

Jesus, Mary, and the Beloved Disciple: Towards a Queer Asian Pacific American Christology

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When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother, “Woman, here is your son.” Then he said to the disciple, “Here is your mother.” And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home.

John 19:26-27 (NRSV)

I. INTRODUCTION

One of my earliest memories of going to church as a young boy was looking up at the life-sized corpus of the crucified Jesus Christ that hung behind the altar at Saint Dunstan Roman Catholic Church in Millbrae, California. Although this Jesus with lily-white skin and wavy brown hair bore little resemblance to my own physical features of yellow-brown skin and straight black hair, I was fascinated by my weekly encounter with this figure on the cross. My fascination with the second person of the Trinity has continued to this day. Indeed, I have spent much of my life trying to make sense of who Jesus Christ is to me, as an openly-gay Asian Pacific American man.

In this essay, I will attempt to construct a christology that speaks to “Queer” (that is, lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) Asian Pacific Americans. Since the early 1990s, those of us who identify ourselves as Queer Asian Pacific Americans -- referred to in this essay by the acronym “QAPAs” -- have started to come out in the academic world. We have published a number of anthologies of our writings.¹ We have started to organize ourselves, both in cyberspace and in the real world. Nevertheless, there has been little *theological* reflection, christological or otherwise, upon our shared experiences of suffering, ethnic community, and marginalized sexuality. This essay is a first step towards filling that theological vacuum.

Part 2 of this essay begins with a brief historical survey of our QAPA ancestors, both in Asia and in Asian Pacific America. It recognizes the fact that our ancestors have existed for thousands of years, and that we can feel a sense of pride in ourselves. Part 3

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¹ Chi Tsang, ed., *Witness Aloud: Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Asian/Pacific American Writings*, *The APA Journal* 2, no. 1 (Spring/Summer 1993); Sharon Lim-Hing, ed., *The Very Inside: An Anthology of Writing by Asian and Pacific Islander Lesbian and Bisexual Women* (Toronto: Sister Vision Press, 1994); Russell Leong, ed., *Asian American Sexualities: Dimensions of the Gay and Lesbian Experience* (New York: Routledge, 1996); Song Cho, ed., *Rice: Explorations Into Gay Asian Culture + Politics* (Toronto: Queer Press, 1998); David L. Eng and Alice Y. Hom, *Q&A: Queer in Asian America* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998).

describes the shared experiences of QAPAs in terms of three overarching themes: suffering, ethnic community, and marginalized sexuality. In so doing, this part acknowledges the importance of *experience* as a starting point for doing QAPA theology.

Part 4 examines a number of existing christologies that have the potential of speaking to the themes of suffering, ethnic community, and marginalized sexuality. Specifically, this part examines three areas of contemporary christology: Asian christologies, Asian Pacific American christologies, and Queer christologies. It concludes, however, that none of these christologies is adequate for QAPAs because each represents only a *portion* of the QAPA experience.

Part 5 is an attempt to construct a christology that speaks to the contemporary QAPAs condition. Such a christology focuses upon the relationship between Jesus, Mary, and the Beloved Disciple in the crucifixion narrative of John 19:26-27. This part suggests that Jesus Christ for QAPAs is the *one who, in the midst of suffering, brings together ethnic community and marginalized sexuality*. It closes with some thoughts on the question: Who is Jesus Christ for QAPAs today? Part 6 concludes this essay by setting forth some thoughts on the future direction of QAPA christology.

II. OUR QAPA ANCESTORS

This essay begins with a brief historical survey of our QAPA ancestors, both in Asia and in Asian Pacific America. Before we QAPAs can discover our own theological voices (let alone construct a QAPA christology), it is critical that we be “reconciled to ourselves as persons and to ourselves as a historical group.”² As the National Committee of Negro Churchmen recognized in 1966 at the birth of the Black Theology movement, any group of oppressed people must find “a new self-image” and feel “a normal sense of pride in self” before it can obtain the power that is necessary for liberation.³ In acknowledging the fact that our ancestors have existed for thousands of years, we QAPAs can start to find that new self-image and feel a normal sense of pride in ourselves.

A. *Our Asian Ancestors*

Our QAPA ancestors can be found in South Asian holy writings from over six thousand years ago. Lesbian Indian scholar Giti Thadani has noted the existence of same-sex relationships in the “dual feminine” cosmogonies of the Rig Veda, which was written between 4000 and 1500 B.C.E.⁴ In the Rig Veda, ultimate reality often assumes the form of “feminine twins,” or *jami*, who are engaged in a “holistic feminine union” as

² National Committee of Negro Churchmen, “Black Power,” in *Black Theology: A Documentary History, Volume I, 1966-1979*, 2nd ed., ed. James H. Cone and Gayraud S. Wilmore (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993), 22.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Giti Thadani, *Sakhiyani: Lesbian Desire in Ancient and Modern India* (London: Cassell, 1996), 17.

lovers.⁵ Other Hindu writings contain numerous references to androgynous and transgender deities, as well as same-sex couplings.⁶

In Ancient China, references to same-sex relationships between men can be found as early as the Zhou Dynasty (1122-256 B.C.E.).⁷ Such relationships occurred in the sex lives of emperors, poets, and philosophers.⁸ This tradition was documented for well over a thousand years, until it was widely condemned by the Christian missionaries who arrived in China from Europe in the sixteenth century. For example, one missionary described the “greatest fault” of the Chinese people to be “sodomy,” whereas another missionary predicted apocalyptic disaster by God in retribution for the “filthy abomination” of the “accursed sin of unnatural vice” of the Chinese people.⁹

The widespread practice of same-sex relationships is also documented in the writings of pre-industrialized Japan. This practice, called *shudo*, or the “way of the young man,” reached its height under samurai rule in the sixteenth through eighteenth centuries.¹⁰ Indeed, *shudo* was encouraged by the samurai class, and a large body of writings were dedicated to the “beauty and valour of boys faithful to *shudo*.”¹¹ Again, this tradition was condemned by Christian missionaries who called it the “most depraved of carnal desires.”¹² They noted in horror that the Japanese people generally viewed same-sex relationships as “natural, and even virtuous.”¹³

Other examples of same-sex relationships can be found in historical documents from Tibet, Korea, and Polynesia.¹⁴ As in the case of China and Japan, the suppression of same-sex relationships in Asian and Pacific cultures was often tied to the rise of Western colonialism and the European policies of racial supremacy. Queer historian Rudi Bleys has documented the intimate connections between racist and homophobic discourse in post-Enlightenment ethnographic writings about Two-Thirds World countries, which he calls the “geography of perversion and desire.”¹⁵ Only at the end of the twentieth century have Queer people in Asian countries started to reclaim their historical identities. This can be seen, for example, in the rise of the *tongzhi*, or “same

⁵ Ibid., 21.

⁶ Randy P. Conner, David Hatfield Sparks, and Mariya Sparks, *Cassell's Encyclopedia of Queer Myth, Symbol and Spirit* (London: Cassell, 1997), 18-19.

⁷ Bret Hinsch, *Passions of the Cut Sleeve: The Male Homosexual Tradition in China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 15-33.

⁸ Ibid., 55.

⁹ Ibid., 2.

¹⁰ Tsuneo Watanabe and Jun'ichi Iwata, *The Love of the Samurai: A Thousand Years of Japanese Homosexuality* (London: GMP Publishers, 1987), 11.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid., 23-24.

¹³ Ibid., 24.

¹⁴ José Ignacio Cabezón, “Homosexuality and Buddhism,” in *Homosexuality and World Religions*, ed. Arlene Swidler (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press, 1993), 93-94 (Tibet); Stephen O. Murray, *Homosexualities* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 62-65 (Tibet), 65-70, 168-71 (Korea), 280-93 (Polynesia).

¹⁵ Rudi C. Bleys, *The Geography of Perversion: Male-to-Male Sexual Behavior Outside the West and the Ethnographic Imagination, 1750-1918* (New York: New York University Press, 1995), 272.

orientation,” movement in China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan since the 1980s.¹⁶ This reclamation of Queer identity can also be seen in the Queer liberation movements in Japan¹⁷ and in the Philippines¹⁸ since the early 1990s.

