

# Solus Christus within Empire: Christology in the Face of Violence against Women

By Mary J. Streufert

**Abstract:** When seen as the theocentric political confession it is, the confession “only Christ” is possible and meaningful for victim/survivors of violence against women. To confess only Christ undoes what is “required” in an empire of violence against women and is the recognition that Jesus Christ embraces our bodies, all of them. Moreover, this confession changes the body’s response—individual and communal—to violence in an empire of violence against women.

**Key Terms:** body, Christ, empire, violence against women

## Violence against Lizzy Seeberg

On August 31, 2010, Elizabeth “Lizzy” Seeberg, a student at St. Mary’s College, Indiana, was sexually assaulted by a Notre Dame football player. Although she reported it within 24 hours to campus police, they did not interview the suspect until two weeks later, five days after Lizzy, despondent over the assault and aftermath, completed suicide. Like many other victims of violence against women,<sup>1</sup> Lizzy felt hemmed in. She had gone to the police and to the hospital. She had told friends, written out her statement, and turned to local crisis counselors and her family. Yet the institutional and interpersonal responses to her confirm a thick blanket of silence and control, indicative of an empire of violence against women.

According to Lizzy’s statement, she went to the football player’s residence hall room, along with

one of his friends and the friend’s girlfriend, both of whom she knew. After apparent texting between the two men, the other couple left the room suddenly; Lizzy described feeling immediately unsafe. The man’s assault only stopped once he was distracted by his phone, she reported. Soon thereafter, the other couple returned. The next day, Lizzy reported the incident to campus police. The day after that, the football player’s friend texted her this message: “Don’t do anything you would regret. Messing with notre dame [sic] football is a bad idea.”<sup>2</sup> In the days after the alleged assault, one source related, “She feared people would dislike her for accusing a Notre Dame athlete of a sex crime and that she would wear the incident ‘like a scarlet letter’ throughout her college career.”<sup>3</sup> Unfortunately, the interpersonal response mirrors the institutional response.

In brief, the university appeared to have conducted a poor and ineffective investigation. In addition to the delayed interview with the accused,

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the communication between campus and county authorities was incomplete at best: another reported campus sexual assault just weeks later received similar disinterest and inefficiency;<sup>4</sup> and, although changes were instituted on campus after a Department of Education investigation, no charges were filed against the accused. It takes little to know that Lizzy is but one woman among millions in the United States who are sexually, physically, and/or emotionally victimized by men every year. What happened on August 31, 2010, crushed her. The response—indicative of an empire of violence against women—sought to silence and thereby control her, protect important men, and maintain the way things are, including football and reputations. The empire of violence against women reaches far and wide.<sup>5</sup>

Christian women who have been harmed by such violence often struggle deeply with their faith in Jesus Christ. Theologians have addressed many problematic facets of Christology and soteriology. Central critiques focus on the results of an imitative Christology that supports the necessity of women suffering “like Christ,”<sup>6</sup> sacrificial atonement theories;<sup>7</sup> and hierarchical gender roles.<sup>8</sup> Here I suggest some possible meanings of the confession *solus Christus* from a feminist theological perspective of female victim/survivors. Given my Lutheran commitments, I rely on Scripture and biblical studies, as well as Lutheran confessional principles. I do so not in an effort to speak only within Lutheran circles, but in order to explore the possible gift Lutheran theology may be for millions of Christian women and their communities. What meaning might the confession *solus Christus* hold for women survivors and their communities in an empire of violence against women? When seen as the theocentric political confession it is, I suggest, the confession “only Christ” is possible and meaningful for victim/survivors of violence against women. To confess “only Christ” undoes what is “required” in an empire of violence against women and is the recognition that Jesus Christ embraces our bodies, all of them. Moreover, this confession changes the body’s response<sup>9</sup> to violence in an empire of violence against women.

