Article
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Privilege and the Illusion of Invulnerability

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> **ABSTRACT**: In this paper, I explore the reflexive denial of vulnerability that characterizes constructions of whiteness (along with other forms of privilege) and its implications for concepts of the human person in community and in relation to God. Drawing on resources from disability studies, critical race theory, and theories of power from a variety of perspectives, this paper sketches the contours of the affective reality of whiteness and its relationship to theology. I argue that the feeling of brokenness or weakness is an essential lens for understanding a God revealed through a crucified and resurrected savior, and that the socially-mediated affective habit of denying one's own vulnerability has been a significant detriment to mainstream Christian theology and social witness, functioning to support systems of white supremacy.

The 2017 Annual Meeting of the American Academy of Religion was organized around the theme of "Religion and the Most Vulnerable." This represents an important impulse to keep the studies of religion and theology politically relevant and to avoid isolationist tendencies — yet I am not convinced that it is successful. In this article I am interested in the converse of that question: asking who is the implicit subject who represents "Religion," and what does it *do*, affectively and theologically, for that subject to understand themselves (ourselves?) as somehow *less* vulnerable? Does such an understanding actually work toward the implicit goal of improving conditions for marginalized populations? And, more broadly, is this ultimately a true or useful way of understanding who people are in relation to the rest of humanity and to God?

I write as a white, highly educated person from the US context; and I write as a non-binary queer person with a neurological disability. These social locations are particularly important to my argument here because of the intersecting ways I experience expectations of my vulnerability or lack thereof. As someone who usually passes for ablebodied, I am constantly reminded that I am expected to work harder, faster, longer — and when I speak of my limits, my pain, I am so often met with disbelief and uncomprehension. In my experiences of social exclusion as well as illness and pain, I have found a ground on which to connect deeply with other people who share similar experiences, sometimes particularly people of color, and I often get the sense that I am somehow "betraying" my whiteness in doing so. It feels as if speaking from my experience of pain and limitation is an offense not just against a capitalist labor system but somehow against the norms of *whiteness* itself. And so it is this intuition I am following here: whiteness (and thus white supremacy) is threatened by the universality of human vulnerability, and therefore the system of whiteness maintains itself in part through a denial of that vulnerability. Given that the wholesale deconstruction of white supremacy is beyond the scope of this paper, I will focus here on outlining some of the practical and theological implications of this affective reality, which point to the absolute necessity of facing our own personal vulnerabilities both in the church and in society.

I argue in this paper that maintaining privileged identities or securing power in the framework of U.S. neoliberalism can entail a striving for invulnerability and a denial of weakness that serve to further divide those who can "pass" for invulnerable from those who cannot. The fact of bodily vulnerability is projected onto the groups at the bottom of social hierarchies, while performing privilege, whether whiteness or maleness or ablebodiedness, or otherwise, becomes a continued reinscription of this displacement of vulnerability. This denial of vulnerability creates an insufficient understanding of humanness, which serves to keep privileged people from identifying with those who are left out of this definition, thus perpetuating the unequal distribution of vulnerability. Theologically, it functions to construct suffering solely as a problem to be resolved rather than (also) a reality of human life to be conceptually integrated. By

extension, this theological anthropology has meant that Jesus' incarnation can traditionally only be understood as paradoxical, and his crucifixion both unique and spiritualized, rather than being truly revelatory of the nature of God.

Lynne Layton has argued from a psychoanalytic perspective that the process of becoming a subject under the conditions of neoliberalism entails a "splitting off" of feelings of dependency and vulnerability, particularly along lines of gender, race, class, and sexuality, which is then magnified by a cultural narrative of terrorism and ever-present threat. "Neoliberal subjectivity," she says, is "built on a denial of vulnerability that it both stokes and deems shameful, [and] encourages those who are able to do so to disidentify with dependence, need, and other forms of vulnerability."[1] This disidentification with and rejection of vulnerability functions to produce both an internal conflict and an external one, as a person learns to deny their own neediness and simultaneously to project this stigmatized vulnerability and need onto the other. "Thus," says Layton, in this framework "we defensively use our own investments in class, race, sexual, and gender hierarchies to distinguish ourselves as superior to others."[2] So, while social discrimination and unequal resource distribution have created a world in which marginalized populations are objectively "more vulnerable," this process has functioned to reify an impossible state of independence and invulnerability, which is held up as an ideal for all people but becomes most closely associated with whiteness, maleness, ablebodiedness, and other dimensions of privilege, as those with less privilege are made to bear the cultural weight of the vulnerability which has been forced upon them.