B. *Our Asian Pacific American Ancestors*

Our QAPA ancestors have existed in what is now the United States long before the arrival of European colonialists in the fifteenth century. QAPA author Helen Zia has noted that “same-sex relationships were once an accepted part of Native Hawaiian culture, centuries before Hawaii had a constitution.”¹⁹ Same-sex relationships occurred when Hawaiian men traveled together on long-term voyages, and when Hawaiian women stayed at home. In fact, extended families in Native Hawaiian culture often included same-sex partners.²⁰

In terms of the mainland, Asian Pacific Americans have lived in North America for over two hundred fifty years. The earliest recorded Asian Pacific American immigrants were Filipino sailors on Spanish galleons who settled in Louisiana in the mid-1700s.²¹ Sailors of other Asian nationalities followed shortly thereafter, including three Chinese sailors who were stranded in Baltimore Harbor in 1785.²² Although there is little documentation about the existence of QAPAs in these early Asian Pacific American communities, it is not difficult to imagine the existence of same-sex relationships in these segregated, all-male communities.

During the nineteenth century, there was a disproportionate amount of Asian Pacific American men in the United States. This was the result of exclusionary immigration laws such as the Page Law of 1875, which required Chinese women to secure certificates of “good character” before they were allowed to immigrate to the United States.²³ Although originally intended to bar Chinese prostitutes from coming to the United States, the Page Law had the effect of discouraging most Chinese women from immigrating to this country.

By 1880, there were 100,000 Chinese men in the United States, but fewer than 5,000 Chinese women. These men were forced to live in “bachelor” communities and

¹⁶ Chou Wah-shan, *Tongzhi: Politics of Same-Sex Eroticism in Chinese Societies* (New York: Haworth Press, 2000), 1-9.

¹⁷ Barbara Summerhawk, Cherron McMahill and Darren McDonald, trans. and eds., *Queer Japan: Personal Stories of Japanese Lesbians, Gays, Bisexuals and Transsexuals* (Norwich, VT: New Victoria Publishers, 1998), 5-16.

¹⁸ Jomar Fleras, “Reclaiming Our Historic Rights: Gays and Lesbians in the Philippines, in *The Third Pink Book: A Global View of Lesbian and Gay Liberation and Oppression*, ed. Aart Hendriks, Rob Tielman, and Evert van der Veen (Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books, 1993), 66-79.

¹⁹ Helen Zia, *Asian American Dreams: The Emergence of an American People* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2000), 244.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ Lan Cao and Himilce Novas, *Everything You Need to Know About Asian-American History* (New York: Plume, 1996), 8.

²² *Ibid.*, 8-9.

²³ *Ibid.*, 29-30.

were shunned by non-Chinese women.²⁴ Again, it is not difficult to imagine the existence of same-sex relationships in these segregated all-male communities. Indeed, Asian Pacific American historian Robert Lee has noted how Chinese American men in the late nineteenth century were viewed by the dominant culture as a “third sex,” or as having an “alternative or imagined sexuality that was potentially subversive and disruptive to the emergent heterosexual orthodoxy.”²⁵

The history of the modern-day QAPA movement began in the 1960s and was grounded in the civil-rights movements of that era.²⁶ Prior to the Stonewall Riots of 1969, the QAPA movement was marked by the work of individual activists. One such activist was Kiyoshi Kuromiya, who, on July 4, 1965, participated in the first national gay rights march at Independence Hall in Philadelphia. Another such activist was Daniel Tsang, who participated in radical gay meetings in Berkeley in the late 1960s.²⁷

In 1975, Tsang wrote the first coming-out essay by a QAPA in an Asian Pacific American magazine. Tsang’s essay was in response to a letter by another QAPA who had described the painful ways in which QAPAs were “scorned, ridiculed, and rejected” by the larger Asian Pacific American liberation movement.²⁸ Starting in the late 1970s, we QAPAs began to form our own organizations. One of the first QAPA groups was founded in Boston during the summer of 1979. An informal national network of QAPAs was established shortly thereafter in Washington, D.C., during a conference of Queer people of color at Howard University in October 1979.²⁹ Immediately following the conference, QAPAs marched and spoke at the first National March on Washington for Gay and Lesbian Rights. One of the speakers was Michiyo Fukaya, a QAPA activist who spoke before the Washington Monument on the topic of “Living in Asian America.”³⁰

In the 1980s and 1990s, the QAPA movement began to grow, with organizations forming all across the United States. In New York City, the Gay Asian and Pacific Islander Men of New York (GAPIMNY) was founded in 1990 to facilitate the participation of QAPAs in social as well as political events. In 1991, GAPIMNY organized the protest and disruption of an annual fundraiser by a Queer legal organization (the Lambda Legal Defense and Education Fund), which had decided to hold its annual fundraiser at the Broadway musical *Miss Saigon*. This decision had enraged the QAPA

²⁴ Ibid., 31-33.

²⁵ Robert G. Lee, *Orientalism: Asian Americans in Popular Culture* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1999), 88.

²⁶ Daniel C. Tsang, “Asians in North America,” in *Gay Histories and Cultures*, ed. George E. Haggerty (New York: Garland Publishing, 2000), 76.

²⁷ Ibid., 77.

²⁸ Daniel C. Tsang, “Losing Its Soul? Reflections on Gay and Asian Activism,” in *Legacy to Liberation: Politics and Culture of Revolutionary Asian Pacific America*, ed. Fred Ho (Brooklyn: Big Red Media, 2000), 59.

²⁹ Tsang, “Asians in North America,” 77.

³⁰ Michiyo Cornell, “Living in Asian America: An Asian American Lesbian’s Address Before the Washington Monument (1979),” in Leong, *Asian American Sexualities*, 83-84.

community because the musical used white actors in yellowface to play Asian roles and perpetuated negative stereotypes about people of Asian descent.³¹

During the 1990s, we QAPAs started to publish our voices in a number of anthologies, including *The Very Inside: An Anthology of Writing by Asian and Pacific Islander Lesbian and Bisexual Women* (1994), *Asian American Sexualities: Dimensions of the Gay and Lesbian Experience* (1996), and *Q&A: Queer in Asian America* (1998).³² The internet revolution also allowed QAPAs around the country to meet and organize in cyberspace through virtual groups such as the NQAPA email list. QAPAs formed caucuses within Asian American organizations such as the AAAS (Association for Asian American Studies) and within Queer organizations such as the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force.

In recent years, those of us who are QAPA and Christian have started to form our own organizations. In the summer of 1999, QAPAs within the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches -- a denomination with a special ministry to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and Queer people -- gathered in Los Angeles and founded the Asian Pacific Islander Leadership Institute. Among other things, the Institute seeks to support QAPA clergy and laypersons in their vocations within the denomination. The Institute also seeks to raise awareness on QAPA issues, both inside and outside the denomination. Finally, the Institute sponsors an email list and website that allows QAPA Christians from all around the world to come together and share our ideas and experiences with each other.

Also in 1999, a number of QAPA theological students gathered at the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, California, and founded GRACE-PACTS, which an ecumenical organization that is dedicated to issues facing QAPAs of faith. Other QAPA Christian organizations include the QAPAX (Queer Asian Pacific American Christians) email discussion group, which was created in 2000 to provide a safe discussion space for QAPA Christians in cyberspace. Despite the existence of these groups, there has been little in the way of QAPA theology. Although QAPA clergy such as Leng Lim and Eric Law (both Episcopal priests) have written works about their religious and spiritual experiences,³³ thus far there has not been any sustained, systematic theological reflection on the QAPA experience.

III. OUR QAPA EXPERIENCES

Having established the identity of QAPAs as historical group, I now turn a description of the contemporary QAPA experience. Since the late 1960s, theologians have emphasized the importance of *experience* as a starting point for doing theology. As

³¹ Yoko Yoshikawa, "The Heat Is on *Miss Saigon* Coalition: Organizing Across Race and Sexuality," in Eng and Hom, *Q&A*, 41-56.

³² Lim-Hing, *The Very Inside*; Leong, *Asian American Sexualities*; Eng and Hom, *Q&A*.

³³ You-Leng Leroy Lim, "Webs of Betrayal, Webs of Blessings," in Eng and Hom, *Q&A*, 323-34; Eric H.F. Law, *Inclusion: Making Room for Grace* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2000).

