What Might Teaching about Sex Gain from Christian Theologies?

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*This is a revised and corrected version of the paper I first circulated in early July. At that time, I knew that I was too sick to present at the REA meeting. I should also have realized that I wasn't clear-headed enough to edit a text. Sincere apologies to those of you who read that first version.*

You are invited to reflect on two things: teaching religious ethics and revising Christian scripts for sexed bodies. The topics are separately difficult, worse when entangled. Both oscillate between false generalization and befuddling particularity. Both interrupt settled practices and comforting certainties. Even though I am a teacher with decades in classrooms, these topics push me back to beginner's questions about how we *ought* to teach ethics. Even though I am an aging Christian who has endured many church controversies about sex/gender, the topics make me feel again old *anxieties* about bodies and pleasures.[1]

My text is divided into two parts. They correspond to two courses I have taught in recent years. (Throughout the paper, in its analyses as much as its organization, I attend to individual situations of teaching, since teaching is concrete discernment or *phronêsis*.)

- The first is **an undergraduate course on sexual ethics** set within a core curriculum. It has been offered as a large lecture supplemented by small discussion sections. The guiding questions for this course are: Why might you seek a sexual *ethics*? In what *form* do you expect it appear?

[1] The last phrase refers to the ending of Foucault's *History of Sexuality* 1, as in *La volonté de savoir* (Paris: NRF / Gallimard, 1976), p. 211, "un autre économie des corps et des plaisirs" I will not cite Foucault again but you should expect to hear many echoes of him.

- The second course is **a divinity school elective,** taught either as a seminar or a small lecture with even smaller sections. This course asks future religious leaders to figure out what help, *if any*, Christianity can offer to ongoing controversies about sexual ethics.

I juxtapose the courses for pedagogical and theological reasons. *Pedagogical*: Christians sometimes behave as if their sexual ethics could be taught without regard for the supposedly "secular" culture around them. That's a mistake. In all the examples we know, the sexual ethics of Christian groups reflect or reinforces the ambient social values. More to the point, even an uncontaminated Christian sexual ethics (if there were such a thing) would have to be taught in shared language to those formed by prevailing circumstances. Which swivels to the *theological* reason: whatever is distinctive in Christian theological speech appears most clearly by pressing against other languages. Theology speaks best when it recalls limitations, fractures certainties, opens doors to excluded experiences, or gestures towards the inexhaustible Other that englobes every human language. We shouldn't expect theology to replace the rest of human speech. We don't want it to try.

For both pedagogical and theological reasons, I underline the *variety* of languages. We learn special words for sex/gender in classrooms and churches, of course, but also in bedrooms, locker rooms, courtrooms, doctor's offices, movie theaters, newsrooms, porn sites, and social media apps. The mix that results is like an archeological dig with many layers of idiosyncratic artifacts. Even what used to be called "polite" language registers a competition among disciplines for the right to name sex/gender. Each discipline borrows slily from the others as they quarrel. No single terminology can prevail for long (as the history of sciences proves). So, I won't begin with a table of strict definitions. Just the opposite: I'll use improvised terms—like

the fusion “sex/gender”—to remind you that language for sexes and genders blooms abundantly to wither quickly. The most popular idioms can have the shortest shelf-lives.

**Course 1: “Sex and Ethical Reasoning”**

My first course, “Sex and Ethical Reasoning,” was designed to fit into a curricular box originally constructed for philosophy. Hence the phrase, “ethical reasoning.” The General Education curriculum expects regular displays of reasoning and some assignments from philosophical texts. I try to meet those expectations but then move on. For example, I insist from the first day that sexual ethics in the U.S. cannot be understood apart from dominant *religious* traditions. The course assigns brief selections from the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament. For some students, these are first readings in any scripture.

Beyond philosophical and religious texts, the course ranges widely—from scientific papers and legal arguments, through political manifestos and sociological studies, to literature and works of art. The range of genres reinforces the lesson about the variety of sexual languages. So does the array of topics. We sample debates on sexual acts or artifacts, including masturbation, rape, adultery, polyamory, “perversions,” sex-work, and erotica or pornography. We return to factors that cut across acts: gender, race, ethnicity, class, religious or political affiliation. We also examine emerging topics: a-sexuality and gender-blur, online sex, sexual rights for children or adolescents, the ethics of fantasy, virtual violence, full consent, hooking-up. Sampling so many topics shows that the *expected* contents or headings of sexual ethics change. At various times, in various places, the ethics of sex has focused on regulating births, preventing disease, maintaining purity, controlling pleasure, policing gender, protecting consent, creating privacy, or defending romance from commerce—to name only a few. The shifting contents

are—as my list suggests—linked to various models for enforcement. Sex/gender ethics is usually *not* taught as an open inquiry shared among equals. It has preferred to instill lessons with threats of public humiliation, familial exclusion or civil exile, and bodily punishment or execution.

