

Article

Do Not Despise the Discipline of the Almighty: God as Leather Daddy and Reading Job through Althaus-Reid

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Abstract: The feminist queer theologian Marcella Althaus-Reid (1952–2009) wrote about what it meant to be an “indecent theologian” and claimed that sexual stories from the margins of society can help transform theological issues. What can “indecent theology” mean for the problem of evil specifically as it is addressed in the book of Job? This article will use Althaus-Reid’s creative methodology, which engages in a dialogue between theology, sexual theory, politics, and personal narrative. This methodology will be applied to the hermeneutic of suffering in the book of Job. I propose that this engagement of theodicy through a queer lens and more specifically within the category of gay sadomasochism in particular, while not definitively addressing the broader problem of evil, can be a creative lens to reinterpret the book of Job. By queering Job, I offer an alternative understanding of the problem of suffering and evil that can find a space within contextual theology. The article concludes with a remark on how such a reading can be used as a liberating text for the queer community.

Keywords: theodicy; queer reading; gay studies; liberation theology; sadomasochism

1. Introduction

In her work, *Indecent Theology: Theological Perversions in Sex, Gender and Politics*, Marcella Althaus-Reid suggests that all theology “is a sexual ideology performed in a sacralising pattern” (Althaus-Reid 2000, p. 87) and that sexual urges and arousal is a categorical concept that should not be compartmentalized away from other forms of epistemological classifications. So much of theology, according to Althaus-Reid, has been either divorced from the realm of the erotic or has focused so exclusively on issues of sin and distortion that it has caused damage and violence in people’s spiritual lives.

The task of the practical theologian is to reflect theologically on those areas of life that are commonly experienced. This paradigm “makes room for the reflection on experience and practice and for dialogue with the social sciences as it engages with the normative resources of the Christian faith” (Osmer 2011, p. 157). Althaus-Reid would add that this reflection is indecent. What she means by this is that a Systematic Theology that supports hegemonic constructs of sexual coercion or capitalistic or military power within the major institutions of society are labeled as “decent.” Those theologies that undermine, subvert, and critically question these thought systems Althaus-Reid would be termed as “indecent.” This would then ask the practical theologian to engage in indecent readings of scripture to both subvert and reorganize the relationships found within its pages. By freeing the voices in the sacred texts from the limits of heteropatriarchal structures, the writings can become focused on the outsider, the one who sits on the margins of sexual practice and social acceptance.

Althaus-Reid’s work is imaginative and playful, making use of sexual double entendres in her writing often employing humor to address serious issues of oppression and marginalization. This methodology allows us to capture the joy of sexuality as embodied spirituality, while at the same time it disarms and challenges commonly held assumptions. Althaus-Reid calls on queer theologians

to transform these unjust structures. Because all theology operates with a sexual ideology rooted in accepted forms of oppression that cause violence for marginalized people, the task of a robust queer theology is to embrace its status as an outsider, and to re-contextualize a theology of liberation that includes erotic desire from a subversive loci that disrupts popular orthodoxies. This breaks boundaries that allow theology to be located in experience, one that even allows for “doing theology in corsetlaced boots” (Althaus-Reid 2000, p. 148).

In this essay, I will first address the use of a queer hermeneutic including the limits and strengths of this approach. I will then position sadomasochism (S&M) within a gay experience and briefly touch on homoerotic S&M as a liberating power that evidences a relationship of social exchange that challenges status-quo hierarchies. I will then draw upon those two previous sections to undertake a queer reading of the book of Job in the spirit of the writing of Althaus-Reid, and investigate a narrative theodicy as it is viewed from a queer lens. I do not claim that my reading of Althaus-Reid is all encompassing nor even touches on every aspect of her work. I acknowledge as well that my use of Althaus-Reid’s work is solely focused on one aspect of her thinking and that some elements of my interpretation of her work as it applies to a gay S&M reading from scripture could be interpreted differently by other readers and scholars of Althaus-Reid’s theology.

It is important to note here that many contemporary theologians and philosophers have advocated an abandonment of a theoretical theodicy. As I will discuss in Section 5, attempts to reconcile the reality of evil and suffering with the traditional theistic ideas of a benevolent God often end in frustration or require readers to gloss over parts of the text. Rather than insisting on a satisfactory answer to the problem of evil, I will argue that a creative queer reading of Job’s struggle with suffering can move the focus away from an attempt to solve an intellectual problem to one that embraces a theological praxis of transformation. In concentrating on the “theological language of the Queer Other” (Althaus-Reid 2003, p. 31), we are able to theologically reflect on a queer experience of suffering. What will conclude this essay is my analysis of Job using what Althaus-Reid would lovingly call “displacement techniques” (Althaus-Reid 2003, p. 3).