## Empire

Over the last twenty years, the field of biblical studies has deepened and complexified biblical hermeneutics; of no little significance has been the work of New Testament scholars who emphasize the Roman imperial context of Jesus’ life and the gospel proclamation. By 117 CE, Rome controlled the area from Spain to Britain to Armenia and well into Egypt. But the Roman empire was about more than simply masses of land. The Roman Empire pervasively affected peoples and was held intact through the military, bureaucracy, and ideology.<sup>10</sup> The empire was infused with the ideals of a divine human emperor—that he was a savior, healer, and peacemaker, and that he carried the good news of the peace of Rome.<sup>11</sup> The ideals and control of the Roman empire were no optional venue to pay attention to; rather, they affected how people thought and acted. According to Joerg Rieger, “Empire, in sum, has to do with massive concentrations of power that permeate all aspects of life and that cannot be controlled by any one actor alone.”<sup>12</sup> Subjects of Rome were coerced to desire to belong to it, for to adhere to the ideals of Rome meant that one was “lawful,” one was justified by submitting to Roman law, to Roman ideals. To be lawless, however, was to stand against or outside of the Roman empire, its ideals, images, and idols.

As Brigitte Kahl argues, Roman images communicated, in part, that people outside of Roman law were “down,” “out,” and “low;” in other words, they deserved to get what they had coming to them from the empire.<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, as Davina Lopez demonstrates, Roman images were of male-personified Rome defeating—and sometimes raping—female-personified nations. Again, anyone who was “other” to the empire got what they had coming because patriarchal male domination was portrayed as natural, justified, and expected.<sup>14</sup> Thus, this is the context in which to interpret Jesus’ ministry of a shared table and free healing and his death and resurrection. In an oppressive system of “otherizing,” the lordship of Jesus Christ as God

incarnate challenges the emperor's lordship through ordinary means and acts of the body, eating and healing.

The Roman Empire was harsh for many people. Empire is no less a problem today.<sup>15</sup> There is difficulty in even seeing what is going on in any empire because control is not always through military force.<sup>16</sup> Instead, as Rieger explains "economics, technology, and culture, at times supported by military interventions, have proven far more effective in creating an empire than ever before."<sup>17</sup> In fact, the control of empire reaches us "intellectually, emotionally, psychologically, spiritually, culturally, and religiously."<sup>18</sup> While Rieger makes clear his critique of the United States-backed global empire, his analysis leaves ample room to challenge multiple forms of empire. He reminds us that part of the Christian vocation is to remain in the word of Jesus Christ in order to get past the cult of empire that possesses our collective unconscious, seeking to subvert us from Christ's reality, a reality other than empire.

One form of empire, I argue, is violence against women.<sup>19</sup> The forces of suffering, control, and death try to squeeze out the reality of Jesus Christ in the world. The web of violence against women infuses our collective and individual lives through actual acts of harm, through inadequate laws, through death-dealing ideologies, through silence and denial, through indifference, and through the ways we shape our lives in order to attempt to avoid being violated. We all exist in the web that makes this violence possible. We are compelled to ask where Christ is hidden in the unexpected places—the seams and wounds and deaths of violated women. To be in Christ, to know *solus Christus*, changes our positions and worldviews and responses within empire, no matter which empire, contemporary or ancient.

## Jesus Christ as Lord in Empire

The Gospels clearly relate that Jesus' ministry centered around teaching, table, and healing. Each act resisted and disrupted the ways of the Roman Empire in favor of God's ways. Jesus' teaching entreated listeners not only to love God and others,

but also to resist the crushing power of Rome.<sup>20</sup> And the community of Jesus resisted and disrupted Rome through table and healing practices. Eating with the most marginalized in society challenged Roman ideals of who was at the top of the social order and who was at the bottom. The table with Jesus became very messy, for it challenged the Roman social order, held in place, for example, by patron/client relationships, wherein someone (lower) was always indebted to someone else (higher). That Jesus healed others without charge and then told followers to do the same spread practices of non-patronage in a society utterly dependent upon patronal healing. God incarnate and the empire clash.