I repeat questions about teaching across the semester because any manner of teaching is itself an ethical lesson, whether it means to be or not. My manner reveals what I think of my students or listeners, just as it displays how I conceive intellectual virtues. When teaching ethics, form may count for more than content. If a teacher shouts principles of universal love, most students will learn tyranny. If a teacher invites open conversation but then voices frequent disgust at "sinners" or "deviants," most students will fasten on the condemnations—or the hypocrisy.

In this course, I am regularly reminded of another element of teaching: assumptions of expertise. In a class about sexual ethics, slipping on the magisterial robe can be ridiculous—especially at my age. Looking foolish is not the worst risk. Performing expertise about sexual conduct—or bowing before such expertise—amplifies relations of power that encourage sexual *mis*-conduct. Especially when teaching sexual ethics, my intention is to model generous attention to whatever is sincerely expressed, including fear, shame, ignorance, and disavowed desire. This is more than respectful pedagogy: it is necessary humility.

Refusing to assume the role of the expert about sexual ethics can also counteract a vice that will quickly overwrite the rest of a pedagogy. From the first semester of "Sex and Ethical Reasoning," I noticed that some of the students performed sexual *knowingness*.[2] For example, no matter how unusual or arcane the sexual taste I might mention, some heads in the lecture hall

[2] I use this word with thanks to the psychoanalytic writer, Adam Phillips.

would nod knowingly. As if to say, "Oh, that? Of course." I knew from office conversations and college surveys of incoming students that their sexual experience was likely to be limited. Yet, if I mentioned polyamorous mystical societies devoted to barking-play in alien costumes, heads would bob knowingly. Perhaps I exaggerate—a little.[3]

You might reply with a chuckle that this is just adolescent boasting—or the reflex reaction of students who feel that they can't safely admit ignorance on *any* topic. I would agree. In fact, I used to tease the class about their knowing nods. But there is something more here: a societal imperative to privilege expertise about sex over lived sexual relations. As if there were no need to learn from experience about one's own (changing) desire(s), orientation(s), gender(s). As if the code of one's own sex/gender could only be deciphered in advance by experts. Sexual knowingness in the lecture hall may indeed be boasting or status-anxiety, but it is also mimicry of the dominant forms of power over sex. That expert power is less interested in discovery or nurture than in standardized control.

Let me connect the societal knowingness to a more familiar topic. Assume, for a moment, that many of your students have little or no sexual experience with other bodies. Typically, they *have* logged hundreds of hours of 'sexual experience' online. Their sex is increasingly *virtual*. A lot has been written about the mass consumption of "pornography." Less has been said about the effects of so much virtuality—so much second-hand "experience"—on ethical pedagogy, especially in societies with powerful forms of "sexual science." It is notable that much online porn flattens language, distorts human bodies, stereotypes persons, and glamorizes violence. But notice too how much these effects resemble the coercive abstraction of our most revered sexual engineering.

[3] My recollections of what happened in class are doubtless both simplified and schematic. I apologize especially to students who feel themselves misrepresented.

I worry when members of my class assume that watching porn videos provides them authoritative knowledge. I worry more when this "knowledge" expresses itself in further claims like: "You can know *with certainty* your own sexual orientation before having much or any sexual experience." "You can know *in advance* the plots for your best sexual experiences." "You can correctly predict now the *future course* of your sexed/gendered selfhood." This kind of knowingness is more than boasting about your acquaintance with sexual variations. It is an effort to manage embodied experience by categorizing it according to a comprehensive sex/gender taxonomy. The more compulsory the taxonomy becomes, the more harm it can cause. For a glimpse of the possible harms, substitute "the experts" for "you" in those three claims. Or try "experts appointed by the state."

