. I recently made a friend who is making the transition from female to male and I really enjoyed being friends with this person. They however did not know how involved I am in the church and after a certain point I was still scared to tell them because I was afraid that they might think that I didn't love them for who they are and be there to support them. Sometimes in life we don't get to decide when to tell people things; one of my other friends, not knowing my fear, started talking about my involvement in the church in front of them. It turned out that I had nothing to worry about because by then they knew that I was not the stereotype, but that's not the point. The point is that the fear was there to begin with. My faith stands with those who feel hate or rejection for who they are, but my faith can say more, do more, and be more.

Genesis 1:27 states "So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them" (NIV). God created human beings in order that God's reflection could be seen and known. Genesis continues "For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." (Genesis 3:5, NIV). "Human beings abused free will by eating the fruit from the tree of life distancing their emotional, mental and physical connection to God even more. Thus, God sent Christ into the world to better understand and connect with humankind. Therefore, the humanity of Christ includes the experience of people who are black, queer, and disabled. In other words, God is black, queer and disabled through the empathetic emotional experience in Christ.

Christ experienced what it was like to be truly human while on earth, therefore, he experienced what it was like to be an outcast; in other words a social, ethnic, emotional minority. God created all things to be just how they are, and therefore does not understand the view of anything as imperfect. The Concise Dictionary of Christian Theology defines God as: "The absolute completeness and fullness of God. He does not lack anything or have any moral imperfection" (Erickson).

Christ as a human being understood the concept of imperfection, temptation and sin. He experienced pain by being exiled, and was hated for who he knew he was. Because Christ is joined to God, God understands the true, complete human experience. God aches for those who are put to shame for who they were made to be. God wants to liberate us from this pain, and create a more just society.

Our God is now fighting through us to defeat all oppression; he is a liberating Lord. This has not always been the thought, to many the Lord was an oppressive lord who put people where they needed to be. Through Christ's experience we find that God is focusing on those who are in the most need. He teaches and lives out that - through suffering in life on earth one will reap their reward in heaven. God does not intend suffering to happen, but it is through the circumstances of humanity that suffering does occur. We are called as Christians to reach out to those who are not in the position of power, to step back and let them have a voice, in this sense God understands the feeling of not being heard. Luke 16:28-29 the rich man says, "'for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.'" Abraham replied, "They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them" (NIV). God experienced the pain and agony of being persecuted, and therefore understands the absolute pain of hatred from one's neighbor and the rejection that represents.

God experienced what it was to be thrown to the side and to live in fear of being murdered for who he was and what he could not change. God's existence within the experience of humans is very

emotional because people are more than physical beings alone. God must get much of their connection to the expanse of human emotion from what they felt through Jesus. By this God must understand what it is to live in the modern black experience. God understands the pain of being waved to and smiled at in the daylight but then being spit on in the dark. The idea of symbolism is used for both pain and liberation in the crucifixion of Christ. We all now wear the cross around our necks as a sign of repentance of our sins. The same cross is also a symbol of the injustice toward people of color. Symbol is defined as “something which is itself, yet stands for, suggests, or means something else by reason of relationship, association, convention, or accidental relationship” (Olderr). The cross has often been symbolic of the sacrifice that Jesus went through and has also evolved into a sign of peace and of hope. In this way God inspires hope for a better life after and a more just future. Jesus lived in an imperfect world and felt what it was to lose life and love.

God sent his only son into the world in order that God could better understand what had become of creation. Jesus spent time with all people and in order to become truly human he must have experienced what it was like to love. He viewed the world from the masculine perspective but was also empathetic to females. His empathy is shown by his communication with the female perspective and in the fact that he had female disciples. Jesus loved all his disciples and this is shown in John 13:34 “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another” (NIV). Jesus loved greatly, and Jesus loved all, therefore he loved unusually. He did not ask permission for this love and he did not feel as though he needed approval to love how he loved, in fact he asked us to do the same. Jesus loved as God loves and no one questions God's love. God loves despite all the wrong we have done and despite how we persecute people for their perceived inadequacies.

We as humans are full of inadequacies both perceived and literal. God sees our inadequacies as gifts and things to be celebrated. We are shown this by example. Jesus was sinless but he still was not considered the ideal by his human followers and those who saw him in life. He started out as a sure, strong faith-filled human and biblically we can read how his opinions change. After Jesus's crucifixion he returns with his wounds as a sign of hope and strength in belief. Christ got his wounds from his suffering on the cross. When he returned as truly human his scars stayed with him showing that they are a part of who he is. This shows that he was proud and not ashamed of his physical difference. God worked through Jesus to see humanity in all its ways.

God lives our lives through his experience in Christ. Christ lived a truly extraordinary human experience. He had a calling to live his life to the fullest extent that one could. He loved so much, felt so much, and was so much. God lives all of this with Christ and is still living it out today. He calls us to love and accept all so that we can all experience equality. God is more connected to those who are considered the outsider due to the fact that this is how Christ experienced life. He had an isolated societal experience, he had vast love for everyone despite it not being considered normal, and he wore his physical differences as a sign of who he was meant to be. In all the ways God can experience it, God is black, queer and disabled.

I came to the Augsburg College Youth Theology Institute to try to learn how to be stronger in my faith. I needed to learn how to let my belief shine to those who need love the most. It has been many weeks since I left and I have remained in a state of radiant faith, not just because of what I learned from the amazing professors but also in the outstanding peers that I met. I often feel so alone in my faith and beliefs. I am still afraid that people who often are put to shame for who they are may perceive that it is my faith doing the persecuting. My faith is not a damning faith, it is an uplifting, liberating, loving and infinite faith. Being around so many people who are so firm in what they believe inspires me to do better. My God loves all us for who we were meant to be and will always support us. My fear of my faith has been dulled by the light of a loving community and I will continue to carry it and share it with others.

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Gender Roles Within the Bible

Jade Gerlach, Farmington, MN

The difference between the traditional roles of men and women in the bible are the expectations, like that women were expected to bear children and work within the home. Meanwhile men were expected to provide and work. Some jobs are even segregated by gender, being a pastor for example, is typically a “man’s job”. Even emotions are separated by gender, with women appearing to be more emotional even in today’s times. These gender roles, supported by many interpretations of many bible verses affect not only the Christian community, but the way the entire world functions today. While some of these expectations have been forgotten or replaced, many still hold very true.

“But I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man, but to remain quiet for it was Adam who was first created, and then Eve” (1 Timothy 2:12-13, NIV). This verse supports an idea that men are automatically above women, especially when it comes to holding positions of authority. It affects not just the church, but also things like politics, an opinion that men are better leaders simply because they are men can hurt a woman’s chances at holding an authoritative title. But many people forget that the bible also made women because men couldn’t be on their own. In Genesis 2:18, “The LORD God said, ‘It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him’” (NIV). This verse stands to support the case that as much as women need men in this world, it also works the other way around, with men needing women as well. The easiest example to come to mind is the ability to have children, something unable to happen naturally without both a man and a woman.

One of the most common conceptions of men and women is that men are stronger, better with labor excessive jobs, and able to handle more physically. This is supported by the verse 1 Peter 3:7: “Likewise, husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way, showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel, since they are heirs with you of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered” (NIV). It is a very common practice for women to be discouraged from physically exhausting jobs or careers. A career field that includes less than 25% of their total employee count as female is classified as a nontraditional job for women, according to the United States Department of Labor. These jobs include most construction jobs, as well as STEM based and public safety fields. The opposite of nontraditional jobs for women are just what they sound like, jobs that are dominated by women, identified by women being 75% or more of the total employment. These include most child based careers, such as elementary teachers, childcare workers, and pediatric nurses. More emotional job such as therapists are also included in this list.

“Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted”(Matthew 5:4, NIV). Emotions tend to be a difficult thing to understand for many people. It is assumed by many people today that women are more emotional, better equipped to deal with emotions, and that they also act on their actions more than men. This has led to a world where men aren’t open to express feelings like remorse and grief, and it is more often seen as a woman’s job to grieve. However, this is one point that the Bible doesn’t segregate emotions to one gender, even if people tend to. All throughout the bible there are stories of loss, sorrow, and grief. In many of these stories and verses the theme is God being bigger than grief and sorrow, and to be able put sorrows onto him.

“Surely, he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all” (Isaiah 53:4-6, NIV).

These interpretations help to further solidify the difference between men's and women's roles in the world today, and they all stem from verses of the bible. But every interpretation of the bible can be different. While one person may interpret all the verses in this paper as a reason to believe men are above women for some reason, or that men are stronger than women, someone else may interpret them to say that Genesis 2:18 says that women were not created to serve men, but rather so they may help each other thrive. 1 Peter 3:7 may be interpreted as women being the weaker sex, but it may also be interpreted as a calling, to understand that biologically women may be generally weaker but they are still to be honored as Gods children.

The world today may have changed quite a bit from biblical times; new technology, new understandings of human behavior, and new interpretations of bible verses. Arguably one of the most important advances has been the interpretation of the bible. As I learned from the bible class at the Augsburg Youth Theology Institute taught by Eric Barreto, interpretation is a personal thing done by a community. No one person can really say what a bible verse means or was intended to mean on their own. With assumed interpretations, the most common interpretations are what have led to many gender roles being imposed still today, along with other environmental factors playing a role. In all, gender roles aren't disappearing anytime soon, with less than 25% of construction workers being women, and less than 25% of elementary teachers and therapists being men, but the first step to breaking down the barrier that gender roles have created is understanding where they came from and what makes them arbitrary to have to follow.

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Everyone's Story Is Eunuch In Their Own Special Way

Ollie Kalthoff, Mahtomedi, MN

“This is the body God gave you; He made you this way for a reason.” This is the argument many transphobic Christians use against transgender and genderqueer people. From my week at the Augsburg College Youth Theology Institute learning about different theologies, I became interested in queer theologies, more specifically, how transgender and genderqueer people fit into God's Mosaic. I found that the Christian faith can be inclusive and supportive of transgender and genderqueer people.

There is only one passage, in the Bible that could be perceived as God showing disapproval of transgender or genderqueer people. Deuteronomy 22:5 states, “Women must not wear men's clothes, and men must not wear women's clothes. Everyone who does such things is detestable to the Lord your God” (NIV). This passage poses an issue of interpretation. This passage could be insignificant, considering the difference in clothing between men and women, at the time, was often blurred. Then there is the argument that if a transgender male were to dress in clothes made for men, he would be following the rules of this passage. If this trans male were to dress in clothes made for women then he would be disobeying this passage and the word of God. This passage, however, remains the only one in the Bible that could be perceived as God being anti- transgender or genderqueer.

Now, there is a term used throughout the Bible: eunuch. The modern equivalent of the term eunuch is “not of the same gender you were identified as at birth” or, more simply, transgender or genderqueer. Transphobic Christians think Jesus isn't happy with someone changing what God worked so hard to make perfect in His eye, however, “Jesus replied, “Not everyone can accept this word, but only those to whom it has been given. For there are eunuchs who were born that way, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by others—and there are those who choose to live like eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. The one who can accept this should accept it” (Matthew 19:11-12, NIV). This passage shows Jesus, the voice of God, accepting and supporting eunuchs, or, in our words, transgender and genderqueer people. God is willing to love eunuchs as He loves any of this other children.