James Cone has written, the turn to experience -- in his case, the turn to “blackness” and “thinking black” -- can radically transform one’s way of “seeing the world and theology.”³⁴ This turn to experience has been particularly important for Queer theologians as well as Asian Pacific American theologians, since the voices of both groups have been silenced within the religious and theological establishments. According to Queer theologian Elizabeth Stuart, it has taken Queer theologians a long time “to trust our own experience, to find each other, tell our stories, recognize our oppression and do theology out of it.”³⁵ Similarly, according to Asian Pacific American theologian Peter Phan, it is not surprising that the first major anthology of writings by Asian Pacific American theologians was a collection of “theological reflections on personal experiences.”³⁶

In this part, I focus upon three themes that appear repeatedly in the experiences of QAPAs: (1) suffering; (2) ethnic community; and (3) marginalized sexuality. Although we QAPAs consist of a wide variety of ethnicities, races, cultures, religions, sexualities, and gender identities, we do share a common core experience as the result of living in a Queerphobic and racist society. Accordingly, in discussing the above themes, I draw not only from published QAPA writings, but also from my own experiences.

A. *Suffering*

Suffering is the first theme that appears repeatedly in the experiences of QAPAs. Many QAPAs have written about the *loneliness* of growing up Queer and Asian Pacific American. Indeed, many QAPAs grow up thinking that they are the only QAPA individual in the world. Images of loneliness are present throughout the poetry and fiction of QAPA writers. One such writer, C.K. Toy, has described the QAPA experience in terms of “the cold ricocheting / from lonely body / to lonely body” while walking through New York City all by himself in the early hours of the morning.³⁷ This loneliness is compounded for QAPAs who are also Christian. For example, Leng Lim, a QAPA Episcopalian priest, has written about “sneaking into the sexuality section of the Christian bookstores” as a teenager and “furtively search[ing] for the chapter on homosexuality, only to find condemnation.”³⁸

Much of my own experiences as a QAPA can be characterized in terms of loneliness. Despite growing up in the San Francisco Bay Area during the sexually liberated 1970s and early 1980s, I was largely unaware of the existence of other QAPAs. To me, Queer people were white, and Asian Pacific Americans were non-Queer. (On top

³⁴ James H. Cone, *Risks of Faith: The Emergence of a Black Theology of Liberation, 1968-1998* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1999), xxi-xxii.

³⁵ Elizabeth Stuart, “Learning to Trust Our Own Experience,” in *Religion Is a Queer Thing: A Guide to the Christian Faith for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgendered People*, ed. Elizabeth Stuart (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 1997), 25.

³⁶ Peter C. Phan, “Introduction,” in *Journeys at the Margin: Toward an Autobiographical Theology in Asian American Perspective*, ed. Peter C. Phan and Jung Young Lee (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1999), xx.

³⁷ C.K. Toy, “Walking Through New York City at 6:15 a.m. EST,” in Tsang, *Witness Aloud*, 69.

³⁸ Lim, “Webs of Betrayal,” in Eng and Hom, *Q&A*, 329.

of all that, most of the Roman Catholics I knew in our Italian American working-class town were neither Queer nor Asian Pacific American!) As a result, I did not belong anywhere. Although I had achieved “success” in becoming an Eagle Scout and becoming the valedictorian of my high school, my accomplishments hid the fact that I felt like an outsider wherever I went. This feeling of intense loneliness continued during my college and law school years. Despite coming out at a relatively young age (during my late teens), I would not come to know any other QAPAs for well over a decade.

Suffering also manifests itself in the lives of QAPAs through our experiences of *fragmentation*. We QAPAs are constantly forced to identify ourselves as *either* Queer *or* Asian Pacific American, but rarely both. As QAPA scholar Dana Takagi writes, “many of us experience the worlds of Asian America and gay America as separate places -- emotionally, physically, intellectually.”³⁹ Images of fragmentation pervade the writings of QAPAs. For example, QAPA poet Peou Lakhana has compared her QAPA experiences with the grisly butchering of her people in Cambodia.⁴⁰ Law professor Peter Kwan has written a provocative law review article that analogizes the QAPA experience to the fourteen-year-old Asian Pacific American boy who was chopped to pieces by serial killer Jeffrey Dahmer (who had described the boy as his “lover” to the police).⁴¹ Finally, images of fragmentation are present in the work of QAPA poet Timothy Liu, who writes about “resting my chin / on a stump where the head has been. / Limbs severed / above the elbows the hips, its mutilated sex, testicles / hanging in a stone sack.”⁴²

In terms of my personal experience, I have also experienced suffering as a result of fragmentation. During much of my young adult years, my Queer life was completely segregated from my Asian Pacific American life. All of my Queer friends and partners happened to be white. By contrast, all of my Asian Pacific American friends and family were non-Queer. I never had the opportunity to bring these two worlds together. I became very good at existing in multiple communities, each of which had different languages, cultures, assumptions, and behavioral norms. However, my chameleon-like ability to blend into different worlds came at the expense of erasing my own QAPA identity as well as the core of my very being.

Finally, suffering is manifested in the lives of QAPAs through the *anger* that is provoked by our social location. In her poem “Who Am I?,” QAPA poet Anu screams out “STOP IT, STOP IT” in response to the numerous stereotypes and assumptions that she encounters in the white community, the Indian male community, the white lesbian community, and the straight community.⁴³ Similarly, QAPA poet Lani Ka’ahumanu writes about the depths of her anger -- “I began to cry, and cry, and cry / from a place so deep, so old, so long denied / exposing the pain” -- in her experiences of being rejected

³⁹ Dana Y. Takagi, “Maiden Voyage: Excursion Into Sexuality and Identity Politics in Asian America,” in Leong, *Asian American Sexualities*, 25.

⁴⁰ Peou Lakhana, “Who Am I?,” in Lim-Hing, *The Very Inside*, 40-41.

⁴¹ Peter Kwan, “Jeffrey Dahmer and the Cosynthesis of Categories,” *Hastings Law Journal* 48 (1997): 1257-92.

⁴² Timothy Liu, “Eros Apteros,” in *Vox Angelica* (Farmington, ME: Alice James Books, 1992), 45.

⁴³ Anu, “Who Am I?,” in Lim-Hing, *The Very Inside*, 19-21.

by lesbians of color who do not recognize the complexities of her biracial and bisexual existence.⁴⁴

In terms of my personal experience, I have experienced suffering with respect to anger. Growing up in a traditional Chinese American household, I was discouraged from expressing my true feelings, especially with respect to anger. Similarly, my desire to be accepted by the white Queer community had taught me to “fit in” and not to speak out in ways that would further alienate me from that community. As a result, I often had to suppress the feelings of intense anger that arose from my loneliness and fragmentation within the communities in which I existed. For many years, the suppression of these emotions simply compounded the suffering that I felt as a QAPA.

B. Ethnic Community

Ethnic community is a second theme that is reflected in the experiences of QAPAs. For many of us, family and cultural traditions played an important role in our experiences of growing up in the United States. Many of us lived with parents or other family members who spoke languages other than English, who immigrated to this country from other countries, and who held different cultural views about Queer sexual orientations and gender identities.⁴⁵ For many of our parents and family members, their relationship with the local ethnic community is of paramount importance. Indeed, QAPA scholar Alice Hom has noted that many parents of QAPAs, when they first learn that their child is Queer, are most concerned about their “status and reputation in the [ethnic] community and family network.”⁴⁶ Ethnic food also plays an important role in the reflections of many QAPAs. Many of our memories involve rituals of eating with our families and ethnic communities. It is no accident that “Rice” is the slang term that is often used by QAPAs to describe ourselves.⁴⁷ (For example, “Sticky Rice” is used to describe QAPAs who prefer to date other QAPAs, and “Rice Queen” is used to describe white people who prefer to date QAPAs. Conversely, “Potato Queen” is used to describe QAPAs who prefer to date white people.)⁴⁸

Sadly, many QAPAs lose our sense of ethnic community when we come out and enter the predominantly white Queer community. Not only is the larger Queer community often ignorant of our cultural backgrounds, but it is frequently racist in excluding us from full participation in the life of that community. As QAPA author Song Cho writes, “[t]he pain of being a gay Asian . . . is not just the pain of direct discrimination but [it is] the pain of being negated again and again by a culture that doesn’t acknowledge my presence.”⁴⁹ Our images are largely absent in mainstream

⁴⁴ Lani Ka’ahumanu, “Hapa Haole Wahine,” in Lim-Hing, *The Very Inside: An Anthology of Writing by Asian and Pacific Islander Lesbian and Bisexual Women*, ed. Sharon Lim-Hing, 448.