Once alerted to knowingness, I could recognize it behind familiar academic procedures. It appeared in our weekly use of ethical cases.[4] Cases don't write themselves. Custom or protocol must decide what belongs in them. For example, decisions are required to set a case's *borders* and *scale*. By "borders," I mean the omissions that mark off a case from the rest of a life. Should this case start with the first kiss, the first meeting, the moment of reaching the room where the "sexual act" will occur? Or should the case begin years earlier, with the adolescence of each person involved or birth-family dynamics before they were born? And where does the case stop? With orgasm(s), a later uprush of unexpected feelings, lifetimes together or apart? Notice, next, how assumptions about borders imply a scale of attention or concern. Typically, cases in sexual ethics unroll in high magnification, zoomed in on (usually) just two people for a short period of time. But many thinkers have argued for decades that the scale of sexual ethics

[4] Cases in ethics come in many varieties across the millennia of their pedagogical use. The cases we consider in this class have some resemblances to contemporary "thought experiments" like the "runaway trolley problem," but I try hard to make them both more concrete and more adequately complicated.

must be much larger. The anthropologist Gayle Rubin, for example, asks how and why a *nation* constructs a system of sexual taboos. Michel Foucault wants to demonstrate that we must think sex through the slow shifts in the power that constitute human subjects of different kinds. It's knowingness that makes the micro-scale of reasoning about sex so obvious for us.

Consider, again, the *classes or types of information* deemed relevant to a sexual case. Typically, sexual cases provide basic "demographic" data for the protagonists (gender, age, race, marital status). Sometimes they add sexual histories and other pertinent "medical" conditions (substance abuse, infectious diseases, mental health). Then they go on to narrate verbal exchanges (especially consent) and physical contact. But consider how many other types of information might be relevant to analyzing a sexual case, from religious status or economic situation to ethical maturity or political role. Knowingness appears when custom or protocol asserts that what belongs to sexual cases is straightforward. Let me draw a line under that: the most interesting knowingness around sexual cases may be the expectation that they are useful for teaching because they can be thoroughly known. They can?

The course's most important encounter with knowingness occurs when we begin to talk—slowly, carefully—about sexual violence. We read together a philosophy teacher's account of her violent rape or "sex murder."[5] ("Murder," because the author experienced the death of a self in the crime's aftermath.) We turn next to a Young Adult novel about the sexual abuse of an adolescent by his stepfather, who holds the threat of deportation over the boy's mother.[6] Together the texts bring us face-to-face with disheartening questions about how much of human sex is crossed by violent aggression. This encounter can be desolating. One immediate response is to look for hope. I join the search, but I also war against being misled.

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[5] Susan J. Brison, *Aftermath* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003).
[6] Alex Sanchez, *Bait* (New York: Simon & Schuster 2010).

One form of knowingness promises therapies that will *cure* people who have been subject to sexual violence. Another boasts that it can *prevent* sexual violence. Neither claim seems reliable to me.

Please read me carefully. We must do whatever we can to comfort, to protect, and to heal those subject to sexual violence. Still, I take seriously the qualification, "whatever we *can*." Harms from sexual violence may lie too deep for us to undo. Should we continue to search for remedies? Of course—but without making promises that that no human can keep.

Again, we must draft and enforce policies or laws that reduce sexual violence so far as we can, consistent with civil rights. The tricky phrases are, of course, "actually reduce" and "consistent with civil rights." In one classroom discussion, I paraphrased the premise of Anthony Burgess's novel, *A Clockwork Orange* (1962). "What if," I said, "you could administer a permanent vaccine to every first-year student that would make them so violently ill on seeing or imagining sexual violence that they could never commit it. Would you require that shot during enrollment?" Many hands went up. That response still worries me because it gives up on ethical education. It also betrays an attraction to fantastical "solutions." When someone claims to achieve complete victory over sexual violence, they succumb to a particularly risky knowingness. They may also imply that we are only entitled to ethical hopes when there is an assurance of permanent triumph. As if hope demands unconditional surrender.

Let me give you a final example from the course. When I started teaching it, the campus was embroiled in public conversations about the implementation of Title IX.[7] As a result, many students were focused on *definitions* of consent. They were especially interested in the so-called "Antioch model," named after policies enacted by Antioch College in the 1990s. In some of the

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[7] Title IX is a U.S. law that has been interpreted to require that schools receiving tax funds establish procedures for preventing sexual assault and responding to it when it is committed.

model's versions, consent to sexual activity must be prior, verbal, specific, gradual or graduated, time-limited, and revocable. In the class, members argued back and forth about how realistic or practicable such definitions were. I tried to cut through the spiraling amendments and counter-amendments by asking them to judge a case before us according to *their own* ethical commitments.