And this isn't the only mention of eunuchs. Another passage, Isaiah 56:4-5, reads, “For thus saith the Lord unto the eunuchs that keep my sabbaths, and choose the things that please me, and take hold of my covenant; Even unto them will I give in mine house and within my walls a place and a name better than of sons and of daughters: I will give them an everlasting name, that shall not be cut off” (NIV). This passage displays, yet again, the Lord's acceptance of eunuchs into his covenant. It also shows his willingness to give them a name better than the one they were given. This name giving shows His acceptance to use a name that fits better with the gender the eunuch might identify with, helping these eunuchs transition to feel more comfortable in their skin. This passage is one of the many accounts of God and His people showing love and support for eunuchs.

Throughout the Bible, eunuchs are, almost consistently, accepted into the covenant of God. Reverend Lawrence Richardson, points out, “To honor God fully with our lives requires the balance between our mind, soul and body, and this balance can only happen through and in the Spirit.” Transgender and genderqueer people are born into a body they do not feel comfortable in. Their attempts to feel comfortable in their own skin are a way of finding balance between their mind, soul, and body so they can worship God as their true self, not as someone they are told to be. The love and power of God can help them to feel comfortable in their own skin and move on to worship God and be His hands while at peace with themselves.

Transgender and genderqueer people can and should be accepted by God and His people. The exclusion of transgender and genderqueer people from the church is harmful to both the person and the

word of God. After all, the word of God isn't hate, discrimination, or exclusion; the word of God is love, acceptance, and caring for ALL.

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Effects of Police Brutality and the Bible

Madeline Kearney, Farmington, MN

In the past seven months, 568 people have been shot and killed by police officers. Two hundred thirty nine were White, 121 were Black, 89 were Hispanic, 18 were of different races and 101 victims' ethnicities are unknown. To understand diversity it is first necessary to open your eyes and take a moment to see the world around you. Recent events of police brutality are creating a fear of diversity in our world today.

Diversity is defined as "The inclusion of individuals representing more than one national origin, color, religion, socioeconomic stratum, sexual orientation" (Dictionary). To shorten this up it means appreciating others differences and looking past them. In the Bible, it is mentioned many times to learn to love your neighbor. How can we love our neighbor when our neighbor is the one hurting others? "The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these." (Mark 12:31, NIV). God creates diversity in the story of The Tower of Babel. "Come, let us go down and confuse their language so they will not understand each other." So the Lord scattered them from there over all the earth, and they stopped building the city" (Genesis 11:7-8, NIV). The story at first seems to give a negative idea about diversity, but in reality this is God creating it. This is the Lord making everyone different in their own way, for a reason.

Police brutality is related to abuse of power. Not all police officers are at fault, but in any job field, there are always the ones who do wrong. Police are more in the spotlight because their job has to do with the general public. All minorities are affected by the consequences of brutality. Other minorities are often ignored because of Black Lives Matter movements causing more media focus on them. Not to say it is a bad thing, more minorities just need to be recognized. "Give justice to the weak and the fatherless; maintain the right of the afflicted and the destitute. Rescue the weak and the needy, deliver them from the hand of the wicked" (Psalm 82:3-4, ESV). In the Bible, God tells us to help the people in need. This verse is specifically directed towards those in authority.

Police brutality is creating a new fear of diversity. Citizens that aren't a part of a minority automatically assume the worst when they see or hear things in the news or online. Assumptions are made and can be aimed towards certain races especially from more conservative or racist individuals. Race and diversity is typically a touchy subject and can cause controversy, but it is important to talk about it.

"Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval, for he is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer. Therefore one must be in subjection, not only to avoid God's wrath but also for the sake of conscience" (Romans 13:1-14 ESV).

This bible quote is talking about how everyone used as a governing authority is appointed by God. The verse also says that if you do good you should have no fear. How can we have no fear even when those who do good are being killed? Fear from authority creates respect even when those being wrongfully accused are scared for their lives. On July 6, 2015 Philando Castile was shot and killed by a white police officer. When he was being shot his girlfriend next to him in the car was still being respectful to the officer as her boyfriend died in front of her and their daughter. The girlfriend, Diamond Reynolds, still addressed the shooter as 'sir' even in the moment. She posted a video on her Facebook and it gained

attention quickly. In 2017 the trial occurred and the officer came out with no charges. To realize that this could all be because of some naivety having to do with racism or because of abuse of power is shocking.

In conclusion, police brutality is creating a fear of diversity in our world today. Even the Bible tells us that we should love everyone and that those in authority are there to do Gods work.

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What I Take Away From My Week at Augsburg College

Dawson Mangels, Billings, MT

I was first told about Augsburg College's Youth Theology Institute by a recent graduate of Augsburg College. The idea of spending a week in Minneapolis to attend college-style classes focused on the Bible and how this ancient series of books impact our modern world really intrigued me. Some months later, when the topic of ACYTI came up again, I was told by this same graduate that I would receive my church's nomination to be able to attend. I was excited, because now I realized that this program could help me learn about how I can appreciate the diversity of God's people on a daily basis. At Augsburg College, I, along with several other youth from around the country, received eight lectures over the course of four days. From those eight lectures, I found three points that stand out from the rest. In this paper, I will evaluate these three major points that I take away from this year's Augsburg College Youth Theology Institute.

The first of these three topics deals with Black Theology and the symbols of the cross and the lynching tree. Black Theology can be based around the lynching tree, a symbol of racism and an attempt of a majority group (whites) to control a minority group (blacks). In that sense, the cross can be seen as a first century lynching tree. James Cone explores the connections between the two in his book, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*. In his introduction, Cone says, "The cross and the lynching tree are separated by nearly 2,000 years... Though both are symbols of death, one represents a message of hope and salvation, while the other signifies the negation of that message by white supremacy" (Cone, 9). This negation, or silencing effect, that Cone speaks about results in the warping and further difficulties with an African American's faith. "White supremacy tears faith to pieces and turns the heart away from God" (Cone, 10).

Despite all of this oppression through death (whether physically or spiritually), there is hope to be found. The cross can liberate the powerful and the powerless from systems of domination. Cone shares this hope by stating, "No gulf between blacks and whites is too great to overcome, for our beauty is more enduring than our brutality. What God joined together, no one can tear apart" (Cone, 11). This hope of a togetherness between blacks and whites is one of the driving forces of Black Theology, and it all comes from the cross and the lynching tree.

The next important topic is that differing privileges give us all a different starting point in life. These differing privileges can come from our unearned assets, or the privileges we are born with. To use myself as an example, I was born a cisgender male into a white, middle class family and was brought up Lutheran. I did not do anything to earn these assets, yet by just being born into this situation, I would have a head start over individuals who are, say, not white or of the Christian faith. Our group did an activity called 'The Race to College Admission,' where Dr. Pippert told us varying circumstances. If a particular circumstance applied to us, we got to take a step forward. Even before any personal accomplishments were mentioned, there was a great disparity of where individuals stood in that field. Some were over halfway to the tree that marked the finish, while others had barely moved off the sidewalk that we had all started on. This visual representation drives the point home about how people are put at advantages and disadvantages simply because of what they were born into.

Another thing that comes along with differing starting points in life is that the advantage some people start out with continues to help them out even after they are born. This can be summed up through accumulated advantage, in which a well off person at birth is given resources throughout their life which builds upon the advantage they already enjoy over one who is worse off. To help visualize this difference, imagine a graph where there are two points at zero on the x-axis, but one point is higher than the other. After experiencing accumulated advantage, the higher point continues to grow exponentially, while the lower point is only able to continue to grow linearly. At this rate, the higher point will always be ahead of the lower point. The differing, unearned privileges we get at birth, combined with accumulated advantage,

heavily impact our abilities to be successful in life. By acknowledging that these differences exist, we can better understand why certain groups of people find themselves in certain situations.

The final of these three topics is Queer Theology, which is focused solely on the fact that those within the LGBTQIA community are legitimate as Christians and, more importantly, as human beings. Traditionally, the Bible has been used to attack those within this group, with passages such as Genesis 19:1-29 (NRSV), where Sodom and Gomorrah are destroyed, and in Leviticus 18:22, where it plainly says, “You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination,” heading the attack. If you are a part of the 31% of Americans who read the Bible literally (Lowe), this is all of the evidence you would ever need. However, by plainly reading the Bible, you can fail to see the big picture, because the Bible is not a buffet where you can pick out the verses that suit you. For example, Leviticus also states that pigs and any sea creature that does not have fins and scales, like lobster and shrimp, are detestable (Leviticus 11), and no-one ever fears of another person telling them saying that eating a pulled pork sandwich is a one-way ticket to Hell. Another example, this time dealing with sexual relationships, is that polyamorous relationships are not shown in a negative light in the Bible, as one can see with Jacob in Genesis 32. Jacob sends his two wives ahead of him before wrestling and getting blessed by God. Today, polyamory is not acceptable in culture and is illegal in the United States. For example, in Montana, bigamy can get you six months in prison! (FindLaw.com). The instances of pork and polyamory show that our society has changed since the times of the Bible, yet at the same time the perspective of homosexuality within the Bible has not changed.

This topic of homosexuality and the Church has become a prevalent issue recently. My home church of Atonement Lutheran is having conversations that may change our wedding policy, which will either accept or deny same sex marriages within our church building. There has been no church-wide meeting on this policy change, yet I have heard of people threatening to leave if it is even brought up and of a council member leaving in the middle of a meeting after a heated argument over this topic. I fear we will miss an opportunity to share the affirming message of the Bible, a message where all people, no matter what minority group they may be in, are seen as legitimate and can be accepted within the church.

I have continued to have lasting interest on these three topics of Black Theology, the differing advantages we have at birth, and Queer Theology, even one month after learning about them for the first time. These topics have helped to explain the world around me and have reminded me of the hope that is found in a liberating Jesus, especially for people within minority groups. My sincerest hope is that one day no one will have the fear of being an outcast or feel the need to fit into the constraints of society, especially those who find themselves as a minority, and that they will feel the boundless love of God.

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But Where Does That Leave Us?

William Mauck, Vancouver, WA

Forgive me friends, for I am about to sin; I hate Martin Luther. But, as a person entrenched in the Lutheran faith I have spent most of my Sunday mornings getting lectures from behind a pulpit about his legacy and teachings. When I was young, I thought he was a superhero. I mean, he fought an evil empire and had cool catch phrases like “Here I stand”. Strong, defiant, a superhero like no other. But, then I grew up a bit and learned about his bluntly named novel, “The Jews and Their Lies” and suddenly Luther seemed to shed his superhero status and become a simple philosopher, important yes, but inarguably flawed. As such, I have grown to detest the all the time allotted to him in essays and sermons alike. Therefore, I would like to turn your attention toward a quite different antiquated German philosopher, Georg Hegel. Hegel is by no means a household name but his school of philosophy, Hegelianism, has quite a bit to teach us.

Hegelianism is a simple philosophical doctrine; when there are two different ideas you must compare them to find a balance between the two of them. Or, the more poetic form of this belief is the tripartite motto, Thesis; Antithesis; Synthesis (Rossi). Through Hegel’s model we can find an equilibrium that may serve to bridge the gap between traditionally white protestant ways of reading different scriptures as dictated by Luther and his followers and the more holistic Latinx, African American, and LGBTQ interpretations.