⁴⁵ Eric C. Wat, “Preserving the Paradox: Stories from a *Gay-Loh*,” in Leong, *Asian American Sexualities*, 74-77.

⁴⁶ Alice Y. Hom, “Stories from the Homefront: Perspectives of Asian American Parents with Lesbian Daughters and Gay Sons,” in Leong, *Asian American Sexualities*, 44.

⁴⁷ Song Cho, “Introduction,” in Cho, *Rice*, 1.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 2.

Queer magazine like *The Advocate*, *Out Magazine*, or *Genre*. Our images are largely absent from Queer movies, Queer television shows, and even Queer erotica. As QAPA videomaker Richard Fung has noted in his landmark essay “Looking for My Penis,” QAPAs frequently find that the mainstream Queer community is a source of “humiliation and pain” for us because of the community’s role as a “site of racial, cultural *and* sexual alienation.”⁵⁰

Like many QAPAs, ethnic community played an important part in my life in growing up in the San Francisco Bay Area. My parents and I immigrated to the United States from Hong Kong when I was one year old. As a 1.5 generation immigrant child, I lived in a very traditional Chinese American household. Our family spoke Mandarin Chinese to each other (as we do to this day), and my maternal grandparents moved to the United States to live with our family. From a young age, I learned about *keqi*, or the complex social rules that governed the ways in which Chinese people interact with each other. My father worked almost entirely with other Chinese Americans, and most of my parents’ friends -- “Aunties” and “Uncles” as we called them -- were also of Chinese descent. My mother and grandmother cooked Chinese food every night, and going to American fast food restaurants like McDonald’s was a rare treat. In sum, I grew up surrounded by people from my ethnic community.

When I moved to the East Coast at the age of seventeen to attend college at Yale University, however, I was thrown into a world of WASP culture that was completely foreign to me. I was the only person from my high school in my entering class of over a thousand students. Unlike many of my classmates who had attended prep schools and other elite schools together, I found it difficult to meet people and to make friends. For the first time in my life, I was the target of racial epithets as I walked through the streets of New Haven. In looking back on nearly ten years of my course work at elite educational institutions like Yale University, Harvard Law School, and Union Theological Seminary, I can only recall having had *one* instructor who was Asian Pacific American (who happened to be a visiting lecturer from another school). This trend has occurred outside of academia as well. For example, none of the partners at the law firms at which I worked were Asian Pacific Americans, and none of the priests or vestry members of the Episcopal church that I attended in New York City for several years were Asian Pacific Americans.

I have also experienced alienation with respect to my ethnic identity within the Queer community. It was a shock to read in the personal ads of Queer newspapers of people who are looking for “Gay White Men Only.” It was a shock to be one of the only QAPAs in a room full of Queer people. And it was a shock to be either fetishized or completely ignored, depending on who you were talking to in the white Queer community. For many years, I experienced a great deal of self-hatred as a QAPA. I thought I was unattractive, compared against the norms of beauty embraced by the white Queer culture. I had no desire to associate with other Asian Pacific Americans or QAPAs. I wanted to be just like everybody else, and most of my friends and partners

⁵⁰ Richard Fung, “Looking for My Penis: The Eroticized Asian in Gay Video Porn,” in Eng and Hom, *Q&A*, 125.

(including my spouse of nearly ten years) were white. In fact, my sense of self-erasure was so complete that I did not even realize how much I missed my ethnic community until I went to places like Chinatown or Flushing and saw my family in the faces of the people who lived and worked there.

C. *Marginalized Sexuality*

Marginalized sexuality is a third theme that is reflected in the experiences of QAPAs. For many of us, our lives in Asian Pacific America highlight the extent to which our sexualities are marginalized. For many Asian Pacific American families, being queer is a “forbidden topic” that is simply not discussed, because it is a “only a problem for white people,” and it is viewed as a “white disease.”⁵¹ QAPA poet Kitty Tsui captures this experience of marginality in her poem “A Chinese Banquet,” in which she attends a traditional Chinese banquet with all of her relatives and is unable to even mention the fact that she has a lover. Tsui tries to tell her mother “i’m gay, / mother i’m gay and so happy with her.” But Tsui’s mother “will not listen, / she shakes her head.”⁵² The silence with respect to Queer sexuality is perpetuated by the Asian Pacific American media. When a QAPA immigrant was beaten unconscious while cruising for sex on a Los Angeles beach in 1993, the Asian Pacific American newspapers went out of their way to assure their readers that the victim was not Queer. They conveniently left out the fact that the individual had pleaded guilty several years ago for engaging in lewd conduct with another man on the very same beach.⁵³

This marginalization of QAPA sexuality is often reinforced by Asian Pacific American religious attitudes. As QAPA attorney and activist J. Craig Fong has noted, traditional Buddhist and Confucian practices of ancestor worship are extremely important in many Asian Pacific American households. That is, “you are nothing until you become an ancestor” and you are venerated by subsequent generations of your family. Thus, the question faced by many QAPAs and their families is: “Who will burn incense on my grave?”⁵⁴ The marginalization of QAPA sexuality is even more pronounced in many Asian Pacific American Christian households. In recent years, religious fundamentalists have formed alliances with Asian Pacific American churches in order to facilitate the persecution of Queer people. For example, in 2000, numerous Korean-American Presbyterian churches in southern California mobilized their members to vote for a hateful state initiative that would have prevented the state government (including schools) from endorsing homosexuality in any manner.⁵⁵ In fact, Queer people are routinely condemned from the pulpit of Asian Pacific American churches for engaging in “sin” and “crime.”⁵⁶ QAPAs often remain closeted within their congregations out of the fear of rejection from their communities.

⁵¹ Wat, “Preserving the Paradox,” 76.

⁵² Kitty Tsui, “A Chinese Banquet: for the one who was not invited,” in Lim-Hing, *The Very Inside*, 155.

⁵³ Wat, “Preserving the Paradox,” 78.

⁵⁴ Carlos Mendez, “A Fighter for Gay Rights,” in *Asian Americans: Experiences and Perspectives*, ed. Timothy P. Fong and Larry H. Shinagawa (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2000), 357-58.

⁵⁵ Chisun Lee, “Moral Minority,” *A Magazine* (April/May 2000), 60-65, 85.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

As a QAPA, I have experienced acute marginalization with respect to my sexuality. I remember growing up and hearing my father make disparaging remarks about Queer people and the San Francisco Gay Pride Parade. When I first came out to my mother in my late teens, she received the news with shock and horror. She made me promise not to tell anyone in our family. In particular, she did not want my father or grandmother to know because she was afraid that they would die of a heart attack. She was also afraid of what our family's Chinese American friends would think. Nevertheless, during the course of the following twelve years, I have come out to my family, my extended family, and my family's friends. It has been a slow and difficult process. A few years ago, one of my uncles sent my father an article from *Time Magazine* about reparative therapy (that is, the Christian ex-gay movement) with the implication that I could be "cured" of my homosexuality if I simply accepted Jesus. (I've accepted Jesus, but I'm still Queer!) Even today, I still feel like an "outsider" at many family reunions and events.

I have also experienced marginalization with respect to my sexuality in terms of my Asian Pacific American religious experiences. On a personal level, I am saddened by the fact that my mother has never fully come to terms with why God made her son Queer. Despite my study of theology and my ordination as a minister, my mother is still angry at God and the Roman Catholic Church for my Queerness. On a professional level, I continue to feel awkward whenever I visit Asian Pacific American churches, such as Our Savior Episcopal Church in Chinatown. Although many elements of such churches are deeply comforting to me (*e.g.*, the language, the faces, the food), the heteronormative "family values" and Queerphobic attitudes of these communities are very disturbing. Indeed, in my own ministries with QAPAs, I have been saddened by the extent to which my siblings in Christ have been rejected and despised by Asian Pacific American faith communities as a result of their marginalized sexualities.