An unusual silence followed. Then a brave volunteer began, "Well, according to Harvard's rules..."

I was rude enough to interrupt. "Not the rules, please, but your own judgment of right and wrong."

Another silence.

It may be that I switched frames too quickly—or failed to allow for students' shyness in voicing normative judgments that might implicate their peers. Still, exchanges like this suggest that some students, two-thirds of the way into the semester, still found it hard to distinguish institutional rules from ethical judgments. Let me turn that around: they found it hard to conceive an ethical space not constituted by institutional rules.

It is a basic task for any teacher of sex/gender ethics to open space between ethical right or wrong and the rules or laws in force locally. I may have failed that semester. But I also worried that I was encountering another form of knowingness, one that displaces hard-won ethical discernment to make room for fluency in regulations. For this kind of knowingness, "ethical reasoning" just is applying the rules. We make that slip so easily because it aligns with the contemporary powers that govern sex/gender—or because we agree with them that regulatory expertise is more attainable and effective than ethical insight.

You can sense the bigger question lurking here: What kind of ethical change should we expect from a one-semester course on sex/gender? I will confess that I ended each semester by repeating: Please *don't* believe that my ending is a conclusion.

**Course 2: "Christian Sex"**

I turn to the second course, "Christian Sex." It is a seminar offered primarily for graduate students in the Divinity School, many of whom go on to ordained ministry, school-teaching, or service in non-profit organizations. Students interested in the seminar have diverse backgrounds, Christian and non-Christian. They classify themselves as religious, spiritual, and none. The course's emphasis on Christianity has more to do with my limits than their interests. Still, given the hegemony of one Christianity or another in many cultures, they find it worthwhile to examine Christian teaching about sex/gender—if only in self-defense.

The seminar is guided by a constructive question: What hope might Christian theology offer to current debates about sex/gender that is not offered better by others? I encourage the seminar-members to define "hopeful" and "Christian" for themselves. I do remind them that Christian reasoning does not always agree with the prevailing common sense: Christians allow for impossible healings, unkillable teachings, and a necessary *un*-knowingness in pursuing the divine.

The seminar spends early weeks examining both influential sources for Christian sexual ethics and possible narratives of how churches got from their sources to their present situation(s). Many seminar-members are better acquainted with recent social-justice movements than with older Christian teachings or denominational heritages. They read in the news or experience first-hand that large Christian institutions are splitting over sex/gender issues, but few have studied

the causes or consequences of the changes. Indeed, seminar-members raised in Christian communities—or within certain strands of U.S. political polemic—have absorbed simplistic stories of progress and regress. Many of these stories attribute major changes to the "sexual revolution" of the 1960s. Whatever praise or blame one wants to heap on the 1960s, U.S. attitudes towards extra-marital sex, dissolution of marriage, same-sex love, and gender-transition were already changing well before that decade. The popular stories confuse *becoming widely visible* with *happening for the first time*. They also ignore the *range* of Christian responses during the so-called "sexual revolution." Such fables serve mainly to reinforce ideological dichotomies between conservative and liberal, orthodox and heretical, educated and uneducated, or liberating and oppressive. As it moves beyond fables, the seminar becomes an occasion both for first readings of old books and for learning a little more about churches' many roles in the histories of sex/gender.

The occasion is not comfortable. Canonical sources often provoke negative reactions. They are severely ascetical—not to say, "dualistic," "misogynistic," "elitist," and "patriarchal." Worse, there is no ready list of more agreeable sources with authority in churches. Nor are there evident solutions for the churches' entanglement in polarized sex/gender controversies—of, for that matter, satisfying analyses of the real causes of contention. Even the recent "progress" that seminar-members want to claim can begin to seem unstable. For example, historians mostly agree that the emancipation of women was a major cause of doctrinal change. If "emancipation" means not just gaining the vote but securing basic rights, then emancipation is hardly finished, especially within Christian churches. In the present political climate, it might well be reversed in part—using with appeals to Christian scriptures.

Faced with an apparently intransigent canon and a troubling church history, the seminar can stall. In hopes of re-centering our conversation, I ask each member to write out an episode of religious change around sex/gender that they experienced directly—perhaps because it was their own change of heart. Sharing the accounts, we can attend to religious change in specific persons or communities (rather than "the world"). We can discuss responses that would use the helps at hand (rather than waiting on an impossible revolution before proceeding). We may even notice the courage of our colleagues' generous telling.