To begin with, there is the disconnect between some Latinx theologians and traditional white protestant interpretations of the parable given by Jesus in Matthew 20:1-16. For those unfamiliar with the parable in question, it concerns a landowner who every couple hours throughout the day would go to town to hire out more and more laborers for his vineyard. Then, that evening the landowner paid all of his workers an entire day’s wages instead of corresponding to the hours they worked (New Revised Standard Version, Matt. 20:1-16). Now, for most affluent people, this story evokes the sense that this is fundamentally unfair, as the men who were hired at the end of the day only worked a few hours, while those hired earlier worked for an entire day. But, they were all paid the same. As such, traditional protestant authors might argue that “God’s grace is above justice” (Gonzalez, 64). However, Justo Gonzalez further states that in communities of transient laborers the interpretation is different. He says,

“The landowners act in paying them a full day’s wage is not a show of a grace that goes against justice but rather of a grace that understands justice at a deeper level than is customary. The landowner pays them what they justly need and what they justly deserve, not what society, with its twisted understanding of justice would pay them” (Gonzalez, 64).

That is, God’s grace is not more forgiving than ours, God’s justice is more rich and inclusive than ours. But, where does that leave us, who are caught in the middle of this ideological dissonance? The synthesis here may be that God’s grace is a more profound justice than any we mortals might make for ourselves. Therefore, the intersection between these two contrasting interpretations is that God’s grace is justice. Therefore, God is not above justice, God’s gift to us, as told by Jesus in this parable, is that of a graceful sense of justice wherein all people who need God’s grace are given it, justly. But, this leads into the discussion of what happens when God’s scriptures are devoid of God’s justice as exemplified in the apostle Paul.

The apostle Paul has a checkered history within the church to say the least but more poignantly among African-American communities. This is because Paul’s letters have been used to justify slavery. Paul’s poor stances on human rights are best exemplified in his letter to the Ephesians here, “Slaves, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, in singleness of the heart as you obey Jesus; not only while being watched to, and in order to free them, but as slaves of Christ doing the will of God from the heart” (Eph. 6:5, NRSV). Therefore, justifiably enough, some African-Americans steer clear of this hellish apostle, no matter the context. This is exemplified best in Howard Thurman’s story about how his

grandmother would refuse to even listen to him read texts written by Paul (Thurman, 30). This is because, as Thurman explains, she had been a slave and such nonsense as her wonderful grandson reading to her the dictum that had allowed her to become a slave was inconceivable (Thurman, 31). Whereas, on the white side of Protestantism, there is the sermon about these passages allowing slavery that most folks have heard. Notably summarized, by the comedian Bo Burnham:

"When god, in verse 45, said that slaves are okay to buy,
He meant that people, all from the start
Each have slaves within their hearts.
God calls us to set these free, free our hearts from slavery...
And then as god goes on to explain the logistics of buying and selling slaves...
Uh, He—ju—the Bible's sorta like...It's like, typos... didn't... exist"

But, where does that leave us? On one hand, we have the belief that Paul is irredeemable and on the other that we are to dismiss his problematic writings as being horrifying metaphors. The synthesis to this problem may be that Paul's writings must be taught truthfully, so that we all may realize the problematic nature of faith, from time to time. However, regardless of color, it is sometimes necessary to soothe a person, particularly children, by explaining that these passages condemning people to lives fraught with pain and suffering are simply metaphors because "If the purpose of the gospel is to spread good news, then anything that would make a person upset is, obviously, not the gospel." (Jeremy Myers). And, fundamentally, the purpose of sharing one's faith as a Christian is to share the gospel and nothing less.

Much like Paul's letters, the story of Genesis 18-19 has often been used as a tool of oppression against LGBT individuals. This story, for those not acquainted, is that of Sodom and Gomorrah in which two angels disguised as ordinary men go to the city of Sodom and receive lodging with a kind man, Lot, and his family. But, as soon as night falls "[T]he men of the city, the men of Sodom, both young and old, all the people to the last man, surrounded the house; and they called to Lot, "Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us, so that we may know them.' (Gen. 19. 4-5, NRSV)". The use of 'know them' is commonly translated as being a euphemism for rape (Coogan, 36). Later, Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed for this affront to angels and to God. This passage is traditionally used to condemn gay relationships as this story prominently features men coming to have sex with other men. However, Patrick Cheng disagrees stating "[T]he ancient Sodomites were punished by God for far greater sins: for attempted gang rape, for mob violence, and for turning their backs on strangers". Cheng states this because even if the men of Sodom were gay, they were also rapists and this was and still is an incredible breach of hospitality and this is what the people of Sodom were punished for. But, where does that leave us? We may find synthesis in the fallibility of the bible. That is, if Sodom's destruction is genuinely a condemnation of LGBT people, we can find solace in the fact that the Bible was written by humans thousands of years ago. The bible isn't God's words, it's our own. As such, we may find from time to time, much like the reprinting of an old book, we must change our words and develop a new way of thinking about a book. Therefore, we can change the way we interpret why Sodom was destroyed. We know it was not for homosexuality and can instead adopt a more liberated stance on love and condemn those men, not as homosexuals, but rapists of the most vile kind. And, we ought to do this because as Jesus stated "I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another" (John 13:34, NRSV).

Through Hegel's system of analysis by thesis, antithesis, and synthesis we could potentially remedy the idea that there is only a single correct way of reading scripture. It can do this so long as the people who do it attempt to find a solution that is amiable to both parties involved. But, this brings us back to Luther, whose book "The Jews and Their Lies" is amiable to no one. With this method, we can kick his sorry butt to the curb and read scripture based on a more inclusive perspective; a perspective that includes the struggles of minority groups. To answer my question where does that leave us? Well, it leaves us here. To begin a new chapter of inclusive biblical analysis through synthesis.

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Cultural Mixing with Theology

Peter Mckenzie, Mendota Heights, MN

“Let your speech be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how to answer each other and everyone” (Colossians 4:6, ESV). During my time spent at Augsburg College, I learned a lot about the different aspects of having diversity in our communities, as well as the importance of diversity of culture in the church today. This verse from the story of the ‘Tower of Babel’, signifies God’s word of how different language and different cultures can interpret the Lord’s word, and how that affects our differences in our theological ideologies, in our aspirations to find the answers to his word.

This concept of Ethnic and religious diversity and mixing in a community, actually to me has a very similar to the story of Pentecost in the Bible. In Acts 2: 2-6, scripture says,

“When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.” (Acts 2: 2-6, ESV)

This is a very special time in the Bible when the disciples and other Christians received the Holy Spirit. Pentecost occurred 50 days after Easter Sunday or 50 days after Jesus rose from the dead. Jesus had already gone back to Heaven so the disciples and new believers of Jesus were waiting to receive the Holy Spirit because that's what Jesus told them would happen. The Holy Spirit being the third person of the Trinity, the Triune God manifested as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; each person itself being God. He then becomes a part of us when we become a Christian and understand that Jesus died and rose for us. The day of Pentecost was a bit different though. People had already become Christians but the Holy Spirit wasn't a part of them yet. This would be the first time everyone who was a Christian would receive the Holy Spirit. The disciples and other Christians had come together to thank God and suddenly a sound like the blowing of a strong wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. Next they saw tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. I'm not sure if they could see the tongues of fire or if it's how the people could explain what they felt happening. When the tongues of fire came, they were filled with the Holy Spirit and began speaking in different languages. It says that there were people of many different nationalities staying in Jerusalem from all over and many of them speaking different languages. These people ran over to see what all the noise was about and were surprised to hear their own languages spoken throughout this group. The Bible even lists up to 16 different places people were from and could hear their language spoken. The story of Pentecost symbolizes our society today; that we speak the scriptures in many different variety of ways, through cultural and interpretation differences. But through uncovering our differences we have in our theology, we can see that we believe in very similar ways towards our faith in God.

Even in the church today, it seems that the people fear that different religions would affect their impact and status in the community, as well as the survival of their beliefs. However, this is changing in many communities, such as our very own communities as well. In a StarTribune article ‘TriFaith July 4’, it says, “‘We’ve created this as a public demonstration that these three faiths can work together,’ said Ruth Anne Olson, an organizer from St. James, which is exploring a renovation of its building to house a center for religious leaders to cooperate closely on community and faith issues.” The article explains this event on the Fourth of July, as a way of coming together as a community and sharing our cultural and religious differences. It’s a way of representing how even though, we come from a variety of backgrounds and ethnicities, we still come together as a nation, which is based on liberty and freedom. This is essential to understand as the church, because in order to survive as a church, it is necessary to be open to others in the church so more people feel more welcome to join.

There were many topics that drove home in my thought processing during my time at Augsburg, but this one I was the most compassionate about. Throughout my daily life I see many different people from many different backgrounds, and there is no possible way to profile that person by their appearance. However it seems to be that people are segregated in the community depending on where you live and your financial status. This also causes people to think they are higher status than others based on their profiling. My church is St. Stephens Lutheran Church, and is located on the borders of West St. Paul and Mendota Heights. I live in Mendota Heights, which is majority white, more financially secure people. However, West St. Paul is a more diverse area, and financially I would say would be less fortunate as the people in Mendota Heights. But since these two areas are so close to one another, they would be considered one community, meaning we share many things such as schools, stores, parks, and places in the community that we all share.

Growing up I started to realize this profiling of people based on their background and social merit. I met people who have had harder lives than I have, and I became friends with these people, and started to understand these people who were not like me. I have realized how important this has been to me, because more different aspects to problems in our life, gives us more views to deal with it. However, I have realized my church is majority white, and diversity is not such a thing in my church. I feel this is possibly due to the fact that we do not welcome our community as we should, and should be more accepting to the fact of diversity, in order to create wellness for the future of the church. Martin Luther once said, "Now the church is not wood and stone, but the company of people who believe in Christ." Church is not a simple place of religion and redemption to me, but a place and sense of community, to come together in our differences and diversity to become one in God's eyes.

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The History of Feminist Theology

Sophia Miller, Lake Elmo, MN

Feminist theology has not always been around. Although it is not a recent act, many people are not educated on it and how it started. For a battle that is still being fought today, there needs to be at least a basic understanding of how this all started. There needs to be a basic understanding of the events that took place when women realized they were being treated unfairly by their superiority, men.

The first wave of feminism changed a lot about how the church worked and how people viewed women and their importance religiously. Before the first wave, ecclesiastical authority was only in the hands of men. This only began to change when the reformation first took place. During the reformation, Martin Luther translated the bible into the German language so regular people could read the bible instead of only listening to what the male church officials had to say. Luther believed that by letting normal citizens read the bible it would inspire change and he was right. Once citizens were able to read the bible for themselves they started to see the wrongdoings that had been put before them (Kostenberger). This inspired them to stand up and assert their right to teach and preach.

Anne Hutchinson was one of the first women to speak out against the church. She ended up getting condemned for disagreeing with the Puritan orthodoxy, but she paved the way for more women to stand up for their rights both inside and outside of the church. Women much like Mary Stewart, who was the first to advance issues of gender equality and social justice in the United States. Catherine Booth, co-founder of the Salvation Army, established the Woman's Christian Temperance Union. Katharine Bushnell was the leader of the Women's Equality Bible Study. Each of these plays an important role in the forming of feminist theology (Kostenberger).

All of these women primarily used two methods of interpreting scripture. The first one being using scripture that speaks of "equality" between men and women to counter the argument of those that limited the power of women. The second method was using female characters in scripture as role models for those who wish to speak out for their beliefs. Deborah was one of these role models. She was known as a prophetess, agitator, ruler, warrior, poetess, and a maternal figure. Another was Ruth. Ruth was known as a faithful daughter-in-law, a determined convert, and a humble gleaner. The last was Esther, she was the Jewish queen of the Persian king at that time (Kostenberger).