IV. EXISTING CHRISTOLOGIES

Having discussed the experiences of suffering, ethnic community, and marginalized sexuality in the lives of QAPAs, I now turn to a number of existing christologies that might speak to the contemporary QAPA condition. In particular, I discuss the following three christologies: (1) Asian christologies; (2) Asian Pacific American christologies; and (3) Queer christologies. Although these christologies are helpful with respect to the respective themes of suffering, ethnic community, and marginalized sexuality, I conclude that none of these contemporary christologies is adequate because each represents only a *portion* of the QAPA experience.

A. *Asian Christologies*

Asian christologies speak to the QAPA experience with respect to our experiences of suffering. Arising out of the social context of the incredible political, social, and economic suffering of the Asian continent, Asian theologians such as Raimundo Panikkar, Aloysius Pieris, and Kosuke Koyama have reflected deeply upon the

relationship between suffering and Jesus Christ.⁵⁷ In this section, I focus upon the christologies of three Asian theologians whose works resonate most strongly with the QAPA experience of suffering: C.S. Song, Kwok Pui-lan, and Chung Hyun Kyung.

In his book, *Jesus, the Crucified People*, Taiwanese theologian C.S. Song argues that “[t]o say Jesus is to say suffering people.”⁵⁸ In other words, Jesus *is* the crucified people. For Song, Jesus includes all those who are “economically exploited, politically oppressed, culturally and religiously alienated, sexually, racially, or class-wise discriminated against.”⁵⁹ Jesus is found in the broken body of a young student leader who was tortured to death by government authorities. Jesus is found in the body of a prostitute who was brought up in an orphanage who had to sell her body in order to survive. And Jesus is found in the “Christa-Christus” that is actually “you and me, a woman and a man who suffers and hopes, who dies and rises again.”⁶⁰ It is not difficult to imagine, therefore, how the Asian christology of C.S. Song can be used to comfort and give hope to those QAPAs who suffer from intense loneliness, fragmentation, and anger.

The theme of suffering is also reflected in the recent christologies of Asian feminist theologians, whose voices have served as an important counterpoint to the patriarchal theologies of Asian male theologians. According to Hong Kong theologian Kwok Pui-lan, for example, Asian feminist theologians “recognize that the language of suffering is powerful and profound in the traditions of Asia, and it must be interpreted with reference to their various cultural milieu.”⁶¹ For Kwok, however, Jesus Christ is experienced not only through other human beings, but also through all of creation. Kwok describes this christology as the “organic” framework of a “feminist ecological model.”⁶² For Kwok, the “death and passion” of Jesus is not “singled out,” but rather seen in the suffering of the “larger context of his struggle for justice for all -- humans and all of creation.”⁶³

Similarly, Korean theologian Chung Hyun Kyung has described Jesus as a priest of *han*,⁶⁴ which is a Korean term that refers to the “sadness and suffering” of the Korean people that eventually can be “transformed to the power and hope for survival.”⁶⁵ Chung’s christology draws upon the tradition of Korean women shamans who serve as “big sisters” to many *minjung* women by “untangling their *han* and helping them cope with life’s tribulations.”⁶⁶ Like Jesus, these shamans are able to heal the “psychological

⁵⁷ George Gispert-Sauch, “Asian Theology,” in *The Modern Theologians: An Introduction to Christian Theology in the Twentieth Century*, ed. David F. Ford, 2d ed. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1997), 455-76.

⁵⁸ Choan-Seng Song, *Jesus, the Crucified People* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 216.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 230.

⁶¹ Kwok Pui-lan, *Introducing Asian Feminist Theology*, *Introductions in Feminist Theology* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2000), 81.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 89-91.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 93.

⁶⁴ Chung Hyun Kyung, *Struggle to Be the Sun Again: Introducing Asian Women’s Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1990), 66.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 23.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 66.

phenomenon of people's suffering" as well as the "unresolved resentment against unjustifiable suffering" by Korean women.⁶⁷ It is not difficult to imagine how the creative re-thinking of christologies by Asian feminist theologians such as Kwok and Chung can be a source of strength for QAPAs, whose voices have also been silenced within the dominant theological tradition.

Despite the importance of suffering in the christologies of Asian theologians such as C.S. Song, Kwok Pui-lan and Chung Hyun Kyung, however, Asian christologies often fail to address a number of issues that are critical for QAPAs. First, Asian christologies rarely distinguish between the social location of Asians, on the one hand, and Asian Pacific Americans (*i.e.*, people who were born or raised in exile or diaspora), on the other. The suffering experienced by those of us who are Asian Pacific Americans is unique in that we exist "at the margins" and are "distanced from the two centers of power" of host country and native country.⁶⁸ Unlike our non-Asian Pacific American friends and colleagues, we are not seen by the dominant culture as being truly "American." Yet, unlike our parents, we do not consider ourselves to be "immigrants." We have never known what it is like to live in a society in which we are the dominant people, and, as a result, we often end up "lacking in self-identity."⁶⁹ Second, Asian christologies are generally silent with respect to the suffering of Queer people, who are often persecuted by our very own families, communities, and churches. This persecution by our ethnic communities -- who are often the very people who we love the most -- adds an additional layer of complexity with respect to the political, social, and economic suffering that is addressed by Asian christologies.

B. Asian Pacific American Christologies

By contrast with Asian christologies, Asian Pacific American christologies speak to the QAPA experience of ethnic community. Unlike Black theology and other United States minority theologies, Asian Pacific American theology is a relatively new field. It is so new, in fact, that a recently-published overview of twentieth century theology failed to mention Asian Pacific American theology at all, despite the fact that it contained an extensive discussion of Black and womanist theology, Hispanic/Latino theology, and Native American theology.⁷⁰ In this section, I examine the christologies of three Asian Pacific American theologians that resonate most strongly with the QAPA experience of ethnic community: Rita Nakashima Brock, David Ng, and Fumitaka Matsuoka.

For Japanese American feminist theologian Rita Nakashima Brock, Jesus Christ is found in community. In her book, *Journeys by Heart: A Christology of Erotic Power*, Nakashima Brock argues that we must create a "new center for Christian faith."⁷¹ Specifically, we must transcend the historical Jesus and think about christology in the

⁶⁷ Kwok, *Introducing Asian Feminist Theology*, 87.

⁶⁸ Phan, "Introduction," xix.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ David F. Ford, *The Modern Theologians: An Introduction to Christian Theology in the Twentieth Century* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1997), 357-88.

⁷¹ Rita Nakashima Brock, *Journeys by Heart: A Christology of Erotic Power* (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1988), 69.

context of the larger “erotic,” or relational, community. For Nakashima Brock, Jesus Christ -- who is “the revelatory and redemptive witness of God/dess’s work in history” -- is found not in a single individual, but rather in the larger “Christa/Community.”⁷² For many QAPAs, Nakashima Brock’s model of “Christa/Community” can be helpful in healing ourselves from the alienation that we experience as ethnic minorities. That is, we encounter Jesus Christ when we come together and form our own communities of Asian Pacific Americans and other QAPAs.

Ethnic community is also an important theme in the christology of Chinese American theologian David Ng. In his essay, “The Central Issue of Community,” Ng notes that the idea of community is so taken for granted by people of Asian descent that “there is no one, simple, definitive word for it” in traditional Asian languages -- “Community *is*, so to speak!”⁷³ According to Ng, the Asian Pacific American encounter with Jesus Christ is found within the context of ethnic churches. That is, the Asian Pacific American community is held together *en Christos*, or “in Christ.”⁷⁴ Accordingly, for Ng, the Body of Christ *is* the Asian Pacific American people. Not surprisingly, Ng’s theology arises out of Asian Pacific American people and the “stories from within [our] social and cultural context.”⁷⁵ Ng compares his theological methodology of storytelling to Jürgen Moltmann’s “christology of the way,”⁷⁶ in which every theology is a “process” and is seen as an “invitation” to join Jesus Christ on the Way.⁷⁷ Ng’s christology can also be a helpful model for QAPAs as we search for ethnic community and come into our own theological voices along the Way, or the *Tao*.

