

## **Solidarity and the incarnation. A dialogue with Denise Ackermann and Allan Boesak**

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### **Abstract**

This paper will discuss how the doctrine of the incarnation informs practices of solidarity in the public and political spheres through the work of two South African activists and theologians, Rev Dr Allan Boesak and Dr Denise Ackermann. I will begin with explicating Ackermann's task of theology, its ground in praxis and human experience, which will lead to a discussion of stories and theology. As we begin to listen to the stories of those around us, we find we need an account of human agency and the particular stories we are told of the incarnation through the Eucharist. Defining solidarity will be the next task, which will begin with Boesak's discussion of "critical solidarity", or solidarity between powerful parties. We will then continue to construct our definition of solidarity through Boesak's model of black solidarity as explicated in his dissertation, *Farewell to Innocence*. Finally, I will synthesize a theology of solidarity in conclusion to this conversation.

### **Keywords**

*Denise Ackermann; Allan Boesak; Incarnation; Solidarity; Mission; Racism*

Have you ever found yourself looking for Jesus? Imagine sitting in an English Cathedral, where the pillars in the sanctuary reach up towards to sky to support the domed Gothic ceiling, lined with intricate designs. The expanse between the walls is lit up by the stained-glass windows surrounding the sanctuary. A procession of bishops creeps their way down the aisle, adorned with brilliant patterns of gold and mitres on their heads. Where would you be looking for Jesus in this place? Anglican theologian and professor of theology Denise Ackermann found herself peering past the extravagant processional, looking for something more than what was already in front of her. She was not looking for a man in gold robes; she

was looking for the man on the borrowed donkey. “Jesus, whom Christians attest is the incarnation of the living God, had nowhere to lay his head, washed the feet of his disciples, and had to borrow a donkey for a bitter-sweet ride that ended on a cross.”<sup>1</sup> As the daughter of a white South African ambassador, Ackermann could have easily rested upon the easy theology of white superiority that pervaded apartheid South Africa, but she did not. She expressed her opposition to the apartheid regime by demonstrating with the Black Sash, an anti-apartheid organization of white women, and as worked as an advocate for women’s rights throughout her life, including through joining the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians.

Allan Boesak rose to prominence during apartheid in South Africa as a prophetic voice against the racism of South African government and the Dutch Reformed Church. As a black liberation theologian, Boesak identified and racist underpinnings of the Dutch Reformed Church’s theology and following the lead of theologians like James Cone and Martin Luther King Jr. to transform the narratives around the worthiness of black and brown people in South Africa and beyond. Boesak is a pastor in the black Reformed Church, but he ministered to all of South Africa through his activism in organizing demonstrations and political parties in resistance against apartheid, alongside giants such as Nelson Mandela and Archbishop Desmond Tutu.

Both of these theologians could not divorce their faith from the suffering of their neighbour. They did not understand their theological beliefs to be separate from their daily lives. The doctrine of the incarnation, that the second member of the Triune God became a human and lived a human life, is one such theological belief. I will engage with the work of these two South African theologians to excavate how the incarnation can affect our practices of solidarity. We will glean wisdom together from Denise Ackermann on the task of theology, the interplay of theology and stories and on human freedom, then with Allan Boesak on how to define what the practice of solidarity is, and the differences between critical solidarity and black solidarity.

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1 Denise Ackermann, *Surprised by the Man on the Borrowed Donkey: Ordinary Blessings* (Cape Town: Lux Verbi, 2014), 23

## 1. The task of theology

We will begin with Denise Ackermann's definition of theology and what a person who does theology, a theologian, is in light of this definition. She begins by defining theology as an act that considers both humanity and God. "Theology is sustained reflection about what we worry about, what *we believe*, and what *we do* about what we believe ... We seek words about God and about all things and all actions in relation to God."<sup>2</sup> Theology is a human activity done in contemplation of God by reflecting through one's own context and particularities.<sup>3</sup> Theology, thinking about God through our human condition, then necessarily begins with the incarnation because it is the intersection between divinity and human particularity. What God is like, how God relates to us, and we relate to God begins with the mystery of the incarnation, "God with us".<sup>4</sup>