The second wave of feminism not only changed the church, but it also extended the work of the feminist movement to the social and economic realm. This started off with women gaining the right to vote in America in 1919 (Kostenberger). After this there was little growth in the feminist movement until 1960 when America went through a major social upheaval. At that time there was an anti-establishment message and a civil rights emphasis.

The second wave also furthered feminism in the church, providing interpretations that looked at women's concerns and interests, especially with church authority. They also developed feminist theologies within already existing cultures. This included African-American "womanist" and the Hispanic *mujerista*. It also formed emerging feminist theologies from European, Latin American, and African origins (Kostenberger).

Over time three groups of feminism formed. There were radical feminists, reformist feminists, and biblical evangelical feminists "egalitarians." Radical feminists rejected the Bible and Christianity as unstable because of their male dominant bias. Instead they focused more on feminine religious experience as a key to interpretation. Reformist feminists essentially got rid of Christian tradition involving women and used the Bible to reconstruct a "proper" and "positive" theology. Lastly, evangelical feminists rejected a critical stance toward scripture (Kostenberger). They did not reject any scripture. They used all scripture to show how men and women are equal.

The third wave of feminism started sometime in the early 1990s. It took an even more radical pursuit of feminine self-realization completely removed from any guiding Christian principals. The third

wave uses Jesus and how he treated women to then come up with reasoning that women are equal to men. The third wave of feminism is still going on today. There has been no synthesis or final say on feminism. Instead there are many feminist theories and those theories are continuing to evolve still today (Kostenberger).

Not everyone will see things the same way with feminist theology. It is important that people do their own research and decide for themselves what they stand for. With that knowledge they can then stand up for what they believe in. Feminists have put their lives on the line to stand up for what they believe in (Isherwood and Athaus-Reid). Although not everyone is ready to put their life on the line they still can stand up for what they believe in and make a difference.

The fight of feminism is still going on today. When looking at it, it is important to remember that these people are coming at this from a biblical and faithful point of view. They are doing this only to strengthen their faith and to do God's work in a healthy way (Ruether). Feminist theology is a lot different than what it was 100 years ago, but is still important to look back and appreciate what others have accomplished before looking forward to see what you can do to make a change. The three waves of feminism have affected a lot of lives and have changed society in many different and spectacular ways.

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God Hates (Prada) Bags

Greyson Mize, Edina, MN

In modern day politics, Christian ethics are reflected not only in public opinions, but lawmaking as well. More specifically, the issue of gay marriage has been debated for decades upon decades, and continues to be discussed even after the Supreme Court's decision in June of 2015. Of course politicians are entitled to their own spiritual and personal views, but when it comes to the civil rights of citizens, perhaps it's not the time to whip out the trusty pocket Bible. The arguments typically come down to righteous indignation paired with a select few Bible verses intended to condemn homosexuals, most commonly originating from Leviticus, Romans, Timothy, and Corinthians. However, our own interpretations of scripture can either hinder or welcome Christian acceptance of same sex love.

It's hard to know where to start with homosexuality and the Bible. I'd be lazy to tell you every conflicting passage can be marked down to mistranslation and the author's personal opinion, but the language barrier between and English is important when analyzing scripture. During our week at the Augsburg College Youth Theology Institute (ACYTI), I learned a lot about the differences in Christian spirituality across the world. All it takes is the comparison of four different Bibles to realize the vast variety of forms the Holy Word takes in the English language alone.

The word homosexual was first used by a German reference paper on sexual perversions in 1892, and did not enter the English Bible until 1946 (Slick). Despite this, many theologians argue that the phrase *ἀρσενικοίτης* *arsenokoitēs*, referenced in Timothy, Corinthians, Leviticus, and Romans can be translated to mean a man who lies in bed with another male (Slick). However, theologian Robin Scroggs argues in his book, *The New Testament and Homosexuality*, that the phrase, and further every mention of "sexual immorality" between two men refers to pedophilia. This certainly makes sense when looking at the story of Noah and his son Ham in Genesis 9, a verse used to reject homosexuality:

"Noah, who was a farmer, was the first man to plant a vineyard. After he drank some of the wine, he became drunk, took off his clothes, and lay naked in his tent. When Ham, the father of Canaan, saw that his father was naked, he went out and told his two brothers. Then Shem and Japheth took a robe and held it behind them on their shoulders. They walked backward into the tent and covered their father, keeping their faces turned away so as not to see him naked. When Noah sobered up and learned what his youngest son had done to him, he said,

"A curse on Canaan!

He will be a slave to his brothers.

Give praise to the Lord, the God of Shem!

Canaan will be the slave of Shem.

May God cause Japheth to increase!

May his descendants live with the people of Shem!

Canaan will be the slave of Japheth." (Genesis 9:20-27, Today's English Version)

It is never fully explained why Noah reacted so violently in the way he did, but it can be assumed rape or incest was Ham's sin, neither directly relating to homosexuality.

One of the most common trends we saw in various interpretations of text in the ACYTI Bible class was that, more often than not, when people read the Bible they read what they want to read. One of the biggest examples of this was the use of Paul's letter to Philemon to justify returning runaway African American slaves to their White owners in America. Larry R. Morrison, in his paper "The Religious Defense of Slavery Before 1830," includes a South Carolinian slave master's reasoning: "All the sophistry in the world cannot get rid of this decisive example. Christianity robs no man of his rights, and Onesimus was the property of his master, under the laws of his country, which must be obeyed, if not contrary to the laws of God." (Morrison). While his statement sounds unshakably confident, I found that Paul's letter conveyed a very different message:

"So if you consider me a partner, welcome him (Onesimus) as you would welcome me. If he has done you any wrong or owes you anything, charge it to me. I, Paul, am writing this with my own hand. I will pay it back—not to mention that you owe me your very self. I do wish, brother, that I may have some benefit from you in the Lord; refresh my heart in Christ. Confident of your obedience, I write to you, knowing that you will do even more than I ask." (Philemon 1:17-21, Today's English Version)

Paul ends the letter by indicating he'd like to visit, presumably to check up on Onesimus' wellbeing. Somehow, I don't think I need a citation to say slave owners did not treat their returned slaves as they would a renowned prophet, so why was the book of Philemon such a trusted source? The truth is, anyone can take any passage and twist it to support their own agenda. This method was, and is still used to justify discrimination and injustice against God's people. However, an incriminating verse can just as easily be turned around into a new light.

One of the most common chapters that is used to "prove" that homosexuality is an abomination in the eyes of God is found in Judges 19. The beginning of the story describes a Levite man who is travelling through Gibeah with his servant and concubine who are taken in by an elderly man. In the night, the inhabitants of the town bang on the door and demand that the man open up so that they may have sex with the Levite (Judges 19:22, TEV). The old man tries to reason with his neighbors, offering them the concubine and his own virgin daughter to satisfy them, but the townspeople would not listen (Judges 19:24, TEV). So the Levite pushed his concubine out the door and the lust driven citizens raped and abused her until dawn, at which point she fell dead on the old man's doorstep (Judges 19:25-26, TEV). At the end of the chapter, the Levite takes his dead concubine and cuts her into twelve pieces, sending a piece to each of the twelve tribes of Israel. This prompts the leaders to be spurred into action, shaken by this horrible display (Judges 19:26-30, TEV).

Obviously, there's a lot to unpack in this dark story. In Biblical times concubines were women who voluntarily sold themselves to men, primarily for sexual purposes. They were seen as lesser than wives, and essentially inhabited the role of a slave (Towns). While translations vary and interpretation can change aspects of the story's meaning, it's clear the Levite's concubine was sexually assaulted, and essentially murdered. However, what isn't clear is the identity of the townspeople who committed the sin. In his paper, "Homosexuality and the Bible," Frederick E. Greenspahn comments that the phrase *'anšê hā'ir* (Judges 19:22) could refer to the general public, not specifying that the abusers were strictly men, a variable that would cancel out the condemnation of homosexuality. Similarly, the story of Sodom and Gomorrah, a widely quoted story and the origin of the word "sodomy," tells the tale of rabid townspeople who demand to rape and humiliate an unknown traveler, but are offered the host's daughters instead (Genesis 19:4-8, TEV). Looking at the two stories as a whole, their messages seem to revolve more around grievously bad hospitality and sexual assault than they do homosexuality. The gender of the travelers is not particularly emphasized or important.

Now, let's do some cherry picking ourselves. Prada bags; they're a fairly common sight, made of leather and embossed with the signature metal "PRADA" logo. You thought they were a fun novelty, a harmless accessory? Think again.

"Turn my eyes from looking at worthless things; and give me life in your ways." (Psalms 119:37, TEV)

Looking at the careful wording and meaning in this verse, it's certain the author was directly referencing purses of the Prada nature. After all, there is only one way to look at the Holy Word, and it's my way. God is begging you; put down the handbags and pick up the hand bibles. Listen to His call.

At the ACYTI our theme for the week was God's Mosaic: Diversity as Good News. Too often Christians are divided based on denomination, sexuality, race, and political beliefs. Scripture can be read millions of different ways by millions of different people, but one thing is for certain: we are all children of the Lord. Go with God, and love with God.

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The Women's March from a Christian Theological Point of View

Aurora J. Pass, Minneapolis, MN

Women are not objects, women are not inferior, and women do not belong to men. We are smart, determined, and we want and deserve to be respected. This is why on January 21st, 2017 more than 3.6 million people around the world participated in a protest for women's rights. Women *and* men marched side by side in what is said to be the largest protest in United States history. We united as one to combat inappropriate and offensive language being used to talk about women and gender stereotypes that are still here despite the people trying to cover them up. I marched on January 21st because I was mad. I felt that I was called by God to follow in the footsteps of Jesus and stand up to those who didn't want to listen.

One person using this inappropriate language was Donald Trump, who was voted President of the United States on November 8, 2016. Trump has been taped saying things such as:

"You know, I'm automatically attracted to beautiful — I just start kissing them. It's like a magnet. Just kiss. I don't even wait. And when you're a star, they let you do it. You can do anything." and "Grab 'em by the pussy. You can do anything." (*New York Times*, Transcript Donald Trump's Taped Comments About Women)

The march was protesting Trump's presidency, but there was much more than that. Sexism has been part of society throughout history. Outright sexism is not usually accepted in the modern day, but sexism unfortunately still plays a subtle role in our lives. When someone like Trump ends up in a position of power and supports sexism, outright and subtle, it gives permission for sexism to continue and to become more widespread. Sexism should not be a trend, and this is what we were protesting.

I believe women should be treated with the same respect that men are treated with. Historically women have not been treated equally, and they were not in the times of Jesus.

"In rabbinic thought men were primary; women were secondary. The religious leaders, being men, looked on women as "other." Indeed their formulations of religious law treat women more as objects that men experience than as persons in their own right. While Women were portrayed as weak-minded and fragile, men in contrast were viewed as courageous, strong, and wise." (Richards)

Jesus, however, disregarded this social expectation many times. Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan Woman at the well is a good example of this:

"A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." (His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.) The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?" (Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans.)" (John 4: 7-9, NRSV)

The woman was surprised that Jesus would speak to her. Yes, she was surprised that a Jew was asking her, a Samaritan, for a drink, but she is also surprised that he would speak to her, a woman. There are many other examples of Jesus interacting with and respecting women. He healed the woman who touched his cloak, though she had a bleeding disorder and was considered unclean. He taught Mary and Martha. He praised the woman who anointed his feet with perfume.