These dynamics of perceived and projected vulnerability are nowhere more clear than in the realm of disability. Robert McRuer coined the term "compulsory able-bodiedness"[3] to describe the cultural mandate for perceived health and wholeness, normative body function, and especially the productivity and resilience which serves as an expectation for

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[1] Lynne Layton, "What Divides the Subject? Psychoanalytic Reflections on Subjectivity, Subjection and Resistance," *Subjectivity* 22 (2008): 69.
[2] Ibid., 68.
[3] Robert McRuer, *Crip Theory: Cultural Signs of Queerness and Disability* (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 2.

all bodies under capitalism,[4] marginalizing visibly disabled people for their failure to live up to these ideals as well as stigmatizing people with less visible disabilities for apparently rejecting this cultural mandate when we dare to call ourselves "disabled." Why would anyone claim an identity that is not just culturally stigmatized, but is assumed to stand in for neediness, brokenness, and suffering itself?

Alison Kafer describes this dynamic vividly: "For those with more apparent disabilities, compulsory ablebodiedness necessitates a constant dialogue on questions of cure, loss, and disavowal.... I cannot count the number of times strangers on the street have not only informed me that anyone else with my disabilities would have killed themselves long ago, but also expected me to agree with them."[5] A life with disability, in other words, is understood to be tragic and filled with suffering, as outside the experience of what a life "should" look like. And so, the reactions of others are prompted not just by this theoretical construction, but also by an entangled affective response: a recognition of the bodily vulnerability which has been made abject that now threatens the illusion of one's own invulnerability. Sara Ahmed draws on Julia Kristeva's concept of the abject as that element of the self which has been rejected, made 'other' to the self, in order to argue that the feeling of *disgust* emerges when what has been abjected from the self is perceived to be threatening: "To be disgusted is after all *to be affected by what one has rejected*."[6] The presence of disability is a constant reminder that ablebodiedness is both compulsory and temporary, and this recognition surfaces in feelings of disgust, pity, and more.

This demand for ablebodiedness/ablemindedness does not just hold along lines of disability, but also exerts its force differentially across other lines of social power, most particularly of race and of gender. Blogger Ciarra Jones has written about this pervasive denial of vulnerability, which she calls "the othering of tragedy," noting that "we are socialized to feel that tragedy happens to others, not us, and […] so when tragedy

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[4] Ibid., 156.
[5] Alison Kafer, "Compulsory Bodies: Reflections on Heterosexuality and Able-Bodiedness," *Journal of Women's History* vol. 15, no. 3 (Autumn 2003): 80.
[6] Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 86. Emphasis in original.

predictably appears along our journey, we become misaligned with ourselves." She observes, further, the way that access to social power is predicated on exactly this disavowal, saying, "The number one rule for people of color in the academy is to *never* publicly acknowledge your pain."[7] Across her work Jones describes repeated instances of having to defend the basic humanity of people of color in her graduate classes at Harvard, and the pain that this labor has caused her. And yet, even as this pain is produced disproportionately for students of color, the cost of accessing the privilege of academic opportunity particularly for those students is learning to "hide our pain, [and]... demonize, ostracize, and 'other' our own trauma," even as that trauma is produced by the very system which demands it be hidden. She emphasizes the toll this takes on all students of color, who having internalized these messages learn to enforce them on others, saying that "watching someone live their truth can be incredibly uncomfortable if we are refusing to recognize our own."[8]

What goes without saying in Jones' analysis is that these academic institutions have already been places where pain is unwelcome, where experiences of trauma and loss have had no place in the culture of the white men who founded them; and therefore no place in the understandings of "academic discourse" which have been handed down to us. As this norm begins to broaden, as the experiences of minoritized people are increasingly included as sources of knowledge, including particularly experiences of exclusion and trauma, it is worth noting the ways that such experiences are often limited to specialized fields like Ethnic Studies and Gender Studies, or considered "contextual" theology, while departments like Philosophy, History, and Theology implicitly transcend context and identity, claiming a universality which is in fact specific to white ways of thinking.[9] By the fact of the disciplinary marginalization of these experiences of trauma, the unmarked white academic mainstream

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[7] Ciarra Jones, "The Othering of Tragedy," *Huffington Post*, February 23, 2016, https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/the-othering-of-tragedy_b_9295764.html.