Finally, Japanese American theologian Fumitaka Matsuoka has also articulated a christology that focuses upon the theme of ethnic community. In his book, *Out of Silence: Emerging Themes in Asian American Churches*, Matsuoka argues that the encounter between Asian Pacific Americans and Jesus Christ must be “rooted intimately in the distinct characteristics of our ethnic groupings and our cultural heritages.”⁷⁸ For Matsuoka, the preservation of our ethnic community is a “necessary defense” in an “inhospitable and racist society.”⁷⁹ Matsuoka critiques attempts by mainstream Christians denominations to strip Asian Pacific Americans of our ethnic identities. For Matsuoka, these attempts are a function of the “fundamental racist orientation of this society, which keeps us [Asian Pacific Americans] in a vulnerable and unprotected state.”⁸⁰ The issue of “Christ and cultures” is not merely an academic one. Rather, it is

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Heup Young Kim and David Ng, “The Central Issue of Community: An Example of Asian North American Theology on the Way,” in *People on the Way: Asian North Americans Discovering Christ, Culture, and Community*, ed. David Ng (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1996), 37.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 38.

⁷⁵ David Ng, “A Path of Concentric Circles: Toward an Autobiographical Theology of Community,” in Phan and Lee, *Journeys at the Margin*, 86.

⁷⁶ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Way of Jesus Christ: Christology in Messianic Dimensions*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 1993), xiv-xv.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Fumitaka Matsuoka, *Out of Silence: Emerging Themes in Asian American Churches* (Cleveland: United Church Press, 1995), 89.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 90.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

an issue of “survival in a hostile environment.”⁸¹ Matsuoka’s christology can also be a helpful model for QAPAs as we struggle daily with issues of ethnic community and survival within a dominant white culture.

Despite the importance of ethnic community in the christologies of Asian Pacific American theologians such as Rita Nakashima Brock, David Ng, and Fumitaka Matsuoka, however, Asian Pacific American christologies often fail to address a number of issues that are important to QAPAs. First, Asian Pacific American christologies are generally silent about the suffering that is faced by various oppressed groups -- such as QAPAs -- that exist *within* the Asian Pacific American community. One of the problems with christologies that equate Jesus Christ with the community itself (as opposed to christologies that focus upon the person of Jesus Christ) is the absence of an external norm by which that community can engage in a process of continual self-examination. Second, Asian Pacific American christologies are generally silent about issues of sexuality and gender identity within the Asian Pacific American community. Like their Asian counterparts, these christologies are often constructed upon heteronormative and Queerphobic assumptions about what constitutes “family” and “ethnic community.”

C. *Queer Christologies*

By contrast with Asian christologies and Asian Pacific American christologies, Queer christologies speak to the QAPA experience of marginalized sexuality. Like Asian Pacific American theology, Queer theology is a relatively new field of study. Building upon the work of first generation Queer theologians like John McNeill, Carter Heyward, and Gary Comstock, contemporary Queer theologians have engaged in the process of “unpicking and reweaving” a Christian tradition that is infused with heterosexism and patriarchy.⁸² In this section, I examine the christologies of three Queer theologians that most strongly resonates with the QAPA experience: Marcella Althaus-Reid, Robert Goss, and Renée Hill.

For Latin American lesbian theologian Marcella Althaus-Reid, Jesus Christ is located wherever marginalized sexuality is to be found. As she writes in her book, *Indecent Theology: Theological Perversions in Sex, Gender and Politics*, “[w]e are talking here about a systematically deviant Jesus.”⁸³ Althaus-Reid constructs a Queer christology of the “Bi/Christ” that challenges the “clear limits and boundaries” and binary thinking of heterosexual theology. For her, the question is not whether Jesus was *in fact* a “transvestite, a butch lesbian, a gay or a heterosexual person.” Rather, the question is whether we are able to focus upon a “Christ who is neither this nor that, a Christ who embraces and shows life as a fluid, changing, outside the reductionist patterns which confront people with irrelevant options.”⁸⁴ The Bi/Christ can be a young lesbian

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Elizabeth Stuart, “Learning to Trust Our Own Experience,” in *Religion Is a Queer Thing: A Guide to the Christian Faith for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgendered People* (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 1997), 26.

⁸³ Marcella Althaus-Reid, *Indecent Theology: Theological Perversions in Sex, Gender and Politics* (London: Routledge, 2000), 112.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 114.

“holding another woman tightly,” as they are locked out of a church. The Bi/Christ can be the “gay companion” of a lonely, poor, and old gay man. Or the Bi/Christ can be a transgender person who takes on the oppression and injustice when “gender and sexuality are bodily dislocated.”⁸⁵ Indeed, Althaus-Reid’s model of the Bi/Christ can be helpful for QAPAs, who experience fluidity and change in the midst of multiple ethnic and sexual communities.

Marginalized sexuality also plays an important role in the christology of American gay male theologian Robert Goss. In his book, *Jesus Acted Up: A Gay and Lesbian Manifesto*, Goss writes about a “queer Jesus” who is a passionate lover of other men and who shatters “many of the gender patterns and hierarchies of patriarchal power.”⁸⁶ For Goss, Jesus Christ is “rooted in the struggle for sexual liberation.” The political death of Jesus symbolizes “homophobic/ heterosexist power at its fullest,” and it represents the evil ways in which people with marginalized sexualities are persecuted by the mainstream Christian churches. Indeed, for Goss, the cross and Good Friday is a “symbol of struggle for queer liberation.”⁸⁷ The story does not end there, however. The resurrection and Easter Sunday is God’s promise of the liberation to the *anawim*, or the people on the margins who are “sexually different” or “sexually oppressed.”⁸⁸ Goss’ model of the queer Jesus can be helpful in giving hope to QAPAs who experience persecution on the basis of our marginalized sexualities.

Finally, marginalized sexuality plays an important role in the christology of Black lesbian theologian Renée Hill. In her ground-breaking essay, “Who Are We for Each Other?,” Hill argues that Jesus Christ is located in a “love and liberation that encompasses and embraces all, including lesbians and gay men.”⁸⁹ She argues that womanist theologians must listen to the marginalized voices of Black lesbians because sexuality is “the life that Christ as incarnate in Jesus, shared with humanity . . . [which is] a profound theological issue.”⁹⁰ In her more recent work, Hill continues her reflection on her “hybrid identity/multiple social location” as a Black woman who is marginalized on the basis of her sexuality.⁹¹ She draws connections between Queerness with other forms of oppression, such as gender, race, class, and age.⁹² Hill’s christology has evolved, however, as she challenges the Black theological community to be “knocked off-center” and to imagine a world in which “Jesus Christ is not at the absolute center of all black theological reflection.”⁹³ For Hill, Black theology (and Black Queer theology) must

⁸⁵ Ibid., 116.

⁸⁶ Robert Goss, *Jesus Acted Up: A Gay and Lesbian Manifesto* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1993), 81.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 83.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 84.

⁸⁹ Renee L. Hill, “Who Are We for Each Other?: Sexism, Sexuality and Womanist Theology,” in *Black Theology: A Documentary History, Volume II, 1980-1992*, ed. James H. Cone and Gayraud S. Wilmore, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993), 350.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 347.

⁹¹ Renée Leslie Hill, “Disrupted/Disruptive Movements: Black Theology and Black Power 1969/1999,” in *Black Faith and Public Talk: Critical Essays on James H. Cone’s Black Theology and Black Power*, ed. Dwight N. Hopkins (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1999), 142.

⁹² Ibid., 143.

⁹³ Ibid., 147.

examine the challenge to the “Christian hegemony” posed by African Americans who practice “Islam, African-derived traditional religions (including Santeria, Akan, Yoruba, and Vodun), Buddhism, Judaism, and Humanism among other traditions.”⁹⁴ Hill’s evolving model of christology is helpful to QAPAs in that it wrestles with the complex relationship between marginalized sexuality, race, and other forms of oppression. Hill’s model is also helpful for many QAPAs who are located at the intersection of Christianity and traditional Asian religions such as Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucianism.