Plenty of people didn't vote for Hillary Clinton, Trump's opponent, because she was a woman. Many people still believe that women should not be leaders, but plenty of women are good leaders now and have been in the past, including in scripture. Deborah is a good example: "At that time Deborah, a prophetess, wife of Lappidoth, was judging Israel. She used to sit under the palm of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim; and the Israelites came up to her for judgment" (Judges

4: 4-5, NRSV). Deborah was a judge, and that was a position of leadership. “It is not surprising that Deborah should be defined as “the wife of Lapidoth.” Women throughout the Old Testament era were identified by the men in whose households they lived” (Richards). The people came to *her* for judgement, though, not her husband. This is one example of women in leadership in the scriptures.

I am thankful for my dad and the countless other men that I saw at the Women’s March protesting alongside their wives, mothers, daughters, and friends. Those men at the march were our allies. According to research from “Interrupting the Cycle of Oppression: *The Role of Allies as Agents of Change*” by Rev. Dr. Andrea Ayvazian, men are more likely to listen to other men, and that is just one reason why it was so important for there to be men protesting. We would not be heard as loudly without them.

I marched in the Women's March because I felt that God created me, my mother, and my sister to be just as important and respected as my father and my brother. I do not believe that women and men are the same, but we are equal. Jesus is God. Jesus treated women equally. So, we should ask ourselves why women are still treated as inferior to men when God treats women with the same respect as men. We should follow Jesus, and respect each other. I believe Jesus would have been at the Women’s March if he was here on Earth. God created both women and men in his image. We are of the same image, made by the same hands, and equally as important and beautiful. I believe “Women's Rights Are Human Rights” (Women’s March Minnesota).

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One Man's Trash is Another One's Treasure

Angelica Pollock-Shimer, Walker, MN

When asked what diversity means people usually say the generic answer of “it’s a variety of all sorts of different things.” When one comes across a mural made of an abundance of recycled materials (otherwise known as mosaic), most people just look at it and register the content of the mural and continue on, but others stop and really comprehend what they’re looking at. Few people look at the bigger picture beyond the edges of the architecture and become inspired; their brains keep thinking about how these pieces of art are just like the human race in terms of cultural diversity and about how, if used correctly, all of our differences can be brought together and can form a gorgeous masterpiece of God’s making. The Bible talks about cultural diversity several times, one of them being Galatians 3:28 which states: “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (NRSV). When Jesus came to be born into the flesh and to live a life of flawlessness, God is never concerned about a person’s skin color or their national origin, because those who are the children of God are citizens of the kingdom, not a kingdom of mankind. Another occurrence of cultural diversity in the bible that may stick out to some individuals is in Acts 17: 26-27 which says; “And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, that they should seek God, in the hope that they might feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us” (NRSV). The Apostle Paul reminds us “that God shows no partiality” (Acts 10:34, NRSV) and “in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith” (Gal 3:26, NRSV), “For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ” (Gal 3:27, NRSV), because “if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to promise” (Gal 3:29, NRSV). There is only one race according to God and that is the Human race. While some differences between mosaics and cultural diversity are apparent, the similarities are prominent.

Mosaics have been dated all the way from 300 BC and were usually used in churches at that time to tell stories from the bible. Now the more modern way of using mosaics is to brighten up public areas such as a park or even a garbage can putting the expression of “one man’s trash, another man’s treasure” literally. These murals are usually made out of an abundance of recycled material such as broken plates, broken mirrors, or old metal. Mosaics are made by gluing the pieces together using an adhesive and forming a shape of an object or forming letters of a phrase.

In society today, most people view diversity as a good thing because it gives people the chance to experience different things outside of what they are normally accustomed to. Diversity in America is openly viewed as a beneficial bacterium, so many backgrounds and not knowing which ones are good and which ones are bad.

Diversity as a wide component is a tricky thing to use and understand because it has both negative and positive effects on society such as education, violence and employment. People have to dig deep to figure out what exactly the effect will be in the end and be patient to wait and see.

Studies show that the lack of bonds between races, sexes and cultures is from lack of trust, stereotyping, and more within-culture conversation and language problems. When these problems are not paid attention to it may lead to an inability to endorse ideas, the inability to gain agreement on decisions, and inability to take united action. In the educational system it is very important that there is a wide array of diverse groups in the classroom, “It is important to have a diverse student body, not only to create a realistic setting but also to encourage people to grow outside their boundaries and learn something new about a culture they may not be familiar with.” (Pendulum, 1). By accomplishing this in the classroom you can avoid child unawareness and actually enlighten them about other things that go on around them with people they may be friends with or know. Another factor in a less diverse student population is

bullying. Students who are different are often targets for bullying. Often when people lack knowledge of things that they are not accustomed to they are quick to judge or stereotype and make ignorant decisions. "Diversity is a positive thing, not something to fear" (Pendulum, 1).

Diversity is not being encouraged throughout America; in fact some cultures would rather have contact only within that family or race, or even that religion. Some people are not persuaded that their children need to be in a diverse setting or experience one. In today's global society, without any prior knowledge of other people, when a person actually gets out into the real world they're often stuck with a limited view of the world. In reality, the work place has every gender, ethnic group and religion. It is like if you say the wrong thing you may think it is funny and others will find it offensive, you have to understand why it affects someone else that is of a different background. "Learning about other countries and other cultures is part of the public school curriculum. Having children from other countries and cultures in the classroom can be a positive experience for teachers and students (Canadian Teacher, 1). Diversity includes not only physical appearance, religious belief, and race, but your opinions and thoughts as well.

In Harry C. Triandis' research on cultural diversity, Triandis found that members of culturally different groups were less likely to be attracted to one another and had more difficulty communicating with each other than members of culturally homogeneous groups did (Mannix, Neale 1). Different cultural groups will find it slightly uncomfortable to talk about what they celebrate and believe in because the other person does not share the same beliefs as they do. It makes it harder for them to talk and often they are being judged because it is not something that would normally interest them or does not interest any other cultural background. There is no research and hard evidence connecting the color of our skin to DNA which means that God made us the way that he wanted us to be and if he can love and work color blind there is no rhyme or reason why we can't.

We all need to do a better job at remembering that every single one of us has felt broken and/or easily thrown away at some point but we are all "essential not accidental" according to Jordan Feliz's song "Beloved" and we are all a piece to God's mosaic. No matter what size, shape or color you are God knows where to put you and has the best thoughts in mind when it comes to placing you in the mural. We should celebrate the differences and learn to work together. What is a better way to celebrate the good news of God's diverse masterpiece than making one of our own?

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As Purple is to Lavender

Grace Porter, Eden Prairie, MN

As a white teenage girl, the last thing I should be writing about is black women. Although I can never understand the pain that they endure, or the history that they carry, I think that looking from their perspective could change everything. When I first read about womanism, I was immediately intrigued to learn more about how their ideologies affect their faith and their role in society. Now I believe that the ideas of the womanist society are crucial to the feminist movement, and acknowledging their theologies make our single-minded interpretations of the Bible more diverse.

A womanist is, by basic definition, “A black feminist or feminist of color.” Throughout history, black women have experienced oppression on multiple levels. During the civil rights movement, the emphasis on race pushed gender issues to the side. When the feminist movement rose in popularity, it addressed sexism apart from racism (St. Clair, 56). Through these movements, African American women were forced to choose what came first; their womanhood or their race. On one hand, they would jeopardize the progress of their race by demanding rights for their sex. On the other hand, it was difficult to embrace an issue that had always been dictated by white women (Tally, 210). As a result, “womanism” was born, to allow African American women to be both black and female. It gave them a way to name themselves through their unique cultural, social, historical, and theological experiences.

Womanism was formed off of four main ideals:

- Being a womanist means to promote the wholeness of African American women without diminishing others. Womanists recognize that putting down others just to raise themselves up isn’t going to solve any problems.
- Womanism was built on the concrete reality of African American lives and their real-life experiences. This made womanism into something more real and tangible for African American women to follow.
- Womanists believe that God supports commitment to and struggle for wholeness. God created us all to be equal and different and wonderful, so womanists strive for that fullness of life, with God on their side.
- Womanist theology is influenced mainly by Jesus’ significance in life and ministry, while still acknowledging his suffering and death. They believe that the everyday service Jesus did is the reason for them to believe and follow in his footsteps, but they will not ignore the sacrifices he made for them.

Womanism creates a whole new level of understanding for those who may not have found it before. It gives black women a place to feel like they are fully accepted into the love of Jesus Christ, without having to choose to single out any parts of their lives.

In the book *In Search of Our Mothers' Garden*, by Alice Walker, womanism is defined many ways, but one of my favorites was this: “Loves music. Loves Dance. Loves the moon. *Loves* the Spirit. Loves love and food and roundness. Loves struggle. *Loves* the folk. Loves herself. *Regardless*” (Walker, xii). Although womanism specifically applies to feminists of color, this definition describes the traits that I think every woman should have. Womanism is inherently important to the feminist movement. After all, “Womanist is to feminist as purple is to lavender” (Walker, xii). It is incredibly important for us to witness the people that are being ignored. Without the opinions, thoughts, ideas, words, and love from womanists, how can feminists expect to gain equal rights for all? The feminist movement, both now and in the 19th century, has been viewed as the “white woman’s movement” (Tally, 206). Acknowledging womanism, and feminists of color, is crucial to achieving the true goal of the feminist movement; gaining equality for all women.

The theology of womanism is focused on the conviction that Jesus makes God real in African American women's lives, and that the "interpretations of Jesus [...] will also be interpretations accepted about their own lives and selves" (St Clair, 58). They believe that those interpretations have a direct relationship to understanding oneself, which in turn leads them to understanding Jesus. One of the prevailing truths of womanist theology is that Jesus carries the role of a divine co-sufferer. However, African American women don't try to pursue suffering to become a co-sufferer; rather, they believe that Jesus knows their suffering and does not abandon them in their struggle for freedom. Although a primary ideal of womanist theology is Jesus taking the role of the co-sufferer, his significance is not found in his suffering, but in his ministry. African American women acknowledge the connections between Jesus' suffering and theirs, but it does not play a critical role in who Jesus is or what he did. Womanists believe that discovering Jesus in their everyday lives is what makes their beliefs so concrete. By grounding their faith in reality, it allows them to believe more fully. Womanists also examine how traditional Christian teachings about Jesus have affected African American women in a negative way, like the refusal to ordain women, and the encouragement of their silence. By learning about the other theologies in the Christian faith, we can work to diversify and advance our own teachings about Jesus and the Bible.

When we look at other people's perspectives, we create a different understanding of our own lives. Diverse thinking is crucial to the advancement of our society. All races deserve the same respect, and adding gender to the equation makes it even more difficult to understand others' lives and views. The bible coincides with all of our lives and affects the way we live them. If we can diversify our views of religion, it shows the love and care of Jesus that Christians believe in. Feminism is important to most women nowadays, but womanists are a group that cannot be ignored. Their history, and future, make up a huge part of who they are, and if we don't acknowledge that, we are ultimately erasing their importance. The only way to fully accept others is to learn about what they believe, and that's why acknowledging womanism is so important.

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Is Pentecost God's Way of Fixing the Story of Babel?

Lynsey Rohrer, Devils Lake, ND

At first glance, the story of Babel and Pentecost appear to be unrelated and perhaps even completely opposite of each other when examining how God acts in the world. The story of Babel is about people trying to build a tower into the clouds for fame and pride. The other story, Pentecost, is about giving the disciples the gift of speaking in another language. The idea that Pentecost is connected to the story of Babel is an interesting one and plays a constant role in helping to create diversity understanding your neighbor, and more.