[8] Ciarra Jones, "The Whisper Campaign of Academic Trauma," *Medium Student Voices*, April 4, 2018, https://mystudentvoices.com/the-whisper-campaign-of-academic-trauma-fc917686fcc3.

[9] For an analysis of this dynamic in the field of practical theology, see Tom Beaudoin and Katherine Turpin, "White Practical Theology," in *Opening the Field of Practical Theology: An Introduction*, ed. Kathleen A. Cahalan and Gordon S. Mikoski (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014).

can continue in the illusion that our thoughts and words are unbiased, objective — precisely because they have not been conditioned by pain. The human fact of vulnerability to grief and loss is suspiciously subjective, and academic objectivity as a discourse of whiteness requires that this vulnerability be located ever elsewhere — as a fact of poverty, or racialization, or femininity, but never a reality of humanity itself.

Even as all of us in America face the same neoliberal capitalist demand for strength, resilience, and denial of vulnerability, this demand is mobilized across lines of social power such that the human fact of vulnerability is projected violently onto the groups at the bottom of social hierarchies. Ablebodied and -minded people can displace their sense of vulnerability onto disabled people; men onto women, trans and genderqueer people, and others who fail to live up to normative masculinity; and white people then are encouraged to displace our fear of death itself onto the people of color both within our society and constructed as threats from the outside. Functionally, then, performing whiteness or maleness or ablebodiedness — or academic privilege, in Jones' analysis — is a continued recapitulation and reinscription of this displacement of vulnerability. It is a performance of an illusion, and yet the deeply *felt* nature of this illusion allows it to pass undetected, as "common sense," even while it constrains our sense of what it means to be human in relation to one another and to God.

So, what work, then, does this feeling do for us? What does it do, spiritually and intellectually, for white people in particular to be so insulated from interdependence and death that we can only see it as a tragedy, an aberration, an unfortunate interruption of what life is supposed to be? It is life lived in "a structure of denial,"[10] in a constant quiet fear that does not usually register as fear – or if it does, that fear is then attached to the racialized other[11] – but more often might just be experienced as propriety, as a habit of repression of "the things we don't talk about." It is a turning away, a willful ignorance, a deliberate unrecognition. James Perkinson notes a particular disconnection with the body that characterizes whiteness,[12] and I suggest that this follows as a direct result of the

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[10] James Perkinson, *White Theology: Outing Supremacy in Modernity* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 175.

[11] S. Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 63.

association of the body and flesh with vulnerability and need, and their subsequent rejection. This habitual denial of interdependence and pain, felt as weakness, creates an experience that is nearly opposite from, for instance, those of us with disabilities or chronic illness, for whom sickness, pain, and limitation are elements of daily life — although we must often fight with the medical establishment to have that pain acknowledged. Or, differently, in contrast to the experience of Black people in America, as Christina Sharpe outlines, who are made to live life in the midst of constant and expected death, but yet continue to live full lives in both awareness and defiance of that expectation.[13]

Conceiving of life as ideally free of pain, interdependence, and even death, has kept the white theological mainstream from making sense of these intrinsic realities of human life. In the dominant threads of Christian thought, we have treated the whole experience of suffering as an impossible theological problem, demanding that pain justify to us how it dares to be present in our lives, instead of considering the possibility that fragility and limitation might simply be part of the experience of being human. The doctrine of the Fall, with its purported explanations for such essential human realities as desire, sex, pain, and death, has allowed Christian theology to locate the flux and vulnerability of human bodies in something other than embodiment itself. Sharon Betcher calls this thinking "a traumatic refusal and objectification of pain,"[14] and even as the belief in the effects of this primordial sin have fallen out of favor somewhat, its impact lives on in the framing of questions of theodicy and the baseline assumptions of theological anthropology. Our thinking has been trapped in this vision of an imagined ideal body, painless and invulnerable, leaving us unable to conceive of pain and suffering except as aberrations, as anomalies which cause us to question God's very nature. By continuing to treat this inevitable part of human life not just as painful or unfortunate but as an intractable *wrong* for the way human life is meant to be, we have failed to articulate a theological anthropology which can ever account for

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[12] J. Perkinson, *White Theology*, 182–4, 188–9.

[13] Christina Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016), 16–17.