Despite the focus upon marginalized sexuality in the christologies of Queer theologians such as Marcella Althus-Reid, Robert Goss, and Renée Hill, however, Queer christologies often fail to address a number of issues that are important to QAPAs. Specifically, these christologies are silent with respect to the unique experiences of QAPAs as racial and sexual “foreigners” in the United States. Both the christologies of Althus-Reid and Goss are silent with respect to the issues of racism and white supremacy that pervade Queer communities in the Western Hemisphere. And, although Hill’s christology does make important connections between Queerphobia and racism, ultimately her focus is on the womanist and Black male communities. It would have been interesting if Hill had reflected more deeply upon the ways in which Black Americans are viewed differently than Asian Americans -- or other United States minorities -- by the dominant culture, in terms of issues like racial identity (*i.e.*, native vs. foreign) or sexuality (*i.e.*, hypersexual vs. asexual).⁹⁵

V. CONSTRUCTING A QAPA CHRISTOLOGY

Having examined the ways in which existing christologies fail to address adequately the QAPA experiences of suffering, ethnic community, and marginalized sexuality, I now turn to the task of constructing a christology that speaks directly to the contemporary QAPA experience. In particular, I focus upon John 19:26-27, the pericope in the Fourth Gospel in which Jesus, hanging from the cross, instructs his mother Mary and his Beloved Disciple to come together as a new family. For me, this pericope is at the heart of a QAPA christology because it reveals to us the Jesus Christ who, in the midst of suffering, brings together ethnic community and marginalized sexuality.

A. *Jesus, Mary, and the Beloved Disciple*

In John 19:26-27, the Fourth Evangelist describes the interaction between Jesus, Mary, and the Beloved Disciple during the last moments of Jesus’ life. After Jesus had been nailed to the cross and Roman soldiers had cast lots for his clothing, Jesus looks down from the cross and sees his mother Mary and the Beloved Disciple standing next to each other. He instructs them to come together as a new family. Specifically, Jesus says to his mother, “Woman, here is your son” (referring to the Beloved Disciple). Jesus then says to the Beloved Disciple, “Here is your mother” (referring to Mary). From that hour,

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Kelly Brown Douglas, *Sexuality and the Black Church: A Womanist Perspective* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1999), 31-59.

the Fourth Evangelist writes, the Beloved Disciple took Jesus' mother into his own home.⁹⁶ Following this exchange, Jesus knew that "all was now finished."⁹⁷

For centuries, readers have interpreted this pericope in different ways. One line of interpretation has viewed this story as a representation of Jesus' filial piety. That is, Jesus is concerned about what will happen to his mother after he is dead, and he wants to ensure that she will be taken care of by the Beloved Disciple.⁹⁸ Another line of interpretation has viewed this story as an allegory about the new relationship between the Church (as represented by Mary) and the Christian (as represented by the Beloved Disciple).⁹⁹ That is, upon Jesus' death, the Church gives new life to the Christian in baptism.¹⁰⁰ Raymond Brown has offered a third interpretation of this pericope. For Brown, the story is about a new relationship between Jesus' earthly family (as represented by Mary) and Jesus' spiritual family (as represented by the Beloved Disciple).¹⁰¹ In other words, this new relationship between Mary and the Beloved Disciple "enlarged [Jesus'] discipleship in a significant way" and was "a sign that it will grow and contain many from diverse backgrounds."¹⁰²

Not surprisingly, I interpret this story differently. For me, this story is at the core of a QAPA christology because it reveals to us the Jesus Christ who, in the midst of suffering, brings together ethnic community and marginalized sexuality. All three themes of the QAPA experience are present in this pericope. First, the theme of *suffering* is present in the physical, psychological, and emotional pain of Jesus in being nailed to the cross. Second, the theme of *ethnic community* is present in Mary, who -- as Jesus' mother -- represents the biological and cultural roots of Jesus of Nazareth. Third, the theme of *marginalized sexuality* is present in the Beloved Disciple, who is described by the Fourth Evangelist as the one "whom Jesus loved."¹⁰³ (In recent years, Queer theologians have written about the Beloved Disciple as being a passionate lover of the Queer Christ,¹⁰⁴ and they have uncovered ancient traditions going back to the time of Irenaeus in which the Beloved Disciple is said to have frequented the public baths, "a Greco-Roman institution of bad repute among the Jews."¹⁰⁵)

Thus, at the moment of his greatest suffering, Jesus creates a new "family" that is a hybrid of both his ethnic identity and his marginalized sexuality. Prior to hearing Jesus'

⁹⁶ John 19:26-27.

⁹⁷ John 19:28.

⁹⁸ Raymond E. Brown, *The Death of the Messiah: From Gesthemane to the Grave*, vol. 2 (New York: Doubleday, 1993), 1021.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 1023.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 1024-25.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 1026.

¹⁰³ John 21:20.

¹⁰⁴ Robert E. Goss, "The Beloved Disciple: A Queer Bereavement Narrative in a Time of AIDS," in *Take Back the Word: A Queer Reading of the Bible*, ed. Robert E. Goss and Mona West (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2000), 206-18.

¹⁰⁵ Tom Hanks, "John: Jesus' Beloved Disciple Subverts Literalism and the Law," in *The Subversive Gospel: A New Testament Commentary of Liberation*, trans. John P. Doner (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2000), 55-66.

words from the cross, Mary and the Beloved Disciple were standing apart from each other, symbolizing the divisions that exist between our ethnic communities and our marginalized sexualities. After hearing Jesus' words, however, Mary and the Beloved Disciple come together as a new household under one roof. It is this creation of a new "family" that is at the heart of a QAPA christology. Like Jesus, Mary, and the Beloved Disciple, we QAPAs are called to bring together, in the midst of our suffering, our ethnic communities and our marginalized sexualities.

In terms of traditional atonement theory, this QAPA model of christology can be viewed as *both* an objective and subjective way of understanding the significance of Christ event. As theologians have noted, an objective theory of atonement focuses primarily upon the "changed attitude on the part of God" (*i.e.*, traditionally the ransom and satisfaction theories of atonement), whereas a subjective theory of atonement focuses primarily upon "a change taking place in men [sic]" (*i.e.*, traditionally the moral influence theory of atonement).¹⁰⁶

With respect to an *objective* theory of atonement, the QAPA model of christology allows us to view the crucifixion as the salvific moment at which God acts in human history to bring together our ethnic communities and our marginalized sexualities. The importance of the cross in Christian theology has been noted by many contemporary theologians. For example, Black theologian James Cone has noted that the cross is central to his theology because it "reveals the extent of God's involvement with the suffering of the weak."¹⁰⁷ Through the crucifixion, God "took the humiliation and suffering of the oppressed into God's own history."¹⁰⁸ Similarly, German theologian Jürgen Moltmann has argued that "[t]he death of Jesus on the cross is the *centre* of all Christian theology."¹⁰⁹ For Moltmann, "[a]ll Christian statements about God, about creation, about sin and death have their focal point in the crucified Christ."¹¹⁰ The cross also plays an important role in the work of womanist theologian JoAnne Terrell. For Terrell, the sacramental nature of Jesus' death on the cross enables humanity to "see women's blood as sacred," particularly the blood of those Black women "who suffer abuse and die at the hands of patriarchal, violence-driven persons."¹¹¹ Like these theories of atonement, the QAPA model of christology proposed in this part can be viewed as an "objective" theory because it focuses upon God's work in human history by way of the cross.

With respect to a *subjective* theory of atonement, the QAPA model of christology creates an ethical model that invites us to integrate our ethnicities with our sexualities. For many womanist and feminist theologians, the cross is not a symbol of salvation, but

¹⁰⁶ Gustaf Aulén, *Christus Victor: An Historical Study of the Three Main Types of the Idea of Atonement*, trans. A.G. Herbert (New York: McMillan, 1960), 2.

¹⁰⁷ James H. Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, rev. ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997), 161.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁹ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God; The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology*, trans. R.A. Wilson and John Bowden (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 204.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹¹ JoAnne Marie Terrell, *Power in the Blood?: The Cross in the African American Experience* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1998), 143.

rather a symbol of horror and defilement. Womanist theologian Delores Williams has argued, for example, that the cross is a “reminder of how humans have tried throughout history to destroy visions of righting relationships.”¹¹² For Williams, “[t]here is nothing of God in the blood of the cross.”¹¹³ In fact, to glorify the cross is to “glorify sin” and to make the exploitation of Black women “sacred.”¹¹⁴ Similarly, feminist theologians Joanne Brown and Rebecca Parker have argued that the cross perpetuates “an abusive theology that glorifies suffering.”¹¹⁵ Building upon the work of lesbian theologian Carter Heyward that criticizes theological masochism and unjust relations, Brown and Parker conclude that the “cross is a sign of tragedy” and that “[n]o one was saved by the death of Jesus.”¹¹⁶

For Williams, Brown, and Parker -- as well as other theologians who reject patriarchal theologies of the cross -- what is most important is the way in which Jesus’ life encourages us to live a life of “ministerial relation” with each other.¹¹⁷ As *mujerista* theologian Ada María Isasi-Díaz puts it, *la lucha* (“the struggle”) -- and not suffering -- is what’s central to the self-understanding of many feminist communities of color.¹¹⁸ Like these theories of atonement, the QAPA model of christology proposed in this part can be viewed as a “subjective” way of understanding the significance of the Christ event because it encourages us to act in a manner that brings our ethnic communities and our marginalized sexualities into right relationship.