I don't want to gloss over the pedagogical break here—or twist it into a cheery fable. Alongside most members of the seminar, I suffer from our immersion in the suspicion of sex/gender preached by venerable Christian books. If there is a locked library of Christian Masterpieces on Abundant Eros, I cannot find the key. (I do sometimes dream of missing theological books: illuminated counsels for erotic exploration, effective exorcisms for mistaken shame, exemplary lives of *un*-celibate saints, glorious rites for re-naming after transition, litanies for easy birthing of long-desired infants.) But throwing out the Christian libraries we have inherited is not an alternative for Christians. Christianity is a religion of the Book and its fragments or reflections. In them, healing truths can be found right beside violent condemnations. There are also detailed records of change in ethical teaching. To be educated just in present theories, categories, sets of data is to be confined within the knowingness of present structures of power over sex/gender.

Some seminar-members do give up on Christian sexual ethics (at least for a time). Others decide that the project of Christian theology is too compromised—too stained by innocent blood—to be rehabilitated. They choose to accomplish ~~Christian~~ goals without invoking Christian authorities. But in its shared work, the seminar attempts recuperative re-reading in

Christian libraries—re-reading and so re-writing. I mean two things by that last phrase. Re-reading often requires re-writing. (We call it exegesis, interpretation, commentary.) But the seminar also experiments with its writing to discover what Christian sexual ethics might sound like. During these experiments, we are greatly helped by contemporary readings that were also examples of powerful writing.[8]

In unexpected ways, the writing exercises help the seminar move forward by moving back. Deliberate practices of theological writing can enable us to appreciate the compositional choices of authoritative Christian books. (Your writing experiments may help you to approach canonical works as *acts of writing*.) Consider, for example, the relation of narrative to oral teaching in the canonical gospels. Reports of Jesus's teaching are embedded within broader stories about him. We might inquire into sex/gender theologically by approaching the gospels with confidence that Jesus teaches about sex/gender whenever he teaches about bodies. He teaches about bodies partly by living the created goodness of his own body, partly by showing love to the bodies he encounters. The gospels offer his ethical teaching about bodies as much in reported actions as in reported words. The offer can slip by you if you expect ethics to look like regulatory code.

The seminar examines critically its members' pedagogical expectations for ethics. The expectations, like other forms of knowingness, take many forms. They can appear, for example, in supposedly scriptural fantasies about "normal" human lives. One fantasy goes something like this: a girl and a boy (naturally complementary, fated to come together) fall in love and get

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[8] In the latest version of the seminar, they included (among other titles): Jeanette Winterson, *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* (1997); some essays in Marcella Althaus-Reid, *From Feminist Theology to Indecent Theology* (2004); Christian Wiman, *My Bright Abyss* (2014); and Maggie Nelson, *Argonauts* (2015). If you find such titles mostly irrelevant to Christian sexual ethics, you can use that as a guide to your expectations for what ethics must sound like.

(permanently) married in a local church wreathed in childhood memories. After a decent interval, they become Mom and Dad, (naturally) reproducing themselves so that they can bequeath (without significant change) their faith, their citizenship, their way of life, and their economic prospects to a new generation, in which a girl and a boy.... I exaggerate—and I apologize if I cause offense. Still, a little offense may sharpen a double question about the contents of this fantasy and the style in which it is told: What here corresponds to the riddling teaching or the unmarried, itinerant life of Jesus of Nazareth?

The question become sharper still if we turn back to the traces of early controversy elsewhere in the New Testament. We read, for example, that communities quarreled over the permissibility of marriage and that they suspected some contamination in sexual intercourse (e.g., 1 Cor 7:1, Rev 14:4). The quarrels point to a gap in early memories of Jesus. If Jesus meant to provide detailed sexual *rules*, he fumbled as teacher. In the gospels we receive, his pronouncements on sex and marriage are frustratingly obscure. A standard defense is that he—or his narrators—expected the quick passing away of the present order, including sex and marriage. That might be, but there are other equally plausible explanations. He may not have given detailed rules because he judged rules an inadequate genre for the important truths about sex/gender. Or perhaps he didn't think that those truths could be captured in words at all.