[14] Sharon Betcher, *Spirit and the Politics of Disablement* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 23.

the whole of human experience, and we have failed to conceive of a notion of humanness that includes all humans, implicitly excluding those whose lives have been made to be most precarious.[15]

The most troubling implication of this dynamic for me is the way that this insufficient felt sense of humanness functions to both entrench the disparities in the distribution of vulnerability and also to constrain the possibilities for empathy across these divisions. As privileged people continue to insist that we are not, as a rule, vulnerable to one another or to the possibility of injury or loss, we fail to realize the ways in which we cause the precarity of others, and we fail subsequently to realize our common humanity with the people we have exposed to death.

Judith Butler, while theorizing the universality of grief in her book *Precarious Life*, and the way it points to a "common human vulnerability," notes the "radically different ways in which human physical vulnerability is distributed across the globe," and the "hierarchy of grief" that is created thereby. She points in particular to the "ungrievable" lives of Palestinians killed by the Israeli military with United States support, arguing that US cultural narratives have altogether excluded these lives as human, and in so doing have created the conditions for their deaths and then foreclosed an opportunity to recognize our mutual identification with suffering.[16] The experience of grief felt in the US in the wake of the September 11 attacks, she posits, holds the possibility of "return[ing] to a sense of human vulnerability, to our collective responsibility for the physical lives of one another," asking, "Could the experience of a dislocation of First World safety not condition the insight into the radically inequitable ways that corporeal vulnerability is distributed globally?" Here she understands the feeling of vulnerability as a resource for political action, particularly because it holds the possibility for identifying with others who suffer.[17] The foreclosure of that vulnerability, then, makes possible the exclusion of Palestinian lives and deaths from US cultural consciousness, placing them beyond "the limits of human intelligibility."[18] This exclusion both enables

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[15] See Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (London: Verso, 2004), 33–35.
[16] Ibid., 30–33.
[17] Ibid., 30.
[18] Ibid., 35.

continued support of the war that causes their exposure to death and then prevents us from expressing grief at their losses, and thus from feeling the impact of the human toll that our national actions have taken. The United States, then, as a national subject has responded to the violation of the 2001 attacks by "seek[ing] to reconstitute its imagined wholeness, but only at the price of denying its own vulnerability, its dependency, its exposure, where it exploits those very features in others, thereby making those features 'other to' itself."[19]

Christina Sharpe, from the perspective of literary studies, argues along similar lines that Black people in America are not just more physically vulnerable, but are culturally understood to be always already on the verge of death, living the midst of a "total climate" of Black death, "as those whom the state positions to die ungrievable deaths and live lives meant to be unliveable." That is, just as Butler has identified the limits of US social discourse that exclude Palestinians in particular from humanness itself, rendering their lives invisible and their deaths unmarkable, Sharpe outlines a parallel dynamic in which Black people are understood by the state and thus by the white majority as "no-citizen," "with no state or nation to protect us, with no citizenship bound to be respected."[20] As white people, we have learned that Black people's deaths are unremarkable; they constitute the background noise of "urban life," the filler between more important news stories, what Sharpe names "the Weather" of antiblackness.[21] This proximity to death is what is named in the recognition of "vulnerable populations," and yet it is precisely the repeated habit of locating vulnerability over *there* and not *here* which perpetuates this disparity. As Butler puts it:

> Violence against those who are already not quite living, that is, living in a state of suspension between life and death, leaves a mark that is no mark. There will be no public act of grieving.... If there is a 'discourse,' it is a silent and melancholic one in which there have been no lives, and no losses; there has been no common bodily condition, no vulnerability that serves as

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[19] Ibid., 41.
[20] C. Sharpe, *In the Wake*, 21–22.
[21] Ibid., 20–21.

the basis for an apprehension of our commonality.... None of this takes place.[22]

Sharpe cites in particular a Temple University Hospital program called "Cradle to Grave" designed to expose "at-risk youth" to the emotional impacts of gun violence. She describes a class of middle-school children, mostly Black, being brought in to the hospital trauma bay, where they are "'told the story of Lamont Adams, 16, who died at the hospital after being shot 14 times by another boy.' One young person is invited [by the 'Trauma Outreach Coordinator'] to put her body in the [place] of Lamont Adams's body, on the gurney that he would have been placed on." Sharpe asks, "How are we to understand trauma here? These young people's bodies are always already in the space of Lamont Adams's body; it is not that step […] that requires imagination." Pointedly, she says:

> I would wager that those same doctors and administrators would not want *their* early teenaged son or daughter exposed to such graphic violence. I would wager that they would not consider it simply an "education" or a "teachable moment" for their child to be positioned face down on an empty body bag and tagged with orange dots to mark each of the twenty-four points of entry and exit for the bullets that struck, and eventually killed, sixteen-year-old Lamont Adams.[23]

"But these children are already 'at-risk!'" we might say. And so are we all, as a point of fact, in a time and place where 7% of a small town's population can be killed by gun violence while sitting in a church service one morning — as happened in Sutherland Springs, Texas, on November 5, 2017.[24] How can we, well-meaning white folks, justify exposing middle-school students to unnecessary trauma except by believing that this place of risk, of exposure, is where *they*, and not we, *already are* — and in doing so reproduce the logic which tells these children that they are already expected to die? This logic recognizes the increased vulnerability that

[22] J. Butler, *Precarious Life*, 36.
[23] C. Sharpe, *In The Wake*, 88–89.
[24] David Montgomery, Christopher Mele, and Manny Fernandez, "Gunman Kills at Least 26 in Attack on Rural Texas Church," *The New York Times*, November 5, 2017, https://www.nytimes.com/2017/11/05/us/church-shooting-texas.html.

youth of color do face in our country, but twists it from a vantage point in which we white people cannot imagine ourselves or our loved ones in their places and so can see them only as a faceless crowd of "at-risk youth," naming them and re-creating them as such, and then barely batting an eye when these same kids are hurt or killed or incarcerated, because that is the future we already expect for them. As James Perkinson puts it, "To be white in this world is not to be any less subject to death than being black. But it often does indicate a lifestyle committed to denying contingency and trying to banish the signs of mortality 'elsewhere.'"[25]

This pattern of continued denial of vulnerability has had serious theological implications for Christology in particular, as mainstream Christian perspectives have continued to treat the vulnerability of a human person to suffering and death as completely antithetical to divine power, or to power at all. The incarnation in this framework can only ever be a paradox, a forcing together of two mutually exclusive realities. While a certain amount of dynamic tension is theologically necessary, the absolute opposition in which these two realities have been held misses some fundamental insights which Jesus' incarnation potentially offers us. Most broadly, if we conceive of these two realities as fundamentally opposed to one another, and yet hold at the center of Christian theology a foundational insistence that human and divine come together in one body and in one spectacular instance of how vulnerable human bodies are to other humans, then I submit that we have not correctly understood either divinity or humanity. The divine power which is manifested in Jesus' life, and most particularly through his torture, death, and resurrection, cannot be a power which categorically excludes weakness and vulnerability. And likewise, the human life which displays that divine power through touch and love, through suffering and through still-wounded new life — that wounded human flesh cannot be understood to categorically exclude the power and holiness which is manifested through it. That is, the power of God, we claim, has been most fully manifested on earth in an ordinary human body, and all this divine power did not preclude that body and that

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[25] J. Perkinson, *White Theology*, 165–7.

person from being physically and emotionally vulnerable to the people and the world that he encountered.

One powerful recent consideration of the violence of Jesus' crucifixion comes from James H. Cone, drawing a line between the cross of Jesus and the lynching trees that haunt the Black experience in America. He finds an important resonance in the history of Black Christian faith between the present-day violence and oppression and the remembrance of Jesus' own crucifixion and resurrection: "The more black people struggled against white supremacy, the more they found in the cross the spiritual power to resist the violence they so often suffered. They came to know […] 'what it was like to be crucified […]. And more: that there were some things in this world that are worth being crucified for.'"[26] In this parallel between the cross and the lynching tree, Cone finds a wealth of resources for understanding both more fully. Yet, he says, white theologians in particular have neglected this connection, as they (we) have neglected to consider racial injustice more generally. "But if the lynching tree is America's cross and if the cross is the heart of the Christian gospel," Cone challenges us, "perhaps Martin Luther King Jr. […] has something to teach America about Jesus' cross."[27]

Looking particularly at the work of Reinhold Niebuhr, as a white theologian who came close to making this connection but ultimately did not, Cone locates Niebuhr's intellectual failure in an *affective* failure — a failure to truly empathize with Black experience. While Niebuhr did consider the impact of racist violence "from a rational and intellectual standpoint," and "had 'eyes to see' black suffering," Cone believes "he lacked the 'heart to feel' it as his own."[28] This failure of empathy, on the part of a man who claimed to value racial justice as well as the Christian message of "the ultimate success of what the world calls failure and failure of what the world calls success,"[29] limited Niebuhr's ability first to speak prophetically to his present moment, and further, to make a full analysis of the meaning of Jesus' crucifixion in that context. Even as he emphasized the political importance of the cross and of theology generally, by