Ackermann identifies herself as a feminist theologian of praxis. She identifies as a feminist because she believes in the equal worth and dignity of both genders, despite the theological, legal, political, and social practices that would aim to say and practice otherwise. She uses the term *praxis* to draw out a particular implication of the task of theology. "Praxis describes the inseparable relationship between reflecting and acting, between what I think I believe and what I do to achieve my beliefs."<sup>5</sup> This definition highlights the interconnectedness of *belief* and *reflection* with *doing* and *acting*. That which is not done is not believed. Ackermann draws out this foundation of theology in conversation with other schools of theological thought which have relied heavily on praxis, such as feminist, womanist, and liberationist theologies.

Just as the incarnation becomes the grounds for initial theological reflection because it is the meeting of the divine and human, it also serves as a starting point for theological anthropology. Combining the awareness that the incarnation of Jesus brings holiness to humanity along with the

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2 Denise Ackermann, *After the Locusts: Letters from a Landscape of Faith* (Grand Rapids, Mich. : Glosderry, Republic of South Africa: W.B. Eerdmans; D. Philip Publishers, 2003). 27.

3 Ackermann, *After the Locusts*, 35.

4 Ackermann, *Surprised by the Man on the Borrowed Donkey*, 101.

5 Ackermann, *After the Locusts*, 35.

praxeological nature of theological discourse, Ackermann concludes “[t]he aim of such a theology is healing and liberating praxis.”<sup>6</sup> Theology then must address sin and the antidote to sin, which is found in Jesus. Since the aim of theology is healing and liberation, theology must begin, first and foremost, with pain. “It is concerned with the very stuff of life, our questions, our experience of alienation, our searching for meaning. Theology demands an engagement of the mind and the heart.”<sup>7</sup> This is another reason Ackermann identifies herself as a *feminist* theologian; she is naming her pain and how her pain through misogyny illuminates her experiences of and with God. It also reveals that the task of theology for her includes the dimension of faith, and proceeding from that, hope.

## 2. Theology and stories

Ackermann is not shy about naming her faith and spirituality, and their formational role in her theology. Because of this we can identify how theology and faith are two sides of the same coin in Ackermann’s theological task. Faith relates directly to the task of asking about God. “Having faith means wanting to know more about God’s creative, life-giving, and life-sustaining power and desiring to understand more about God’s being and God’s will ...”<sup>8</sup> It is an inquiry into the character of God through our present experience, and the experiences of those around us through storytelling. Because of this, theology must wrestle with storytelling and narrative construction. Whose stories are being told? Whose are not? Whose stories are seen as unreasonable or pessimistic, and whose are understood to be worth retelling?

There is this often quoted saying, “history is told by the victor”. I believe it is a relatively accepted understanding of the way our metanarratives of history are formed. Because of this, attempts to understand the comprehensive truth of historical situations are side-lined for the continuation of the stories told by those who have traditionally held the power and prestige to regurgitate their versions of the narrative. Historical narratives which

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6 Ackermann, *After the Locusts*, 36.

7 Ibid., 27.

8 Ibid., 29.

add another dimension are side-lined as “elective” or optional histories, which we can see in the context of the United States. African-American, Asian-American, or Native American perspective of history are not seen as crucial to constructing society’s metanarrative. Even when they highlight crucial events that illumine causes and effects in history which are obscured from the dominant point of view. How much more insight into history could we receive by connecting the current anti-“Mexican” sentiment when we read it in light of the Mexican Repatriation acts of the 20’s and 60’s? How might the events of Black Wall Street serve as a case study to deepen our understanding of post-civil rights strategies of economic disenfranchisement? And why is it that these stories are deemed not worthy of being told?