2. Queer Reading

Althaus-Reid’s understanding of a theological dyad (Althaus-Reid 2003) is helpful to begin a cursory overview of queer scripture reading. Althaus-Reid argues that much of theology is based on an exclusively heterosexual ideology of twos. This is where binaries are emphasized; God and humanity, clergy and lay, Father and Son, sin and redemption, etc. These binaries are primarily heterosexual and often these binaries occupy a secretive space. According to Althaus-Reid, this is when, as a sexual ideology, an expression of heterosexual desire is defined by its own secretiveness “between twos; this is the logic of husband and mistress; or husband and boyfriend; or wife with her beloved” (Althaus-Reid 2003, p. 12). These secretive dyads act as a model in which desire is treated as something shameful, to be hidden or, even worse, transferred to an unhelpful theological reflection. These reflections have a direct impact on the lives of those who do not conform to the models of power this dyad establishes. The theologian who emphasizes heteronormative, theologically binary concepts are simply reinforcing the hegemony. The goal of the queer theologian, then, is to disturb and transgress this. In some theological concepts, Althaus-Reid would see this transgressive element already in place.

One example Althaus-Reid uses to explain this is the concept of the Christian trinity. “By believing in the Trinity, we mean that there is an acceptance that theology is not a symmetrical art (a dyadic, one-to-one relationship with issues of dogma and tradition) but is a twisted one, following a path of reflections marked by disruptions of dyads or scandals. For we are not saying that God is one, manifested in father–son relationship, but that God is a relationship of three” (Althaus-Reid 2003, p. 16). For Althaus-Reid, this third representative in the Trinity is an example of queerness. By highlighting the queerness of a theological concept, we destabilize the normative establishment networks of power that cling to a single narrative that resist any outside interpretation.

The argument can, and has, been made that interpretations of the Biblical texts themselves are narratives that shape a political, social, and sexual identity. The imaginative use of sacred stories

to either forge an identity or to give hope to an oppressed people is not new. Samuel Hill refers to this as the politics of survival. In the context of the narratives in the Hebrew Scriptures and a Jewish identity, this hermeneutic is the process of “a people using narratives to construct a strong sense of national identity, against a background in which such an identity is being threatened by extinction” (Hill 2009, p. 42).

As the shift is made to give attention to a queer reading, it is important to acknowledge that many authors suggest that the term “queer” is not so much an identity but rather “something of the uncapturable or unpredictable trajectory of a sexual life” (Ahmed 2016, p. 489). This is certainly the understanding of “queer” as Althaus-Reid would suggest, although Althaus-Reid would be quick to point out that this trajectory be one that is “indecent,” one that emphasizes its voice from the margins.

Some scholars like Amy Kalmanofsky often feel hesitant to “queer read.” The legitimate concern is that using creative approaches to scripture could rob the text of its historical grounding. “I do not offer a queer reading of the biblical stories I analyze because I think a queer reading would disturb the integrity of these narratives by imposing an interpretation on these texts that cannot be supported” (Kalmanofsky 2016, p. 2). Kalmanofsky is correct in her caution but overstates, I believe, the danger. For Kalmanofsky, her goal is to demonstrate the Biblical text’s deep connection to the sexual status-quo. A queer reading seeks to upend this as it acknowledges that the “integrity” of the historical context is a culturally conditioned one.

In exploring Schüssler Fiorenza’s work on feminist hermeneutics, Robert Goss astutely points out her critique of theological institutions of higher learning. These academies, seminaries, and universities have so insisted on a “value neutral” biblical scholarship that considers the text’s historical meaning, that any meaningful, contemporary reflection is either lost or is secondary. Goss applies this to a queer hermeneutic effectively arguing that the Bible “is a justice resource in the queer battle for Christian power/truth” (Goss 1993, p. 90). A queer reading is one that can simultaneously undo the scriptural texts that reinforce a harmful heterosexist model and at the same time make relevant to a queer audience a text that can act as a source of strength and hope. This model allows the Bible to be “critically read both as subversive and empowering practice” (Goss 1993, p. 90).