Paul proclaims the same. In fact, he uses the language of the Roman empire to proclaim the other-than-empire gospel. For example, Paul declares that God is the Father (not Caesar) and Jesus Christ is Lord (not Caesar): "yet for us, there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist" (I Cor. 8:6). Jesus above Caesar? This is impossible according to the ideals of Rome; Caesar declared himself divine and placed himself in the role of dispensing life and death for all Roman subjects. That Jesus Christ is Lord means that God is hidden in an unimaginable way according to the logic of Rome. The form of this Lord is the lowest, a savior who is the inverse of the imperial savior—arms spread in crucifixion, rather than arms lifted in battle. This savior of the nations is in the lowest place in the empire, rather than commanding the cross. This savior is a disruption to all human expectations. This is a savior who rapes no one.<sup>21</sup>

Thus the power of this savior is also not like the empire's power; it is other-than-empire. The force of Jesus Christ is the no-force, which is nevertheless a subversive force. Just hear the teaching; look at the table; notice the healing. People are justified not by adhering to the ways of empire—being "lawful" according to Rome—but by being in Christ. Only Christ. *Solus Christus*: this is a very dangerous confession in any order of empire. To confess Christ, to be in Christ, is not simply a moral position but a radically political existence. It is political because this confession has to do with

the body politic, the body/bodies in and of creation. What does this mean for us in the empire of violence against women? What is the other-than-empire transformation towards God's reality which Jesus Christ makes possible?

## Solus Christus

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The reformers of the church were centrally concerned to turn faith from the human-driven salvation that had developed over many centuries to Christ. Thus, in the Lutheran Reformers' defense of the movement, they write:

In the first place, our works cannot reconcile us with God or obtain grace. Instead, this happens through faith alone when a person believes that our sins are forgiven for Christ's sake, who alone is the mediator to reconcile the Father. Now all who imagine that they can accomplish this by works and can merit grace despise Christ and seek their own way to God contrary to the gospel.<sup>22</sup>

Their emphasis is on God's act through Christ alone to forgive sin and reconcile humanity to God. Christ alone is what humanity needs. They continue, "[Scripture] sets before us Christ alone as mediator, atoning sacrifice, high priest, and intercessor."<sup>23</sup> Here we see the careful wedding of the Reformation *solas*: *solus Christus*, *sola gratia*, *sola fides*, *sola scriptura*. Their point is that it is Scripture that carries Christ, faith through which we receive Christ, and Christ alone who acts to redeem through grace. The Reformers are focused on interpreting Jesus as the "only one atoning sacrifice in the world."<sup>24</sup> This, they argue, "is very comforting and beneficial for timid and terrified consciences."<sup>25</sup> But is the female survivor in an empire of violence against women suffering from a guilty conscience? Is she worried about what reconciles her to God because of *her* sin? Hardly. She is, rather, terrified and seeks salve—*salvus*—because of someone else's sin.

Therefore, the context of violence against women must be the context for confessing *solus Christus*. One danger of interpreting *solus Christus* outside

of this context is that the proclamation of God's grace does not then meet her need. If the Reformers' words are kept in their world and not released into our own, the confession can stand as a kind of external idea, or something "of faith," but not of our real, utmost needs, be they existential, physical, or spiritual. A confession of Christ alone that remains outside of what deals death *right now* does not proclaim the *pro nobis* nature of salvation. We miss what Christ means to the body in any empire, ancient, medieval, or contemporary. As has been pointed out in multiple contexts, confessing only Christ has led to misplaced suffering, silence, and unchallenged male hegemony.<sup>26</sup> But to confess only Christ disrupts and transforms all that deals this kind of death.

## Saved and Redeemed

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When you have been violated by another or others, *solus Christus* might mean that only Christ is "a sure and certain consolation."<sup>27</sup> One Lutheran theologian argues from this christocentric principle that Christ meets our deepest needs: "[Christ] mediates the actual salvation human beings need."<sup>28</sup> The actual salvation a survivor needs includes meeting her questions and redeeming her from the place into which she has been thrust by another's greed, another's evil. Her deepest questions may include: "Why? Why me? Why this suffering? Who will hear me? Why this silence? Why this isolation? My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" The place into which she has been thrust by this web-like empire of violence against women is as the "Other" in this empire. I suggest that for Christian women living and dying many deaths, only Christ is the other-than-empire to redeem her, to offer healing, salve. Nothing she does, including following the "laws" of an empire of violence against women, will redeem her.