I had never heard the story of Babel until I was in the Bible class at Augsburg College Youth Theology Institute (ACYTI). After reading it I learned that the descendants of Noah were living in Babylon where they all spoke one language. The people decided that they wanted to build a tall tower that would reach all the way up to the clouds so that they could be like God. God did not like what the people were doing so he caused the people to suddenly speak different languages so they could not communicate and work together to complete the tower. This caused the people to scatter across the land. They named this structure The Tower of Babel because the word Babel means confusion and the people were all very confused. Again, this story does not seem to have a connection to Pentecost, but upon further review, it seems to me that they are.

Pentecost is a story I have gotten familiar with through church and in the article “Exploring the Bible” in our reader from ACYTI. To me, Pentecost is 50 days after Easter Sunday when everyone came together in one meeting place and then suddenly the Holy Spirit gave the disciples the gift to speak in different languages. When they heard this sound a crowd of people speaking all types of languages came together because each one heard their own language being spoken. Then Peter stood up and said that everyone will live into their discipleship and “it shall come to pass that everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved” (Acts 2:21, NKJV).

Because of the Holy Spirit’s activity at Pentecost, more people joined the Christian faith. The first converts were very diverse coming from many different areas, imagine what it must have been like having all of these people coming together in one place sharing diversity as good news. In the article “Exploring the Bible,” we read about a miraculous moment of unity on the day of Pentecost (Barreto and Chan 49). To many, this is a dramatic reversal of the story of Babel. Arguably without the events which occurred during the construction of the tower of Babel, Pentecost may have never been celebrated.

Pentecost may have never happened if the extreme events that occurred at Babel had never taken place. Even by modern day standards, the punishments of Babel seemed as if God was being cruel and spiteful to the people who made a prideful and greedy mistake, but without him being so harsh Pentecost wouldn’t have had the same effect. In order for Pentecost to happen, it took an extreme event to take place to prepare the people to accept the unexplainable developments of this miracle. With the story of Babel it made communication very hard but because of Pentecost it brought people back together.

There are many further connections between the story of Babel and Pentecost first with the idea of understanding your neighbor. In Genesis, the Lord talks about going down and confusing the people’s language so that they cannot understand each other (Genesis 11:7, NKJV). In Acts it talks about a huge group of people coming together and they were confused because everyone heard them speak in their own language (Acts 2:6, NKJV). These two stories are connected in the sense that God created a multitude of languages. In the story of Babel, God does so as a punishment, but at Pentecost God gives language as a gift so that the Good News of Jesus Christ might be shared around the world.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the creation of diversity is a huge connection between the story of Babel and Pentecost. In the story of Babel, the Lord came down and caused the people to speak different languages and because they couldn’t communicate to complete the tower, the people scattered across the land establishing their own communities and cultures over time. This act created an immense

amount of diversity in the sense that the different languages were created which scattered people to make up the world as we know it today. Pentecost also helped create diversity by gifting the disciples with language. In doing so, the Christian faith went from one religion to bringing people together from around the world showing that no matter where you live or what language you speak the Lord loves and accepts you just the same.

Indeed, Pentecost wouldn't have been the same without the story of Babel. At the time of the story of Babel it seemed as if God was splitting the people who made a mistake, but without him being so harsh Pentecost wouldn't have had the same global effect. I don't believe people would be able to understand their neighbor without Pentecost changing their ways of communication. The story of Babel helped to create diversity but without Pentecost, not everyone would think that they are equally loved and accepted by God.

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Understanding Racism to Bring Community Together

Kieara Sampson Kjesbo-Johnson, St. Paul, MN

“Jesus commands us to love another as he loves us” (John 13:34, NRSV). The two types of racism we struggle with in our world is Active Racism, which are acts of racial bigotry and discrimination, and Passive Racism, for example when a racist joke is told and avoiding difficult race-related issues. My paper will explain how racism happens within generations of African American and white people and how we can bring everyone together instead of being racist towards one another.

Some people think that racism only happens with African Americans and White Americans which is not true. People of all kinds get judged and judge others. We all sometimes makes rude comments, talk about each other and say stereotypes about one another that we should not say. We mostly seem to notice racism on social media, on the streets, in stores, on the bus. Racism can happen anywhere, but some people just do not notice it right away or are just too nervous to speak up about it. Since they do not want problems or are not paying attention, and do not care because they think that people are right so they do not think they need to have input on what is going on at that current moment.

There is such thing as white privilege. Some people say “White privilege is complex” (ACYTI). In a white supremacist culture, all white people have privilege whether or not they are overtly racist themselves. The privilege that white people and African Americans have is different but they should not be and we all should be treated the same and as God made us: all siblings to love and care for one another. “There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” (Galatians 3:28, NRSV).

The differences between a African American person and a white person is that when an African American person walks down a street, they are seen as a threat and are quick to be arrested because of how they look or if they fit another description of another African American person. But for a white person they have second chances and don't have to worry about getting killed or shot when pulled over by a cop or watched very carefully while in a store.

Kids don't grow up racist they have to see it in order to portray it. They start to see racism in our communities, in their homes, in stores, through friends, through adults, and through family. As kids start to get older they have that memory of how they were raised, so they end up raising their kids how they were raised. People need to know that generations after generations are being raised up racist.

People don't seem to realize that our world is like a big hemisphere puzzle. We have to put the puzzle pieces together to see if the pieces fit right or don't go together. But the pieces that do not go together are the struggles and when we try to put pieces that do not match or fit together there is a problem. When there's a problem people tend to give up. But if we start losing pieces to the puzzle it would be hard to make a whole hemisphere puzzle. We all need to realize that we are not more important than anyone else but we are also not less important either. “You shall love your neighbor as yourself. There is no other commandment greater than these” (Mark 12:31, NRSV).

“There is no fear in love, but perfect love drives out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love.” (1 John 4:18, NRSV). A white person has more fear of an African American person than a African American person has of a white person, but we might have fear over some police because of their known history with African Americans. But if white people and African American people come together we would learn lots of things about each other, and it also would help us bond better and know how we can help one another. So we can cast out the fears with lots of love for one another.

With youth it starts with bad jokes about skin color, stereotypes, and making fun of one another. But some youth need to understand that we are all the same human race but are different ethnicities of the same human race. The reason we are all the same human race is because all human beings have the same

physical characteristics, with minor variations, of course. This was needed to be said loudly “All human beings are equally created in the image and likeness of God!!” (Genesis 1:26-27, NRSV).

An African American “Pulling the race card” is used over and over to stigmatize those who disagree with the myth that America is now a color blind, post-racial nation. Some people do not see what is happening in the real world, they only see what is happening right in front of them. I hope that people open their eyes to see that African Americans do not have as much power and privilege as white people.

“We must learn to live together or we will all die together.” (Martin Luther King). The world can’t be fixed unless we are fixed within as we may know we see our sisters and brothers killing, name calling, fighting, and talking about each other. We do not really seem to be thinking clearly about our actions and if we do not stop now with treating each other with those bad ways we do now then we are basically saying that it is okay for others of different kinds to treat people that way. But if we stick together in this world and stop the gang violence, girl drama, competition on who has the better clothes, who has more money, who has the nicest house, who grew up better, jokes of someone’s skin color, and the rude judgements. These problems we have in our world are caused by Active Racism and Passive Racism acts.

“God loved the world so much that He Sent Jesus to lay down His life for us.” (John 3:16, NRSV). Racism, it’s everywhere, but the last place you would think of it being racist would be at church. Some churches are passively racist and are racially segregated. “Jesus loves the little children, All the children of the world; Red and yellow, black and white, All are precious in his sight. Jesus loves the little children of the world” (Sunday School Song). This song was meant for people to understand that Jesus wanted to have all of his people together and to understand that we are all loved and do not need to be racially segregated in churches. The “World” obviously includes all ethnic groups. In order for people to understand that you are all loved and can worship together they must also realize that we are all important in this world and we are all siblings in Christ. I want all people to come together as a family, worship together and respect each other.

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“Jesus Loves the Little Children: Songs about Jesus and Me.”

Jesus is My Favorite Feminist

Ruthie Sawyers, Tampa, FL

Usually when one hears the word “feminist”, the first people who come to mind are women like Gloria Steinem or Ruth Bader Ginsberg—or maybe even the 19th century suffragettes Elizabeth Cady Stanton or Susan B. Anthony. Yet although these amazing women have played a paramount role in the development of the feminist movement over time, they certainly aren’t the first to endorse equality between men and women. When I think of the term, “feminist”, I think of the very Son of God, Jesus Christ Himself.

To some Christians, this claim could be considered blasphemous. To them, “feminism” is based on an inflammatory *connotation* rather than its *denotation*. To these individuals, feminism “encourages liberation..., praises abortion..., promotes the ‘wild woman’ lifestyle..., fights for sexual autonomy..., encourages women to rebel against submission, and to be their own authority”(Clark). It’s evident these people view feminism as a threat to the very ideals of God. But the actual definition of “feminism” is “the advocacy of women’s rights on the basis of the equality of the sexes” (Merriam-Webster). Jesus Christ is portrayed throughout the Bible as one committed to fairness, acceptance, and equality for all—he was a true feminist.

There are many instances throughout the New Testament of the Bible which illustrate Jesus as an active feminist. Jesus reached out to the woman at the well when this was socially taboo; he accepted Mary Magdalene’s devotion with mutual respect; and he encouraged Martha to reject the social expectations of her gender, as Mary had, and follow Mary’s example. Although Jesus’ efforts on behalf of the poor and sick are prevalent and clear in the Bible, seeing his feminist activism is not necessarily as obvious. Proving his belief in gender equality requires a deeper understanding of exactly what feminism would have looked like in first century AD Middle East.

During the time of Jesus’ ministry, women dealt with very different gender issues than they do currently. They didn’t fight for the right to have an abortion, they didn’t question why tampons have a “luxury” tax and Viagra doesn’t (Gass-Poore), and they didn’t worry that they couldn’t regulate their periods or plan their pregnancies because birth control was illegal. These serious problems correlate to contemporary societal gender roles and expectations, yet thousands of years ago women faced a different set of expectations. In 1 Corinthians 11:7-9, Paul states that women are inferior to men, exist only to support men, and are detached from God: “For a man ought not to have his head covered, since he is the image and glory of God; but the woman is the glory of man. For man does not originate from woman, but woman from man; for indeed man was not created for the woman’s sake, but woman for the man’s sake” (NIV). Paul goes on to say, “Let the women keep silent in the churches; for they are not permitted to speak...for it is improper for a woman to speak in church” (1 Cor. 14:34-35, NIV), further belittling the role of women and literally and metaphorically silencing them. Lastly, Paul clarifies what is expected of all women by outlining specific behaviors “required” to honor God when he states, “Older women likewise are to be reverent in their behavior, not malicious gossips, nor enslaved to much wine, teaching what is good, that they may encourage the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be sensible, pure, workers at home, kind, being subject to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be dishonored.” (Titus 2:3-5, NIV). Although parts of 21st century western society may not condone this specific gender bias as Paul espouses, unfortunately, these cultural customs continue to oppress women in various places worldwide.