An imaginative reading of biblical texts, far from being a devaluation or a lessening of the integrity of scripture, is historically normative and has a long tradition within religious communities. Elaine Pagels has remarked about the ways in which Christianity has engaged the hermeneutics of sacred writing, an engagement that has recognized the reality that a “genuine interpretation has always required that the reader actively and imaginatively engage the texts. Through the process of interpretation, the reader’s living experience comes to be woven into ancient texts, so that what was ‘dead letter’ again comes to life” (Pagels 1988, p. xxvii).

We must be able to reach a position where we understand the historical and theological context in which the narrative was written, and yet at the same time realize the possibilities that an erotic queer biblical sensibility can bring both to hermeneutical discourse and to the transformative potentials of the text upon the queer reader and her experience. This subverting of traditional forms of interpretation helps to delegitimize structural and ecclesial monopolies of what is considered “truth” as well as actively bringing scripture to life as a form of queer resistance.

3. Sadomasochism

Images of sexuality in popular culture have increased in the modern world, but these images still make clear demarcated lines between mainstream sexualities and marginalized sexualities. Mainstream culture has even begun to embrace the sadomasochistic subculture through popular novels and their film adaptations (*Fifty Shades of Grey* is one such example). This is not, however, to say that this mainstreaming of sadomasochism is necessarily positive. Eleanor Wilkinson has argued that, while we have seen an increase in the acceptance of sadomasochism in society, the existing narratives by which sadomasochism is framed come with very limited conditions (Wilkinson 2009, p. 182), thus reinforcing sadomasochism’s otherness. In the case of *Fifty Shades of Grey*, for example, the kink of the

main protagonist is depicted as an unhealthy personality quirk that needs redemption from the hands of a “good woman.” Sexist and heteronormative power structures of oppression exist within S&M depictions in the culture that “often replicate wider power structures” (Wilkinson 2009, p. 188). That these communities can often be spaces where homophobia reveals itself is to be expected given that sadomasochistic stories are as diverse and varied as those who inhabit S&M spaces.

If sadomasochism represents an “other,” then how much more so would a gay sadomasochism, especially one that often employs traditional heterosexual images of masculinity and subverts those very images? To exemplify this, one needs to turn to images of gay machismo like those made popular by artist Tom of Finland. These representations are not without their problems. While individuals like John Rechy admire that Tom of Finland’s images are ones in which “gay sex is celebrated, proudly performed, never hidden . . . they are proud outlaws” (Rechy 2006, p. 31), the critique nonetheless is that these images often depict men in Nazi uniforms, military gear, and using police props of punishment. These tropes are “representative of legendary heterosexual homophobic forces” (Rechy 2006, p. 32), thus reflecting a disturbing gay self-hatred that seeks punishment for gay desire. While Rechy correctly identifies a concern that is often raised with such images, I would contest this as not being a valid criticism given that Tom of Finland’s images are ones in which both the sadist and the masochist revel in joy at each other as complementary in a theatre of role playing, a point that Rechy himself acknowledges. The question, to me, becomes whether these traditional representatives of oppressive, indeed horrid symbols of torture against queers can be subverted and redeemed. I would answer that they can. In the same way that black liberationists have made the link between the lynching tree and the cross, symbols can, paradoxically, be the conduit toward a theology of hope. “How did African Americans survive and resist the lynching terror and keep enough of their sanity to love and marry each other, to raise their children, and to teach them love and respect for each other? The answer is clear for many blacks: it was their faith in God and themselves that kept them emotionally and spiritually healthy . . . Whites used Christianity to lynch blacks and blacks used it to survive and resist whites” (Cone 2013, p. 225).

As Jeremy Carrette rightly points out, the inclusion of S&M into theological discourse is done not for a sense of titillation or as an attempt at academic “shock and awe.” S&M places itself as a “transgressive subcultural form of resistance to hegemonic sexual practices—in so far as it identifies pleasure outside the procreative act” (Carrette 2005, p. 14). In addition, this cohabitating of pleasure and pain and the relationship of power and submission to that power within a psychosocial context is key to a theological reading of sadomasochism. While Carrette’s concern is to recognize the role of BDSM as it relates to a theological reflection on embodied forms of social exchange within a Western capitalist system and to point out its force as both liberating and oppressive, my goal here is to narrow this scope to the space of a particular biblical text. The focus will be a reinterpretation of a narrative theodicy that fits the need of a queer reading. To paraphrase Reginald F. Davis, the context of queer oppression will dictate the content of this theology (Davis 2005, p. 97). This will be a theology that articulates on the rapport between suffering and joy with sadomasochism as a referent. “For S&M requires something which commercial-theological productive sex does not require, that is a pleasure generated through an exchange of deep trust and intense intimacy—formative of communities. This is where sex gets dangerous, not in its glossy commodification but in its personal imaginative pains and enacted fantasy, with all the messiness of human suffering and our multiple polymorphous selves” (Carrette 2005, p. 23).