B. Who Is Jesus Christ for QAPAs Today?

Who, then, is Jesus Christ for the QAPA community today? One christological figure for the QAPA community might be Kiyoshi Kuromiya, a QAPA activist who died in 2000 of complications from HIV/AIDS. Born in a Japanese American concentration camp during World War II, Kuromiya was deeply involved with the civil rights movement in the 1960s. In fact, he was almost beaten to death while organizing voter registration drives in Montgomery, Alabama. He met Martin Luther King, Jr., during the 1963 March on Washington, and he watched after the King children during the week following Dr. King’s assassination in 1968.

Throughout his life, Kuromiya sought to bring together ethnic community with marginalized sexuality. As a young man, Kuromiya participated as a QAPA in the first gay rights march in United States history, which occurred in Philadelphia three years

¹¹² Delores S. Williams, “Black Women’s Surrogacy Experience and the Christian Notion of Redemption,” in *After Patriarchy: Feminist Transformations of the World Religions*, ed. Paula M. Coeey, William R. Eakin, and Jay B. McDaniel (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), 12.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 13.

¹¹⁵ Joanne Carlson Brown and Rebecca Parker, “For God So Loved the World?,” in *Christianity, Patriarchy, and Abuse: A Feminist Critique*, ed. Joanne Carlson Brown and Carole R. Bohn, (New York: Pilgrim Press, 1989), 26.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 25-28.

¹¹⁷ Williams, “Black Women’s Surrogacy Experience,” 13.

¹¹⁸ Ada María Isasi-Díaz, *Mujerista Theology: A Theology for the Twenty-First Century* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996), 130.

before the Stonewall Riots in New York City. He was an openly gay delegate to the Black Panther convention that endorsed the gay liberation movement. He founded Critical Path, a nonprofit organization that provided free information and internet access to thousands of people with HIV/AIDS in the Philadelphia area, including QAPAs and other queer people of color. Most importantly, he recognized the importance of being both gay and Asian Pacific American. Kuromiya, in the midst of suffering, was able to bring together ethnic community and marginalized sexuality.¹¹⁹

Another christological figure for the QAPA community might be Michiyo Fukaya, a QAPA poet, activist, mother, and survivor of sexual abuse who took her own life at the age of thirty-four. Born in 1953 to a Japanese mother and white American father (and originally named Margaret Cornell), Fukaya spent much of her short life bringing ethnic communities and marginalized sexualities together. In 1979, Fukaya was a co-founder of the first national network of QAPAs. In the same year, she was also the first QAPA to speak at a national gay rights march on Washington, D.C.

In that address, which was entitled “Living in Asian America,” Fukaya asserted our right as QAPAs “to our sexuality, to our love, and to our racial identities.”¹²⁰ She challenged QAPAs everywhere to think about how “we become accomplices to our own sexual and racial oppression when we fail to claim our true identities.”¹²¹ Living at the intersection of multiple forms of suffering -- “sexual abuse, racism, single motherhood, sexism, poverty, homophobia, militarism, classism, loneliness and the psychiatric world”¹²² -- Fukaya nevertheless was able to bring together ethnic community and marginalized sexuality during her short life.

The list of QAPA christological figures might include numerous other individuals. It might include Judy Han, a QAPA activist who led the fight in Southern California against the conservative Korean Christian congregations who wanted to ban the government from “endorsing” homosexuality in any positive way. It might include Pauline Park, a transgender QAPA activist who is fighting for the inclusion of gender identity in the New York State hate crimes law and in the New York City lesbian and gay civil rights ordinance. It might include Susie Chin, a divorced QAPA mother who helped to organize the first national organization for QAPA Christians in the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches. All of these individuals have demonstrated great courage, in the midst of suffering, in bringing together ethnic community and marginalized sexuality.

My own encounter with the QAPA Christ occurred, a little over a year ago, when I walked into the Metropolitan Community Church of New York during its first annual celebration of the Asian Lunar New Year. For much of my adult life, I had struggled --

¹¹⁹ For a biography of Kiyoshi Kuromiya, see Evan M. Forster, “The Critical Pathfinder: Philadelphia’s Kiyoshi Kuromiya Lights Up,” *POZ Magazine* (February/March 1996).

¹²⁰ Cornell, “Living in Asian America,” 84.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*

¹²² Gwendolyn L. Shervington, ed., *A Fire Is Burning It Is in Me: The Life and Writings of Michiyo Fukaya*. (Norwich, VT: New Victoria Publishers, 1996), v.

without much success -- to find a spiritual home that would honor both my Asian Pacific American heritage as well as my Queer identity. Out of desperation and suffering, I had found my way to the Metropolitan Community Church. On that beautiful Sunday morning, I experienced an entire community of QAPAs who were reading scripture, celebrating eucharist, serving communion, and hosting coffee hour! For the first time in my life, I was in a community of other QAPA Christians. For the first time in my life, I was able to bring together my ethnic community, my marginalized sexuality, and my faith.

Following this encounter with the QAPA Christ, I have become increasingly involved with the QAPA community. I have joined various QAPA groups such as GAPIMNY (the Gay Asian Pacific Islander Men of New York) and NQAPA (a QAPA email list on the internet). I have also spent much more time socializing with other QAPAs in the New York City Queer community. In January of 2001, I was ordained a minister in the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches. I have dedicated much of my work -- both in church and in academia -- to helping other QAPAs find their voice. In connection with my ministries with QAPAs at the Metropolitan Community Church of New York, I currently serve as the list manager and webmaster for the Asian Pacific Islander Leadership Institute, a network of QAPA Christians who live across the country and throughout the world.

VI. CONCLUSION

This essay has attempted to construct a christology that speaks to the contemporary Queer Asian Pacific American experience. I have argued that Jesus Christ for my community is the *one who, in the midst of suffering, brings together ethnic community and marginalized sexuality*. This christological model is best reflected in the pericope of John 19:26-27, in which Jesus, speaking from the cross, instructs Mary (as a metaphor for ethnic community) and the Beloved Disciple (as a metaphor for marginalized sexuality) to come together in the same household and to form a new family. Unlike existing christologies -- *i.e.*, Asian christologies, Asian Pacific American christologies, and Queer christologies -- this QAPA christology seeks to weave together the overarching themes of suffering, ethnic community, and marginalized suffering that are present in the lives of QAPAs.

For me, Jesus Christ is no longer limited to the life-sized corpus hanging above the altar in my childhood church. Neither is Jesus Christ limited to the first-century historical figure who lived in Ancient Palestine. Rather, Jesus Christ can be found wherever there are QAPAs who seek, in the midst of their suffering, to bring together ethnic community and marginalized sexuality. Jesus Christ is embodied in the struggles of QAPA activists who are faced with racism in the Queer community as well as Queerphobia within the Asian Pacific American community. Jesus Christ is embodied in the voices of QAPA artists, musicians, and writers as we shatter the silence about our social location at the intersections of race and sexuality. And Jesus Christ is embodied in the lives of QAPA people of faith as we come together as a community and work to heal

the wounds of loneliness, fragmentation, and anger that so many of us have experienced in our lives.

Of course, there is still much work to be done. Although the world is changing, QAPAs are still largely invisible within Queer culture as well as Asian Pacific American culture. Agitating for social change is never easy, but the promise of the QAPA Jesus Christ -- who, in the midst of suffering, can bring together our ethnic identities with our marginalized sexualities -- can bring hope to those who are engaged in the struggle. It is my hope that a QAPA christology will help us -- and the world -- experience God's promise of salvation through the QAPA struggle for liberation.

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