When Jesus confronts the woman at the well in John 4:1-42, many social boundaries are broken. Most controversially, a *Jewish man* is speaking to a *Samaritan woman*. This kills two birds with one stone: Jews and Samaritans are known enemies, and women are not permitted to speak to men outside of their families (let alone in public). The woman herself was breaking multiple social expectations: she had been married five times before, the man she was currently living with was not her husband, she’s by

herself at the well, it's the middle of the day, she's asking Jesus about the Bible, and she's testifying her experience in public, among other things. But even despite all of her shortcomings, Jesus plainly revealed himself as the Messiah to her. It was very uncommon for Jesus to be so upfront about *anything*, especially his true identity; and choosing to let his guard down to such a socially unacceptable, dishonorable woman shows that Jesus felt *she*—not a boy, a man, a priest, or a king—a *woman* was worthy of such powerful knowledge.

Jesus accepts and appreciates the devotion of Mary Magdalene even though she is not a male disciple. Mary Magdalene raises much controversy for Bible scholars. Firstly, some make assumptions she was a prostitute. But the dozen or more times she's mentioned throughout the New Testament, there's no indication that she was anything of the sort. But whether she was or not doesn't change the fact that she was an unmarried woman who was asking questions, associating with 12 rebellious men, and learning, teaching, and practicing religious beliefs and rituals. For these reasons, she was an anomaly and an outcast, which made her the perfect disciple of Jesus (Carroll). Her unwavering devotion to him made Mary even more committed than Peter, the rock on which Jesus will build his church (Matthew 16:18, NIV). When Jesus asked difficult things of his disciples, each of the twelve (some more than others) expressed doubt. But when the men complained, Mary Magdalene proceeded without question. Her commitment is proof that she really did devote her life to Jesus; she was able to let go of the human instinct to question everything. She stayed at the cross after Jesus died, was at the tomb, and was the first person Jesus appeared to after his resurrection. The relationship of Jesus and Mary Magdalene was one of mutual respect and understanding. This equality, based on faith not gender, is just one example of what made Jesus a feminist.

Lastly, the story of Mary and Martha represents the "cultural ideal" of what society expects of a woman versus what Jesus ideally expected. When he visited the sisters, Martha took the role of the dutiful housewife by focusing on constant cleaning, cooking, and hosting. Meanwhile, Mary sat attentively at Jesus' feet, listening to him speak, a seemingly lazy choice. But to Jesus, the Word of God is worth more attention than clean dishes and full stomachs. In this very unusual incident, Jesus praised Mary for not making *him* welcome, but rather for making the Word of God welcome (Aust). Although by the societal standards in which they lived, Martha was in the right for complying with her domestic responsibilities, Jesus did not represent the society in which he lived. Rather, he represented what it *could be*.

While the concept of feminism was extremely unpopular for the time, Jesus persisted in his mission. To his enemies, he was an anarchist, to his followers, an activist. Jesus used stories like the woman at the well, Mary Magdalene's faith, and the contrasting roles of Mary and Martha to set a precedent for Christians to be shameless feminists. By following his example of gender equality, Christians can achieve a closer understanding of God's unconditional love.

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Using Privilege to Care for God's People

Lexie Sorensen, Eagan, MN

I am a straight, white woman. Both of my parents have doctorates, and we live in a safe, well-to-do neighborhood in one of the best public school districts in the country. From a young age, my parents read to me at home, and took me to different cultural and musical events that helped me better understand my community and the world as a whole. I have been given private music lessons since kindergarten, and am taken on multiple vacations each year. I didn't work for any of these things, but they all add up to give me great advantage as I step out into the world. This is privilege. As a privileged person, I am already steps ahead of some people, and I get to decide whether I want to lap them or take a minute to help them catch up. People with privilege have power that can be used to make concrete change in the social atmosphere of the United States.

Merriam-Webster defines "privilege" as "a right or immunity granted as a peculiar benefit, advantage, or favor." At ACYTI, we did an activity that our professor, Dr. Timothy Pippert, called a "race to college admissions." The whole class started by standing on the same line. Dr. Pippert then began saying phrases, and we were asked to take one step forward if the phrase applied to us. He called out, "step forward if your family is considered middle class or above," "take a step if you were brought to cultural events as a child," "move ahead if both of your parents are college educated, and then take another step for every degree they have beyond a bachelor's degree," and so on. Before he asked us about GPA, extracurricular activities, or test scores, some were already significantly ahead of others. We quickly realized that no matter how smart we are, or how hard we work in life, there will always be people ahead of and behind us simply because of the situations they were born into.

It is a fact that our society is skewed to help white people succeed, and is much more judgemental and unforgiving of other races. White people have privilege. We live in a world where it is still the "norm" for the prince to marry the princess, so any other sexuality is seen as a strange deviation. Heterosexual people have privilege. Women are often not taken as seriously as men, and are sexualized much more often. Males have privilege. Those who are gender nonconforming or transgender are still fighting for basic rights, and for their identity to be considered valid in society. Cisgendered people have privilege. Dr. Pippert helped us better understand what privileges we have by asking when we first noticed certain things about ourselves. He explained that if we did not feel as though something like our race, gender, etc. affected us socially at a young age, we are probably privileged because of that thing.

All of our different privileges, or lack thereof, come together to create unique social experiences for each of us. "Race, class, and gender are *intersecting* categories of experience that affect all aspects of human life; they *simultaneously* structure the experiences of all people in this society" (Anderson & Hill Collins, 4). We need to recognize what our place in society is so we can best serve those that are in different situations than we are; no matter what situation we're in, God wants us to act as servants.

The ultimate goal of service is equality. We are told that "it is for freedom that Christ has set us free" (Galatians 5:1, NIV), so we have to fight for freedom, because so many people do not have it yet.

Often times, when we think of service, we think of feeding the hungry and giving shelter to the homeless. These are very important issues, but there are many people that have needs that are not quite as physical. Women *need* to be paid as much as men for doing the same jobs. Transgender people *need* to have the opportunity to serve in our military and fight for American justice. African Americans *need* to be able to walk down the street without fearing for their safety. Gay people *need* to be able to love each other. Christ died for these people's freedom, and as servants of God we must support them in their fight for equality. Though not all of us might identify with these issues, God calls us to sympathize and stand alongside our brothers and sisters in Christ by saying that "if one part suffers, every part suffers with it" (1 Corinthians 12:26, NIV). It is for freedom that we were *all* set free. Freedom doesn't come when a

certain ostracized group says they want it. Freedom comes when that group declares what they need, and everyone else rallies around them in unconditional support until that need is met.

We can each use our own privileges to help those that are in need. The support of privileged people is essential to creating real social change. As a white person, showing up to a Black Lives Matter protest or benefit shows that I care about that cause, even though I am not (directly) affected by it. This sends a powerful message to people in power, as they will be more apt to create legislative change when people of many diverse groups are demanding that the issue be addressed. In the same way, men standing up for women's issues, and straight people standing up for LGBTQ issues is the only way that those movements will continue to grow and get closer to their goals for equality.

I challenge you to take a moment to think about your own privileges, as well as your own needs. Let compassion take root in your heart, and then decide how you will reach out to help those that society has excluded. When one member of God's family suffers, everyone else suffers with them. When one member of God's family is honored, everyone else rejoices with them. Let's work towards days where there is more rejoicing than suffering, for it is for freedom that Christ has set us all free.

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Did Not One God Create Us?

Julia Stensaas, Minneapolis, MN

“Do we not all have one Father? Did not one God create us? Why do we profane the covenant of our ancestors by being unfaithful to one another?” (Malachi 2:10, NRSV) When you walk outside and absorb the breathtaking vast Earth we live on, what do you see? As you take in your surroundings you see the world the way you have been taught to see it, you see other people but you conceptualize them as a different group from you; you have your own group where you reside. Humans are programmed from birth, forming their view of fellow humans; we categorized others and with unprovable claims, declare one group superior to others. Putting people in groups helps us separate ourselves from people who are different, so we can stay close to those who look and think like us. Does not God support us equally and see us as one, for he made us from his image? That does not mean humans see diversity just as God does. We need to go deeper into race, the human socially constructed ideology on diversity, as opposed to God’s view of our differences.

In sociology class on the second day during my time at Augsburg College Youth Theology Institute (June 2017), we covered two topics that deeply get to the soul of a human’s need to categorize. First, we discussed the social construction theory and then the Thomas theorem. The social construction theory clarifies that we humans determine worth. Pieces of paper were given worth by us, the dollar bill was meaningless until someone decided to assign it worth. We did not stop at inanimate objects, we did this with each other assigning worth, as a community, humans create the reality of what something is and what its worth is. The Thomas theorem is: if you perceive something is real it becomes real in its consequences. Together these represent the human way of treating those who are different; we assign groups and together we make something that did not exist grow into a reality. These groups are either superior or inferior to each other and the superior groups make no hesitation in taking full advantage of the power that it comes with. As time has continued, our created realities have become far more sound, sturdy, and normal. These theories give us an explanation as to how humans have shaped how we experience life and how we treat others, the ideology of different is bad has been ingrained to our heads for many past generations and is still today.

What is our definition of race? In Michael Omi and Howard Winant's *Racial Formations*, they examine how race came about through some of the history of humans. When European explorers began to travel the world they claimed to have discovered new people and land, even though the people and the land existed far before the Europeans came along. The explorers saw the obvious differences between themselves and the natives of this new land. This raised questions and concerns in relation to humans as one species. Originally it was considered that God created one species of humans but the new found knowledge of these humans who resembled nothing of the Europeans caused many to step back and question what they believed and knew. Many felt the natives were not equals and this ideology turned over into slavery and extermination of peoples by the Europeans dubbing themselves the most holy and pure. The Europeans established that they were superior and we still unconsciously tend to lean that way, even when looking back you may be appalled to see what they did. So as I see it race is taking differences someone possesses and taking them to an extreme to prove inequality between two or more groups. Race was and still is a way to separate and have an excuse and reason why one group can mistreat another.

So we have established a solid base of what humans have made diversity to be, but what is God's perspective on diversity? Did not God create the Ten Commandments, one of which is “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” (Mark 12:31, NRSV). God has proven his love time and time again, he sent Jesus to us to give a human touch, helping us understand how to love everyone despite differences. Jesus ate with the poor, the sick, and different people that others just ignored, Jesus came to teach us that kings and high rankings of Earth mean nothing in heaven. God does not want hate, resentment and discrimination to consume us, diversity is beautiful and wonderful. God shows us how differences are not

bad; they bring new perspectives, customs, ideologies and so much more. God is an all-powerful but loving leader, who through Jesus calls himself the Shepherd guiding the sheep. God created each one of us with all of our differences so that we might be strong and individualistic, his goal was not to make clones out of us but to cultivate a beautifully diverse world.

What is God's view of diversity versus human views and our concept of race? How did our ideology become what it is? Humans are critical, usually seeing race and diversity as a bad thing. Even as we try to change the way we think about race, it's hardly something you can just do overnight. We need to read scripture and educate ourselves about God's unconditional love for everyone. As a Christian, I (and many others) like to think that we are viewing the world with a sense of equality just as God would want. We see how God has made us all and that in God's eyes race is meaningless. Yet still as humans we remain imperfect, we are not immune to social media and the things that are shared all around us. And as one example: far too many times, when talking, people refer to a Caucasian person by simply saying a person. But when referring to someone of another race, suddenly it is very important to label them. If you do not label them, the automatic assumption for most people is that they are indeed white until proven otherwise. We can not always control how or what we are taught, but we can be truly open-minded and strive to truly make a change in what the children of the future are taught. If we start now we can begin to guide humanity to a more humane place where we are all people just people. "There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male or female; for all of you are one Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28, NRSV).