One pedagogical advantage of a narrative over a list of rules is that a story can foreground someone not speaking. The obvious gospel example for sex/gender would be Jesus's refusal to condemn a woman caught committing adultery (John 8:3-11). Jesus keeps a prominent silence when a crowd demands the application of a scriptural punishment: stoning (Deut. 22:22, Levit. 20:10). The episode suggests not only Jesus's mercy but his refusal to speak in condemnation. (When he and the woman are finally left alone, Jesus speaks an ambiguous

admonition that ends in a blessing.) Throughout the gospels, Jesus is mostly silent not just about sexual sins but about sexual feelings and acts—about sexual *life*. What does the writing of Jesus's silence suggest for current writing about sex/gender? Again, if the ethics of sex/gender is best learned from stories, what learning is required when those stories emphasize silence? Could the silence of John 8 invite its readers to write into the space left by silence?

Across several semester, seminar-members took up a regular practice of writing their bodily experiences in an effort to hear divine promptings or disclosures through bodies. If the practice seems outlandish, you might consult the library shelves labelled "Christian Mysticism." Many writers on them use highly erotic language to describe intimate encounters with God. The traditional explanation is that they write according to precedent—in the scriptures (see *Song of Songs*) or in previous mystical writers. That explanation only pushes the question back one step: Why did the precedent-setting texts choose erotic imagery for meeting God? Could it be that they meant to show how erotic episodes can open onto divine life? For decades now, a few Christian theologians have asked us to consider the body as a site of divine teaching, in suffering or tranquility but also in ecstasy. (Isn't it odd to assert that God only teaches bodies when they suffer? That is, unfortunately, a common if tacit belief.) Some recent theologians have even written prayers for sexual encounters. That is neither obscene nor silly—unless you consider sexual acts altogether excluded from divine creation and providence.

Rituals of writing about bodily experience can open the scriptures and other sources as acts of writing. They also lead us back to the great challenge of writing the body of Jesus—writing about it, writing in its ongoing presence/absence. On almost every shelf of Christian libraries, the fundamental teaching is supposed to be divine incarnation. Whatever else it might be, the incarnation is a pedagogical act. Its pedagogy is the obvious guide for any adequate

approach to human sex/gender. Christians profess that the divine incarnation begins to disclose the whole of human embodiment, including the promise of personal resurrection. It is an old theological teaching that Jesus was born with human genitals and rose from the dead with them. An old teaching and not a shameful one, despite the record of censorship in Christian iconography and theologians' continuing skittishness about getting too close to an embodied Jesus.

Professing faith in bodily resurrection should make Christians less knowing about human bodies—including their sexes or genders. Christian theologians have long appealed to eschatology to suspend the divine command-to-multiply (Genesis 1:28) in favor of virginity, celibacy, and continence in marriage. Eschatology could suspend more plausibly any final judgment *in this life* on the ends for God's creation of human sex/gender. From an eschatological viewpoint, humans never attain physical maturity in the present life. The first letter attributed to John says, "now we are children of God and what we will be has not yet been disclosed. We do know that when [Jesus] is disclosed, we will be like him" (1 Jn 3.2). Our present knowledge of embodied selves can never be more than anticipation: "When he is disclosed, we will be like him." Resurrected flesh is both our teleology and our (anticipatory) epistemology. What "we do know" now about bodily life awaits correction. Silence can be a sign of attentive expectation. Whether we like it or not, theological writing yearns for a bodily fullness that rushes towards us out of the future's present silence. Humble fragments better represent our present condition than systems of law or triumphant dogma.

What hope might Christian theology offer to current debates about sex/gender that is not offered better by others? In keeping with the seminar's concrete pedagogy, I address the question only for myself. I've been led to believe that Christian ethics contributes most when it

teaches through forms that resist knowingness. When it takes the risk of speaking about bodies so far as it understands them, it should resist the false transparency, the pretended omniscience, the regulatory abstraction broadcast by the power that manages sex/gender. Jesus's repeated invitation was to join him—not in codified purity, not in an assurance of full self-possession, but in an open series of encounters along a road. If Christian theology has failed by compromising with earthly powers, it has also failed—failed more—by agreeing to codify its rules for sex. Under present circumstances, that failure is an egregious capitulation to the most knowing genres of governance.

A final word before I refuse to conclude. If you have been put off by my talk of resurrected bodies and following Jesus without codifications, you might still consider the suggestion about what Christianity has to offer. Like other religious pedagogies, Christian theology can still perform ethical teaching in forms that resist the knowingness of contemporary governance. We need that resistance—for protecting human sex/gender but for other protections as well.

Please *don't* believe that this ending is a conclusion.