The Reformers' arguments against works as a means of redemption are especially helpful when interpreted through a feminist viewpoint of violence against women. Remember their emphasis on consolation. They thought that people's consciences were terrified before God because they

knew how desperately sinful they were and saw no way to reconciliation with God. Of course, all of humanity shares equally in sin and in our need for grace. What the Reformers were not able to do at the time is ask what consolation God offers for those of us terrified because of someone else. They write, “We are debating about an important matter, namely, about the honor of Christ and the source from which the faithful might seek a sure and certain consolation—whether we should place our confidence in Christ or in our own works.”<sup>29</sup> They also cite Ambrose, who argues that human works do not lead to God’s mercy: “For then it would be the worker’s wage rather than the donor’s gift.”<sup>30</sup> Such teaching on the confession, *solus Christus*, is good news to survivors.

The works that the empire of violence against women dictates, as is clear in Lizzy Seeburg’s life and death, are to accept male aggression and violence, to remain silent about it, and to support and accept the institutional responses of denial, resistance, and silence that protect the accused and the way things are. To confess only Christ undoes the acceptance of this law of justification within an empire of violence against women. The woman’s wage—“the worker’s wage”—is not suffering “like Christ,” simply for the sake of suffering. Suffering, by being beaten, raped, stalked, assaulted, and otherwise attacked, cannot and does not reconcile us to God. Accepting such violence may “reconcile” women and girls to sinful patriarchal relationships, but such “works” will never redeem us to God. For God through Jesus Christ lives as other-than-empire through the Sacraments, creating and sustaining the body of Christ. And this body is violated.

## A Feminist Proposal for *Solus Christus*

I offer some suggestions to confess Christ from a feminist perspective of violence against women by thinking through the methodological sources I have outlined previously.<sup>31</sup> Speaking through his-

tory, kerygma, dogma, and experience, we can confess only Christ even within the empire of violence against women—all while thinking *through the body* in and with the sacraments of baptism and the Eucharist.

## History

Historical study lifts the curtain on the ancient world and the context of Scripture; it helps us see the grueling nature of the Roman Empire and the disruption and transformation Jesus Christ is. Historical study helps us to hear the depth of Paul’s letters and his latent and explicit resistance to anything that claimed to be above the God of Israel through Jesus Christ. We know that Jesus’ eating and healing practices destabilized the relationships of power that were in place to keep some people “high” and some people “low” in the social order. Jesus’ practices, as I have written elsewhere, “in an empire of systematic oppression provide the provocative image of immanent salvation Jesus lived.” Scripture testifies that “God incarnate looks like this: radically disruptive of human expectations and radically relational.”<sup>32</sup> These acts of the body mean something for women victim/survivors of violence in an empire of violence against women.

Joy Schroeder uncovers a solid history of biblical interpretation in the Christian tradition that blames the victim and denies or makes little of the violence and utter horror of stories of violence against women in the Bible. In fact, we find in the Bible and pursuant interpretations a web of denial, protection of important men, silence, and distrust of women, including blaming them for the violence. Throughout centuries of interpretation, silent women were seen as trustworthy; women who protested the violence men did to them were untrustworthy.<sup>33</sup> Such is the same thread today, as was the case for Lizzy Seeburg. What do the shared table and free healing of the community surrounding Jesus Christ mean for her? In very broad terms, it means Christ among us *is* the body.

A Roman shared table was an embodiment of equal bodies. To be at table meant that the people who were eating together were of similar



status; they had somewhat equal ranking, importance, wealth, etc. But the table of the Jesus movement disrupted the imputed meanings of relative importance. This means bodies met and served each other, no matter the value placed on them in the context of hierarchy. This means that the bodies women survivors meet at the table have no relative worth higher than theirs, even if they “mess with notre dame [*sic*] football.” What they say and need is not only heard, but believed and acted upon. The other bodies in the body serve her. And she, them.

Free healing also matters for women victim/survivors. Those who were healed in a patron/client system were indebted to their healers. Jesus asks his followers to live without the debts and hierarchy of healing in a patronal system. Those who were healed no longer owed their existence to superiors through debt. For women survivors in the body of Christ, free healing removes the ranks of authority and the relationships of indebtedness from their lives. This means that women survivors owe no one a debt of silence or passivity. Instead, those who are called to heal without debt, do so. In the case of Lizzy, this would have included the Notre Dame police department and administration. They would have acted on her testimony within hours, not weeks. The delay in interviewing the implicated man, for example, was a form of debt that Lizzy was indirectly asked to pay in that particular system of silence and denial. The institutional and interpersonal responses (the football player’s friend) did not represent the free healing of the Gospels.