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[26] James Cone, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2011), 22.
[27] Ibid., 64.
[28] Ibid., 40–41.
[29] Reinhold Niebuhr, *Beyond Tragedy*, quoted in ibid., 36.

remaining detached from the emotional impact of racial violence Niebuhr missed key insights into the meaning of the cross in the modern era, and failed to articulate a theology which could speak fully to complexity of race in America. In his work, as in most of the white theological mainstream, what might look like simply an interpersonal quirk becomes a systemic failure of imagination. As Cone puts it, "This suggests why it is so hard for whites and blacks to talk about white supremacy; even among progressive intellectuals like Niebuhr, there is too little empathy regarding black suffering in the white community.[30]

The contemporary neoliberal framework teaches us that we gain power by denying our vulnerability and interconnection on a micro level, constraining the very feelings we allow ourselves to have, which translates on a macro level into restrictive definitions of "humanness," and a pattern of displacing threats and violence of all kinds onto the people who are "not us," however that may be defined. Yet the example that we have in the Christian tradition of what power looks like is precisely the opposite: it is a kenosis, a movement *toward* vulnerability and *toward* identification with the other, along with an ever-widening definition of who is human. Within Christian theology, then, if we hold that Jesus is the paradigm of true human nature, we must consider the logical implication that humanness itself is defined by precisely this kind of physical and emotional vulnerability — even as our privilege as white people (or as male, as ablebodied, as American, as first-world…) can make this truth feel unthinkable.

Even as those of us with privilege can and must recognize the vastly unequal distribution of vulnerability in our world, the danger in marking some populations "more vulnerable," or "at-risk," is the implicit assumption that we doing the marking are *less* vulnerable, or somehow *not at risk*. This assumption is objectively untrue, given the pervasive reality of death, illness, and injury, and as increasingly theorists across disciplines have begun to emphasize the deep interconnectivity and permeability that characterize not just human relationships, but also selfhood and materiality itself.[31] But further, this implicit denial divides us from one another, even

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[30] J. Cone, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*, 57.
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though the humanitarian impulse of recognizing "vulnerable populations," because it neglects the reality of our mutual vulnerability and shared humanness, and erases our complicity in the global systems that have caused these precarious situations.[32] Within the Christian tradition, our theological affirmations have helped to encode these assumptions, which then impacts the way we experience our own bodies and constrains what we allow ourselves to feel, and subsequently reinscribes an imagined ideal body, painless and invulnerable, implicitly or explicitly in the theology we write.

The way forward from this theoretical bind is an attention to vulnerability not just "out there" but also in each of us, particularly in relation to the privileged positions we may occupy. It is here that a recognition of intersectionality becomes necessary as a way to conceptualize the complexity of the power relationships that impact each of us. Even the most privileged people have experiences of grief or loss, and as Butler outlines, these experiences of human vulnerability can be resources for political action rooted in empathy and shared humanity. It is only when we who are privileged are able to recognize both our complicity with and the ways we are impacted by the systems of oppression — including being unable to acknowledge our vulnerability — that we will be able to address the unequal distribution of vulnerability in our world, and to theologically articulate a notion of humanness that includes not just all members of the human species, but also those parts of our own humanness that have been repressed and abjected.

Our theology depends on it, and more importantly, all of our lives depend on it.

Kai Moore LeFranc is a doctoral student in Christian theology at the Graduate Theological Union, and is an ordained minister in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). Their work is aiming at a queer theology of the cross, which centers on an analysis of the complex relationship of power with flesh from a variety of perspectives, including queer philosophy in the Foucaultian tradition, disability studies, new materialism, and intersectional race theory, and is animated by a conviction in the scandalous power of Jesus' particular body.

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[31] See, for instance, J. Butler, *Precarious Life*, and Karen Barad, "Posthumanist Performativity: Toward an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter."

[32] Laurie M. Cassidy, "Grotesque Un/Knowing of Suffering: A White Christian Response," in *Christology and Whiteness*, ed. George Yancy, (London: Routledge, 2012).

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