How do humans create and continue to view race versus God and his perspective? Humans have always needed to categorize and separate each other, the more alike the better. But it became more than staying away from those who were not like you. The dominant group in the situation tends to take it to the extreme becoming a tyranny over the other groups. These ideas have stuck with us being passed down keeping the dominant group dominant. But we can make a change a gradual one, by teaching kids not only one side of history but the whole ugly truth. The Bible possess many windows into God's view of diversity, the overarching theme being love regardless of any human downfalls one may possess. "Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it." (1 Corinthians 12:27 NRSV).

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Accumulated Advantage

Amanda Torvund, Rochester, MN

“The rich get richer and the poor get poorer. The smart get smarter and the dumb get dumber.” Everyone has heard these before, but has anyone actually stopped to think about them? The rich go to school to learn and in turn make more money with their knowledge. While the poor may not finish high school because they have to work to get by, so they cannot get a better job because they do not have the education for it. Accumulated advantage is summarized by “the rich get richer and the poor get poorer”. Accumulated advantage is built up by gender, race and social status.

The division between the genders has created an accumulated advantage for males. There has been a hierarchy between male and female genders for generations. Originally men took to the leader roles and women were to follow. This basic principle has carried on and is still present today. Society knows about the lead that men have on women, and most are against it and aim to even the field. But why then is the wage gap and bias toward men for higher roles still there? Even when most of society agrees that women should be equalized with men? It is because men as a whole have so much accumulated advantage from over the years that it is hard to change. It is like a bad habit that people do but do not like to do: cracking knuckles or smoking. People keep doing it because it is habitual. To assist in building this gap, women used to be told that they were just not as good at a lot of things like math, science, sports and leadership. This helped give men more advantage because women honestly believed that they were the weaker sex, both physically and mentally.

Race also adds to accumulated advantage. It has unfortunately always played a role in the U.S. culture. The most prominent race in the U.S. is white. That is because it was white Europeans that colonized the U.S. and formed the government here. More and more Europeans have moved to the U.S. to make up more than half the population. The largest minority that the U.S. has is African American. African Americans were originally brought to America to be slaves and have long since overcome that. There are many other small minorities that live in the U.S., like American Indians, Asians, Hispanics and Middle Easterners. Even with the U.S. being as diverse as it is, there is still racism. Racism is seen in the workplace, stores, and social situations. Most of the time it comes from the white majority towards a minority. Most recently African Americans and people from the Middle East have been the subject of this racism. History and decisions of a few have stacked the odds in the white majority's favor throughout the years. This advantage that some races have over others adds to accumulated advantage.

Social standing also adds to accumulated advantage. Money is the biggest indicator of social standing. It affects education, where people live, how they live, and everything else they do. Income dictates what kind of house and neighborhood people can live in. If a family makes a good amount of money, they live in a good house in a good neighborhood with other families with good income. Their children will go to the schools in that neighborhood and the school's condition will be based on the neighborhood condition, so the school will be a good school. In this good neighborhood, most families will have enough money to have two cars and go on vacations. They are able to go out to eat and go to the movies. However, if a family has lower financial means, they will not have the advantages that are just presumed by other families. This social advantage adds to accumulated advantage.

So what? Why does Accumulated advantage matter? Why does someone being picked for a job over someone else because of their gender matter? What about someone being treated with disrespect in a restaurant because of their race? Or how a child from a family that has a lower income than another family does not get as a good of an education as others? Why does any of this matter? It matters because all of these things are happening at the same time to all people. For some, like the wealthy male, it is a benefit. For others, like the poor African American woman, it is making life harder. Race, gender and

social status can all stack to be an advantage or a disadvantage. It makes it harder for people to improve their lives if they are the disadvantaged. It does not make it any harder for the advantaged though. This uneven possibility of improvement has created a gap in social classes. The middle class has shrunk and in turn the gap between the lower and upper class has widened. This gap makes it even harder for people to move up and creates an ever growing stack of odds against those in the lower class. Accumulated advantage is important because it affects people in ways that are not even their fault. It affects them in ways that they do not think about in a bigger picture.

Accumulated advantage made up of gender, race and social status matters because people are better off than others without even realizing it. Some people can just be born and already be better off than others because of who their parents are and what they look like. Someone's physical attributes and monetary status should not be able to affect them so much in their lives that it stops them from improving.

I've Got Good News and Bad News

Amber Torvund, Rochester, MN

The word 'traditional' means "in accordance with tradition...habitually done, used, or found" (Dictionary.com). In the traditional church, interpretation has habitually oppressed, sidelined, and dehumanized minorities in accordance with the Bible. White, rich men have benefited for centuries from the popular, traditionalist views interpreted by the dominant and powerful. Over time, however, different theologies have risen to give the gospel to people who have been skirted away. Latin American, black, queer, and disabilities liberation theologies fight against the traditional gospel to proclaim their own interpretations of truly good news.

While lecturing at Augsburg College Youth Theology Institute, Associate Professor Jeremy Myers clarified that "theology is relational" and could be different "for the neighbor." What one message is interpreted to say can be harmful and oppressing to another. The most common widespread gospel in churches has certain messages that outcast believers and turn them away from Christianity. Liberation theology has been an opening for more minorities to relate and understand the good news for themselves and who they are.

Latin America has a history of its people being in poverty with little power. Since the governments and magnates had the power, the traditional and dominant good news came from them: God helps the rich and powerful, and He is impartial to all. The rulers enforced and believed in this gospel, but they craftily avoided saying that God was not for the low and middle class, and He is not on their side. Eighty percent of Latin America struggled with poverty, and they were offered a God who did not side with them (Lowe, *Augsburg College*).

In response to the traditional gospel, Latin American liberation theology offers better Good News for the poor. In it, God is on the side of the poor and oppressed, and He gives extra care to the poor. In *The God of Life*, Gustavo Gutiérrez claims that "Yahweh is father of all the people but especially the poor." From Psalms 68:5, Gutiérrez highlights God's "holy dwelling" as being a "father of orphans and the defender of widows" (Gutierrez, 43). Gutiérrez demonstrates that the Lord is on the side of the poor by placing His work and pride with those who have little to give or little themselves. God's work is done by protecting and helping the poor. Also, the story of the rich man going to Hell and Lazarus standing by Abraham in the afterlife reinforces God favoring the poor (Luke 16: 19-31, NLT). While Lazarus and the rich man lived on earth, the rich man had the upper hand, but when they entered the afterlife completely in God's hands, God chose to save Lazarus while punishing the rich man. These interpretations accompanied with others allow for Latin American liberation theology to give the good news to the poor and oppressed.

Like Latin Americans, black people have not always had good news pertaining to themselves. The dominant white church preaches that God is colorblind, and that (in the instance of U.S. slavery) black people would receive a better afterlife for their time on earth. While this interpretation seems open and accepting to good news for blacks, the beliefs from the dominant society can actually be rephrased to say God can't see blackness, and He will allow for slavery and black oppression.

Black liberation theology rose to reinterpret the dominant gospel and give a God for black people to relate to. In black theology, God and Jesus are black, and Jesus knows the suffering of a black person. James Cone, a man who could be considered the founder of black theology, knows "there is no place...for a colorless God in a society where human beings suffer precisely because of their color." God isn't blind; He knows his people are suffering, and He knows it is because of their color. Because of this, "God has made the oppressed condition God's own condition" (Cone, 98). Although the Lord may not be physically black, He has to know being black in relationship to power. It is part of Him, as it is part of His people. Also, Jesus Christ, as part of God, must know black as his oppression as well. Cone notes that

Jesus suffers from “human existence that is responsible for human misery” (Cone, 122). In other words, Jesus is weighed down by all the oppressors people are being brought down for. Since people are being pulled down for their skin color and suffer from it, black theology concludes that Jesus is black, at least in the relationship to power based on color appearance. Black theology has given its people a God they can identify with through their good news of the Lord and Jesus Christ.

Like Latin Americans and blacks, the LGBTQ+ community has had oppressing interpretations coming from the traditional church, which came from the dominant people in power. Traditional churches preach that being gay is a sin. Even though it is obviously not good news to the gay community, multiple statements in the Bible have been interpreted as anti-LGBT. People who have come out as gay or transgender have been outcast from their homes and churches due to these standpoints.

Fortunately, queer liberation theology provides a voice with good news for the LGBTQ+ community. This theology affirms queer persons and proclaims that sexuality can change. Patrick Cheng, a theologian, seminary professor, and ordained minister asserts that “sexuality and spirituality are not polar opposites or mutually exclusive categories.” Cheng brings up the idea that sexuality and spirituality can coexist within one person, and that they do not necessarily have certain affiliations with the other. While straight people can be religious and gays atheist, straight people can also be atheist and gays religious. One does not strictly rely on the other. The good news is anyone can find their home in a church that suits them and satisfies their needs. Also, queer theology gives good news from the idea of co-creating. From 2 Corinthians 5:17, Mary Lowe, an associate professor at Augsburg College and theologian, notes that “‘in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new’” (Receiving the Gift). In God’s world, things change; in His doing, people are able to physically, mentally, and emotionally grow and renew themselves. By doing this, people who change (their name, sex, being) create themselves along with God. The people themselves are being pulled to change, and “their journey calls them to weave identities and fashion renewed body-minds” (Lowe, Receiving the Gift). From God’s will, the person co-creates with the Lord to change. Queer theology has gifted their community with the good news of affirmation and co-creation.

The final minority presented, people with disabilities, faces just as much oppression in traditional, dominant interpretations as the previous minorities. Traditional gospel would say that sin gives disabilities, but God can save you with physical healing as forgiveness. Multiple stories in the Bible showcase Jesus saving a person from their sins that are in the form of a disability. Sight, hearing, and the ability to walk are among the disabilities that were given from sin to show God’s work in the healing. This good news pushes the idea that to be whole, a person cannot have a perceived disability, and to have one means prolonged punishment for a sin.

Disabilities theology revives the disability community with the news that a disability is not a sin nor does it need physical healing, and in the Resurrection, Jesus became the disabled God. Pauline Otieno highlights in Micah 4:7 that in Israel, “those who were exiles will become a strong nation.” People with disabilities were exiled and outcast from society due to the traditional beliefs of them being sinners, but the Lord steps in to choose these outcasts as His people, worthy of societal standard and respect. Also, the Bible makes a point at including the image of Jesus with his wounds after the Resurrection (Luke 24: 39-40). Those wounds were inflicted on Christ for everybody’s sake, making his wounds our wounds. The traditional society would see anyone else’s wounds and scars and label him as disabled; instead, Jesus has become the voice and embodiment of a disabled God to reach out to everybody, including the disabled. Disabilities theology brings good news that people with socially-labeled disabilities have a place in the Bible with their God by their side.

Good news has come from the Bible since its existence and before it was written. Different interpretations, however, have oppressed groups within society. Liberation theologies have provided good news to minorities when the dominant interpretations have omitted them. Their inclusiveness and adaptations have provided a God for all people, no matter a person’s situation. The oppressed are uplifted

while not putting down any other group of society. The equality and representation of all people is pertinent to God's world. After all, only God can exclude from His Kingdom.

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- **Human Services Concentration**—prepares students to work in faith communities and other non-profits serving individuals and families in need.
- **Cross-Cultural Relations Concentration**—prepares students to help faith communities and other non-profits work effectively across cultural differences.



Contact Information

Jeremy Myers, Ph.D.
Religion Department

612-330-1202
myers@augsborg.edu

augsborg.edu/religion/tpl

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