## Kerygma

The proclamation of the good news of God’s grace through Jesus Christ is central to Lutheran theology and all that Luther stood for. God’s promise of justification by grace through faith, Luther holds, is *pro nobis*, for us, and *pro me*, for me. Unlike our postmodern consciousness that separates the individual and the community, Luther reveals an interconnected grasp of the promise of God *pro nobis* and *pro me*. In his commentary on Galatians, he writes, “As I have said, faith grasps and embraces

Christ, the Son of God, who was given for us, as Paul teaches here. When He has been grasped by faith, we have righteousness and life. For Christ is the Son of God, who gave Himself out of sheer love to redeem me.”<sup>34</sup> God is *for us* not because we are innocent but out of mercy and because of our need for God.<sup>35</sup> As Lutheran theologians Kathryn Kleinhans and Anna Mercedes make tellingly clear, God’s grace is a giving, not a taking; through the Spirit’s work in us, our hands likewise are opened towards each other in the body of Christ. The grace of which they speak is immediate and active in us and thus de-centers the rational ego not only of us as individuals, but also of us as the body of Christ.<sup>36</sup> That it is Christ through whom we receive God’s grace active in us means we are not the center of the universe. This personal and communal ego de-centering holds the grace-filled reminder that the human self and human community receive grace; we do not create it.

This means that the community, the body of Christ, is equally subject to God. There is thus no special priority for men to violate women; one form of humanity is not the subject and the other the object. Rather, we all share in being subject to God. Likewise, the proclamation that God’s grace through Jesus Christ is *for us* means that grace is experienced now, in our bodies and souls, not simply in the eschaton. The grace of such a living Christ for women survivors meets her needs for salve, which for her may include all that Lizzy did not receive: respect and belief in her and her witness, the advocacy of timely and transparent legal and institutional processes, and solidarity in the form of accountability for the accused, his friend, and the football program.<sup>37</sup> What Lizzy needed was not simply justice but a living Christ, actively mending the suffering inflicted on her.

To speak of suffering naturally turns us to consider the cross. A substantial focus in the Christian tradition is on substitutionary atonement, yet the *pro nobis* promise of grace is not limited to the cross as substitution. The promise of grace also is deeply connected to our bodies in at least two important ways, through Jesus’ ministry of healing bodies and through the crucifixion of Jesus *as God incarnate*. Both of these areas are intertwined with dogma,

the confession that Jesus Christ is fully human and fully divine—and thus sufficient for salvation.

## Dogma

The authors of the Creed of Chalcedon were eager to ensure the confession that Jesus Christ is fully human and fully divine, in one being. That God is incarnate in Jesus Christ changes us. To confess that Jesus Christ is human means that God shares humanity with us; to confess that Jesus Christ is divine means that God in Christ remains fundamentally different from us. We know that Jesus' ministry as God incarnate involved bodies, including healing a woman whose vagina had not stopped bleeding for 12 years. What intimate care for bodies. This is how God meets the world.

Yet Scripture and tradition tell us that God incarnate was fully human in the actual existence of Jesus Christ, for Jesus of Nazareth was born and was crucified. To be fully human, as the medieval tradition relates, was to be generative and vulnerable.<sup>38</sup> The healing and table practices of the community surrounding Jesus were generative, and the crucifixion made him utterly vulnerable. As Schroeder reminds us, Jesus on the cross was real human flesh in agony and suffering. Crucifixion practices in the Roman empire involved public humiliation, torture, and sexual shaming; victims of crucifixion were hung up naked.<sup>39</sup> Jesus of Nazareth was forced into the non-being of the exposure of the cross through his entire body. The forced non-being of women victim/survivors is fully known by God through Jesus Christ, who has not escaped the suffering of evil. This is the Christ who is *pro nobis*; survivors are known fully. God has become part of her in sharing the depths. This is reason to hope in only Christ.<sup>40</sup>