Gay sadomasochists as “deviants” and “perverts” seems to me a perfect place to locate a theological reflection on theodicy with an eye toward an Althaus-Reidian interpretation of scripture. It is toward this that I now turn.

4. An Indecent Reading of Job

Queering Job will require more than simply showing Job as a liberationist text for a gay audience. It will require an embrace of what has been marginalized and reviled as well as the full sexual

deconstruction of God. My suggestion is to read Job as an exploration of the relationship between suffering and desire, as the subversion of the role of obedience along with a critical questioning of authority. By queering Job we are able to unmoor it from its vanilla nature tied to a vanilla theology (Althaus-Reid 2000). I think Althaus-Reid would be pleased with such a proposition, and while I admit that my focus is on one aspect of male-to-male gay sexual expression, it is one that can be appropriated toward an inclusive queer hermeneutic.

The book of Job opens by introducing its protagonist as an “upright” man, as one who is “perfect” (1:1). By all accounts, Job represents the very epitome of a decent theology and his life is a reflection of such a stable theological category. Prosperous, esteemed, and happy, Job’s life is the status quo of which God is about to disturb. In queering Job’s backstory I construct the patriarch as a “house faggot.” In this context, such a term denotes a gay man who appeases and seeks to be validated by heterosexual social institutions. Such an individual undermines queer liberation, embraces heterosexist paradigms and even reviles members of their own queer community. This revision of Job as “house faggot” broadens the scope of the text to locate queer theory within the narrative and at the same time theologically reflect upon and question political and theological oppression within queer communities. Through locating Job within this queer reading, we are able to move the narrative from a broader exploration on the role of suffering to one that is localized. Job has often been used as a text to explore the larger questions of just vs. unjust suffering, the suffering of the “righteous” or the nature of faith in the face of a seemingly indifferent deity. Moving the narrative away from one that focuses on definitive answers to the question of suffering to one focusing on a liberationist orientation of the narrative, we are able to have it serve as a force of queer resistance. The efficacy of Job to speak authoritatively about the role of suffering will be addressed later, but it is important to point out here that the more interesting strength of the Joban narrative lies in its ability to be read as a subversive deconstruction of heterosexism and homophobia. Queering Job as a sexual story unpacks issues of homophobia within society, as well as examining eroticism as a form of communicating faith. The theologizing of sexual stories is an acknowledgment that sexuality, particularly one rooted in heteronormativity, informs “our economic, political and societal life . . . Without a theology of sexual stories, the last moment of the hermeneutical circle, that is, the moment of appropriation and action, will always have a partiality and a superficial approach to conflict resolution” (Althaus-Reid 2000, p. 131). Having Job fill this narrative role within a queer fetish context helps enhance and inform both a theological and political struggle for justice and liberation.

In the prologue, Job’s piety is emphasized. Transgressing the narrative, piety here is read as a totalitarian theology “which does not admit discussion or challenges from different perspectives” (Althaus-Reid 2003, p. 8, note 4). Job believes in his own goodness. His worldview and his moral obligations are ones in which he is confident. Like many who claim not to be homophobic and would embrace their classification as a “good person” but nonetheless rarely question their own heterocentered privilege, Job begins in the prologue with a preconceived notion of God, the Covenant, and his own place in the world. Content and self-satisfied Job begins the narrative centered in a heterosexist constructed ideology, and “it is this piety that the book as a whole, by way of the Satan’s question, subjects to critique” (Ticciati 2005, p. 353). That Job is faithful to his own understanding of a commonly accepted religious sense of righteousness is without question. The friends who come to both mourn and console Job reinforce this and even remind Job that he himself offered such explanations to others (4:1–6).

As much as the friends of Job come to try and offer explanations for his suffering, they operate out of a particular ideology that, like Job in the prologue, seeks to strengthen the status quo. In the friends’ minds, Job has transgressed the prevailing hegemony and is being punished by God as a result. The friends exist here as an attempt to represent traditional sexual orthodoxy as part of God’s order for society. They represent a soft-core theology that, like soft-core pornography, looks toward a new horizon but still keeps boundaries sharp and careful. The friends already presume that they themselves are graced by God, thus justifying their heterosexist worldview as a reflection of their own piety. The fact that Job is suffering, they surmise, is a result of his violating this heterosocial code.