This same fully human Jesus Christ is also fully divine, taking the form of non-being; God is fully with us.<sup>41</sup> Jesus Christ therefore is fundamentally different from humanity. We humans are fully known by God, who remains an Other for us. Sometimes, confessing that Jesus Christ is fully divine has been a stumbling block for feminists, but I suggest that we learn much from Scripture and

tradition about the radical otherness and beauty divinity is for us and yet beyond us. We are dependent upon God as source and life. As Luther writes, “You are to have no other gods.’ That is, you are to regard me alone as your God. . . . [T]o have a god is nothing else than to trust and believe in that one with your whole heart.”<sup>42</sup> We cannot save ourselves by adhering to the laws of any empire; as fundamentally different, God through Jesus Christ redeems our wounds through life, death and resurrection. Through the incarnation, God stretches herself into the seams and fissures of human life, including women victim/survivors’ bodies, hearts, and minds. The new life of the body disclosed in the resurrection is the promise of new life in the body which the Spirit provides. As Monika Hellwig points out, God incarnate in Jesus Christ is the hope of divine compassion,<sup>43</sup> a compassion that stretches our bodies towards each other in care. And we know this vocation of care because we, too, as the body, are called to be generative and vulnerable with each other.

What the incarnation might mean for women survivors may be quite simple. We are known. We are known by the God who is vulnerable in human flesh, naked before actors of the empire. Jesus Christ has lived the terror of the body and continues to live it. Yet as the God who redeems through the body, Jesus Christ urges hope through the Spirit. Perhaps Lizzy knew that God was with her in her humiliation and suffering; her private thoughts are not public record. To an observer, what is apparent is the potential function of the confession of Jesus Christ as fully human and fully divine to the body of Christ that held Lizzy. M. Shawn Copeland argues that Roman Catholic teaching casts gay and lesbian bodies to the margins of the church because the church is afraid of Jesus of Nazareth’s body. And she asks if the church is really what it thinks it is—“the marked flesh of Christ.”<sup>44</sup> Perhaps less obviously church teaching and in/action casts women survivors to the margins of the church. The body of Christ that held Lizzy needed to know itself as the violated body, as “the marked flesh of Christ” together. Not her, us. There is thus no male god to rule the response to Lizzy, but only God’s desires for us because Christ,

the incarnation of God, reorients our bodies in the body.<sup>45</sup>

## Experience

Feminist theology consistently has foregrounded experience in theological development. Along with womanist, *mujerista*, and queer theologians, feminist theologians have insisted on experience as a theological source, and I have argued elsewhere that experience is likewise a fitting source in the Lutheran tradition.<sup>46</sup> Here I have repeatedly asked what actually matters for women survivors of violence. What are their deepest needs? What is salvation when you are a victim/survivor? I have continued to explore possible meanings of *solus Christus*. To speak Christologically through experience leads to the sacraments, because the sacraments are constitutively relational and radically disruptive of human expectations.

The sacraments matter for survivors; they matter for the body of Christ. Simply put, Baptism marks us with the sign of Christ. Our individual bodies are marked by the sign of the cross into God's life. God forms the body of Christ, the corporate body, the body of bodies. The Eucharist brings Christ to us and unites us not only with Christ but with each other. As Luther writes, participating in the Eucharist means we participate in the sorrow and pain of the whole body of Christ; we share "all the unjust suffering of the innocent, with which the world is everywhere filled to overflowing."<sup>47</sup> This is not our own, human doing, the binding together through the sacraments. Rather, what we experience in the sacraments is the work of the Holy Spirit. We experience that the body of Christ is constitutively relational. As Luther writes:

Now just as God and [humanity] are one indivisible person in Christ, so Christ and we also become one inseparable body and flesh. [Christ's] flesh is in us, and our flesh is in [Christ], so that [Christ] also abides in us with [Christ's] essence, etc. . . . And yet it is devised so that Christ, with [Christ's] flesh and blood, becomes one body with us, that I am [Christ's], as all members of the

body belong together. . . . Whatever ails one member also affects the other.<sup>48</sup>

## God with Us

God is with us. And we are with each other, in all our human generativity and vulnerability. Moreover, what we experience in the Eucharist is radically disruptive of human expectations. Again, as Luther writes:

Thus, what is true in regard to Christ, is also true in regard to the sacrament. . . . Both natures are simply there in their entirety, and it is truly said: "This [hu]man is God; this God is [hu]man." Even though philosophy cannot grasp this, faith grasps it nonetheless. And the authority of God's Word is greater than the capacity of our intellect to grasp it. In like manner, it is not necessary in the sacrament that the bread and wine be transubstantiated and that Christ be contained under their accidents in order that the real body and real blood be present. But both remain there at the same time, and it is truly said: "This bread is my body; this wine is my blood," and vice versa.<sup>49</sup>

God in Jesus Christ is in, with and under the elements of the Eucharist. Yet it is Christ *pro nobis* through whom we share in the "unjust suffering" of each other. Christ is active through our real bodies; the table is set for everyone.

For women like Lizzy, the sacraments are God's powerful binding together of the body. Through them, Christians are knit together into vulnerability with each other. Of course, the eucharist means that Christ lives in her, a survivor. Yet the implications for the whole body of Christ, once again, are far more compelling than our Christologies usually allow. The sacraments are not individuated acts only between God and a person; they are, instead, communal acts that constitute our relationships and disrupt our expectations. For if God is present in the seam of misery in which Lizzy found herself, then the body of Christ is there, too. The police and the administration would have found



themselves there, too, vulnerable to the threats of an empire of violence against women. And maybe suffering because of it.

## Endnotes

1. For the purposes of this article, I have chosen to focus on violence against women, rather than gender-based violence, given the overwhelming problem of violence against women as women. I am relying on an inclusive definition of who is a woman. I have also cautiously chosen to use the language of victim and survivor, for at some point in the violence, she is made into a victim. Many victims survive; many die.
2. Stacy St. Clair and Todd Lighty, "It feels like a betrayal," *Chicago Tribune*, December 16, 2010, sec. 1.
3. Stacy St. Clair and Todd Lighty, "Notre Dame allegation raises questions," *Chicago Tribune*, November 21, 2010, sec. 1.
4. Stacy St. Clair and Todd Lighty, "Family criticizes ND in 2<sup>nd</sup> case," *Chicago Tribune*, February 17, 2011, sec. A.
5. This is demonstrated in statistics. For example, one in six women in the U.S. is sexually assaulted; one in 33 men is sexually assaulted. Approximately six percent of rapists spend time in jail. See Rape, Abuse and Incest National Network, <http://www.rainn.org/statistics> (accessed April 30, 2014). Eighty-five percent of all intimate partner abuse is of women. Almost one-third of female homicide victims are killed by an intimate partner. See National Coalition Against Domestic Violence, [http://www.ncadv.org/files/DomesticViolenceFactSheet\(National\).pdf](http://www.ncadv.org/files/DomesticViolenceFactSheet(National).pdf) (accessed April 30, 2014). For examples of responses to women raped by men outside of a college campus, see, e.g., Marisa Ferri, "Take It from Me: D.C. Rape Bill Needs More Muscle," *WeNews*, March 11, 2014, <http://womensenews.org/story/rape/140310/take-it-me-de-rape-bill-needs-more-muscle> (accessed April 22, 2014) and Victoria Fitzgerald, "Steubenville Sentencing Sets Blogosphere Ablaze," *WeNews*, March 20, 2013, <http://womensenews.org/story/in-the-courts/130320/steubenville-sentencing-sets-blogosphere-ablaze>.
6. See, e.g., Marie Fortune, "Seeking Justice and Healing: Violence against Women as an Agenda for Feminist Christianity," in *New Feminist Christianity*, ed. Mary E. Hunt and Diann L. Neu (Woodstock, VT: Skylight Paths, 2010), 138–148, 315, and Rita Nakashima Brock and Rebecca Ann Parker, *Proverbs of Ashes* (Boston: Beacon, 2001).
7. See, e.g., Marit Trelstad, ed., *Cross Examinations* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2006).
8. The vast majority of feminist, womanist, and mujerista theological and religious literature argues against hierarchically ordered valuation of humanity. For a specifically Lutheran appraisal of hierarchical gendered theological anthropology, see, e.g., Kristen E. Kvam, "God's Heart Revealed in Eden: Luther on the Character of God and the Vocation of Humanity," in *Transformative Lutheran Theologies*, ed. Mary J. Streufert (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2010), 57–67, 242–243, and Mary J. Streufert, "Idolatry-Critical Justification and the Foreclosed Gendered Life," in *Lutheran Identity and Political Theology*, ed. Carl-Henric Grenholm and Göran Gunner, Church of Sweden Series (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2014).
9. Both individual bodies and the body of Christ.
10. See Davina C. Lopez, *The Apostle to the Conquered*, (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2010), 166 and Joerg Rieger, *Remember the Poor* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1998), 29.
11. See, e.g., John Dominic Crossan, *God & Empire* (HarperSan-Francisco, 2007), 19–21, 107–108.
12. Rieger, 2–3.
13. See Brigitte Kahl, *Galatians Re-Imagined* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010), 105; 147.
14. See Lopez, xiii-xiv, 1–2, 119.
15. See, e.g., M. Shawn Copeland, *Enfleshing Freedom* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2010) and Pui-lan Kwok, et. al, eds. *Empire and the Christian Tradition* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007).
16. Rieger, 318.
17. *Ibid.*, 314.
18. *Ibid.*, 3.
19. For historical and systemic analyses of the church's role in intimate partner violence, see Pamela Cooper-White, "Intimate Violence Against Women," *Pastoral Psychology* 60 (2011): 809–855.
20. See, e.g., Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Jesus and the Politics of Interpretation* (New York: Continuum, 2000), 113–114.
21. I depend upon analysis from Kahl and Lopez in particular for these connections.
22. The Augsburg Confession—German Text—Article XX: Faith, BofC, 54.
23. Augsburg Confession—Latin Text—Conclusion, (XXI), 59. Due to the scope of this paper, discussion about the nature of the atonement is not taken up here.
24. Apology of the Augsburg Confession, Article XXIV: The Mass, BofC, 261.
25. Augsburg Confession—German Text—Article XX: Faith, BofC, 54.
26. See, e.g., Evangeline Anderson-Rajkumar, "Politicising the Body: A Feminist Christology," *Asia Journal of Theology* 18, no. 1 (Ap 2004) : 88.
27. Apology of the Augsburg Confession, Article IV: Justification, BofC, 145.
28. Carl E. Braaten, *Principles of Lutheran Theology*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007), 95.
29. Apology, Article IV: Justification, BofC, 145.
30. Augsburg Confession—Latin Text—Article XX: Faith, BofC, 55.
31. Streufert, "A Feminist Lutheran Substantive Christology: Method and Methodology," *Dialog* 49:3 (2010): 210–222.
32. *Ibid.*, 218.
33. See Joy A. Schroeder, *Dinah's Lament: The Biblical Legacy of Sexual Violence in Christian Interpretation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), *passim*.
34. "Lectures on Galatians, 1535," *LW* 26: 177.
35. See "Lectures on Romans," *LW* 25:76.
36. See Anna Mercedes, "Who are You? Christ and the Imperative of Subjectivity" and Kathryn A. Kleinhans, "Christ as Bride/Groom" in Streufert, ed., 87–95; 245–247 and 123–134; 250.
37. See David Haugh, "Answers in short supply from ND," *Chicago Tribune*, November 22, 2010, sec. 2.
38. See Caroline Walker Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption* (New York: Zone Books, 1991), 82–117.

39. See Schroeder, "Sexual Abuse and a Theology of Embodiment" in *The Long Journey Home*, ed. Andrew J. Schmutzer (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2011), 192. We are left to speculate on sexual assault Jesus may have endured at the hands of his captors.

40. A haunting question that must not be ignored is whether or not there is a distance of experience and need between women and girls who are raped and Jesus Christ crucified.

41. See Mercedes, *op. cit.*

42. Martin Luther, Large Catechism, BofC, 386.

43. Monika Hellwig, "Re-emergence of the Human, Critical, Public Jesus," *Theological Studies* 50 (1989): 480.

44. Copeland, 77.

45. See Copeland, 80.

46. Streufert, "A Feminist Lutheran," 219.

47. "Word and Sacrament I," *LW* 35:54.

48. "Sermons on the Gospel of St. John, Chapters 6–8," *LW* 23:149.

49. "Word and Sacrament II," *LW* 36:35.