Job, of course, has done no such thing. In his mind, the friends are mistaken. Like a good “house faggot,” he insists that he has toed the line and maintained the power structures of privilege. “Then Job answered: ‘No doubt, you are the people, and wisdom will die with you; I am not inferior to you. Who does not know such things as these? I am a laughing-stock to my friends; I, who called upon God and he answered me, a just and blameless man, I am a laughing-stock’” (12:1–4). Job’s internalized homophobia and his desire to preserve the status quo extends beyond his physical life. Even when Job laments his being born at all in Chapter 3, he envisions an afterworld in which everything and everyone would have an ordered place and all would fit into a purpose that does not challenge the binary, either/or logic of his own theology. Both Job and the friends are operating out of a faulty understanding of God, all the while the friends’ speeches to Job evoke passages from the Psalms and the prophets. As Wesley Morriston has pointed out, given that God sharply rebukes the explanation of the friends, “it is fair to conclude that the poet means to reject the prevailing Hebrew view of the meaning of suffering” (Morriston 1996, p. 341, note 3).

When God finally addresses Job it is from the narrative construction of a “leather-daddy” dom–sub relationship. In fact, the opening of God’s initial discourse from the whirlwind is one in which the wildness of creation is highlighted. Taking Job on a tour of creation, God utterly silences Job with a vision of ferocity, awe, and strength. This experience of God’s preeminence is one that is harrowing in its vision. We certainly do not find a gentle pastoral scene of God’s providence where everything is tenderly cared for, but rather a world in which all creatures have the reality of their existence, in all its glory, horror, and messiness embraced and affirmed. Creatures, both hunter and prey, exist in such a way that exposes the universe as arbitrary and indifferent to official religious classifications of justice. This is a cosmos not bound by logical argumentation but one that is free and transgresses the binaries humans impose on the world (39:5–12). Job’s realization that God is not bound to any law collapses his worldview that there ever was a contract between humanity and the divine. Job’s role as the “house-faggot” is disrupted and in a striking “coming out” moment, Job makes the bold step of admitting the errors of his cooperation with the status quo. “Then Job answered the Lord: ‘See, I am of small account; what shall I answer you? I lay my hand on my mouth. I have spoken once, and I will not answer; twice, but will proceed no further’” (40:3–5). Job rightly realizes that the traditional Covenant has proven to be empty. God, it seems in these passages, is bound not by external religious systems of law, but God is driven by his desire for his creation. Like a dominant top, God has taken charge of creation assigning a role for each, even using fetish instruments and devices to do so (41:1–2). This Theophany is divorced from a soft-core, mainstream S&M with safe words and an end that is tidily resolved. God’s address to Job does not bring answers nor even comfort to Job (nor to the reader). God is declaring that his domain is one that is wild and untamed.

On the one hand, God is such an alien outsider to Job that he is unable to even come close to grasping the immensity that God is, and yet on the other hand God takes an intense interest in Job. Like a bottom novice to the world of S&M, this leather-daddy God fills Job with awe and fear, and through this (indeed, perhaps because of this), Job also comes to embody his role in this top–bottom dynamic (40:3–5). It is precisely through his journey of pain that he is able to understand who he is in relation to God and the reality of what it means to be an embodied creature. In this reading, God is an erotic encounter, a leather daddy who is “adorned,” who “brings down with a glance,” and who “binds” (40:10–13). By encountering God in this role, the definition of what it means to be a man of integrity changes for Job. In this erotic play with the divine, Job is transformed. Ironically, his experience of pain has made Job realize that his obedience was to an external law, a law that God is not bound to. In his challenges and his erotic play with God, Job is transformed to see his obedience is now focused on relationships; integrity with himself and integrity within God’s creation. This moves obedience away from the following of heterocentered laws and situates it as a grappling with reality in an attempt to be transformed by the liberating power of our sexual embodiment. This movement is one often fraught with pain as Job discovered, and yet it is through this journey of pain that brings him insight.

The relationship between pain and insight is one explored in S&M discourse. Often men in S&M will discuss pain as a way toward some greater good, something that in the end some self challenge has been overcome. Staci Newmahr calls this “investment pain”. This “discourse draws heavily on hyper-masculine narratives of pain (‘No pain, no gain’). This discourse frames pain as an unpleasant stimulus that promises future rewards. Not surprisingly, men, whether bottom or topping, frame pain this way more often than women do” (Newmahr 2011, p. 138).

Job’s worldview has been totally challenged and reordered. He has come to see his relationship with God as forming a new covenant. That God took an erotic interest in him has changed Job’s previous understanding of the Covenant. This new, reordered relationship forms the basis of Job’s emerging understanding of God and his own suffering. Job’s revelation is truly one that is “libertine.”

Althaus-Reid explains that “libertine” is a word often used by religious institutions to give name to their fears. It is a word used to speak of that which transgresses the limitations placed upon sexual behavior and relationships. Althaus-Reid speaks of the libertine act as one that is a covenant. This type of covenant is a practice in which relationships are “pacted and agreements are made amongst people on the sole basis of what is going to be acted. This covenanting in itself is a pleasurable praxis, in the way that it chooses and combines the flow of desires and then fixes them” (Althaus-Reid 2003, p. 27).

This, in the end, is Job’s awakening. Job’s initial shock and awe at having his worldview challenged through an experience of suffering has led him toward a new, transgressive relationship, a new transgressive covenant. Job’s understanding of God, the Covenant, and his own theological idea about suffering has undergone a deep transformation and he has come to see God and life in a new way.

5. Conclusions

Terrence Tilley has concluded that Job’s labyrinthine response to suffering may be irredeemable. “The book of Job makes no coherent claims. It provides no warrant for speaking of God or the meaning of human suffering. It gives no ‘revelational data’ for theologians to build on or transmit. It offers no solutions to problems of suffering. As a text for scholarly inquiry, its scramblings, ambiguities and uncertainties suggest that closure of the meanings of the texts or canonization of a ‘final’ text may not be possible. As part of the Jewish and Christian religious canons, it reveals that no way of speaking of God and suffering will do” (Tilley 1989, p. 268). Tilley’s conclusion seems sound enough. Given the amount of debate and uncertainty among biblical commentators and scholars in striving for a sound theoretical theodicy, Tilley is correct that a final solution to the problem of suffering cannot be found within the pages of Job. An interpreter of Job who attempts to effectively reconcile traditional religious theism, particularly Christian theism, with a seamless God of moral order who stands on the side of the suffering should be prepared to encounter a number of logical inconsistencies.

I think, however, that Tilley overstates his claim that nothing of value about the nature of God and suffering can be found within the Job narrative. Queering Job as a deconstructive act of biblical hermeneutics can become a powerful resource for LGBTQ communities. As narratives that affirm both the struggle for personal transformation, and justice-making in the world, queer biblical reading transgresses those oppressive paradigms that keep queer people quiet and politically marginalized. By making the texts “obscene” and “indecent,” one can claim the narrative as a queer liberative practice.

A biblical reflection on the nature of suffering within a queer context can affirm the role that political pain and the awareness of marginalization plays in the development of an energized hegemony of resistance. For LGBTQ communities, reading Job indecently means questioning the structures of heteronormativity that we as a queer people of faith have often been complicit in. Such an exercise becomes a queer faith practice that moves individuals to theologically reflect on the suffering of their experience, which is both personal and political, both private and communal.

Althaus-Reid holds that obscenity unmask and exposes reality for what it is, thus setting it free. “Obscenity leads us toward a theology of exhibitionism, which is a very encouraging sign for the task of affirming reality and the suppressed aesthetics of Christianity” (Althaus-Reid 2000, p. 111). This act

of “uncovering” has been seen in a number of liberationist movements as a gesture of resistance and as a way to expose the various forms of racism, sexism, classism, and homophobia in religious communities. By engaging in an erotic S&M meditation on the nature of suffering, theodicy is made obscene. Job declares “and after my skin has been thus destroyed, then in my flesh I shall see God” (19:26) as he attempts to interpret his experience. It is in his embodied, renewed sexual awakening that Job is able to transcend his old worldview and to reorder the comprehension of himself, his experience of suffering and the very nature of this alien God he thought he understood.

For a queer audience, Job’s journey of wrestling with the nature of suffering and justice can be a powerful narrative of resistance. Reading this text through an “indecent” sexual lens means claiming it as our own. It embodies an embrace of sexual expression on the margins while at the same time offering a theological reflection on the role that heterosexism and patriarchy as expressed in ecclesial institutions applies to the lives of queer people. “Indecent people challenge precisely the unnaturality and abnormality of the present sexual ideology, in all the consequences of this sexual and political theology” (Althaus-Reid 2000, p. 131). By queering Job, traditional hermeneutical constructs of the text tied to the privileged are delegitimized and the experience of both an indecent God and an indecent theological reflection on life are affirmed.

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