“Not all stories have happy endings. Mostly they have no endings. They are simply ongoing tales in which grit, doubt, and hope are a part of life.”<sup>9</sup> The ongoing activity of story and experience leads to the embrace of both the gritty and the hopeful nature of storytelling in the theological task. Both grit and hope are found in the story of the incarnation. Grit is found in the life that Jesus chose to inhabit as God in flesh. The beginning and ending points of Jesus’ life were marked with two identifications which are often used to signify those that are “the worst of humanity”. Jesus’ birth in a manger was an identification with those who are in poverty, those who are so despised by “respectable” people that they would not even bring a pregnant woman into a safe place to give birth. Jesus’ life ends with the cross, a signifier of criminality.<sup>10</sup>

Ackermann connects the doctrine of the incarnation with concern for the human bodies. Identifying the treatment of God, who inhabited a particular body, with the treatment of particular bodies around us demands a theological praxis. Ackermann gives extended treatment to the HIV/AIDS crisis in Africa, and how the treatment of those bodies, especially women’s bodies, reflect our theological anthropology, namely who we believe is worthy and who we believe is not. Human experiences and the stories they catalyse are all grounded on the site of human bodies. Jesus’s body, as one

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9 Ibid., 40.

10 Ibid., 79.

being identified especially with poverty and criminality, should draw our attention to how we treat the bodies that also carry those labels among us.

In American culture, criminals are treated as the worst of humanity, or even as subhuman because of their status as criminal. Some of the ways we minimize the dignity of criminals are through repealing their political rights through taking away the right to vote during their period of incarceration, but also while they are on parole and even after they have served the entirety of their sentence, which is the case in twelve states in the U.S.<sup>11</sup> In 2016, approximately one in 40 adults were disenfranchised by either a current or past felony conviction, and about half of those people had already completed their sentence.<sup>12</sup> Voter disenfranchisement also affects black and Hispanic communities much more severely, as incarceration does, with one in thirteen black adults being disenfranchised.<sup>13</sup> Those who are in poverty also face barriers connected to their lack of wealth. Stereotypes, such as the welfare queen and the lazy “non-skilled” worker contribute to the idea that those in poverty deserve their status. The real picture is much more complex than this. The Bureau of Labour Statistics show that there are a variety of factors that interfere in the ability of those working or seeking to work to rise out of poverty, including supporting a family or labour market problems, the major ones being periods of unemployment, involuntary part-time employment, and low earnings.<sup>14</sup> The spreading of these stereotypes creates narratives about the worth of those human bodies, conveniently glossing over the variety of ways that poverty is self-reinforcing through market and relational factors, like those listed above, but also for people which chronic health problems, or intellectual or physical disabilities. While the overall poverty rate in the

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11 “Felony Disenfranchisement: A Primer”. Jean Chung. The Sentencing Project. [Online]. Available: <https://www.sentencingproject.org/publications/felony-disenfranchisement-a-primer/>

12 “6 Million Lost Voters: State-Level Estimates of Felony Disenfranchisement, 2016” Christopher Uggen, Ryan Larson, and Sarah Shannon. Sentencing Project. [Online]. Available: <https://www.sentencingproject.org/publications/6-million-lost-voters-state-level-estimates-felony-disenfranchisement-2016/>

13 “Felony Disenfranchisement: A Primer”

14 “A profile of the working poor, 2016”. BLS Reports. [Online]. Available: <https://www.bls.gov/opub/reports/working-poor/2016/home.htm>.

United States in 2016 was 12.7 percent, the rate people with disabilities experience poverty is at 21 percent.<sup>15</sup>

The story of hope is the other component to this story-based theology. Quoting Jürgen Moltmann, Ackermann asserts that Christian hope is resurrection hope.<sup>16</sup> There are certain theologies which understand the incarnation to be the divine assumption of the body, and the resurrection is read as the divine overcoming of the body, or the defeat of the body, especially as the body is seen to represent sinfulness. Instead of reading the doctrines of the incarnation and resurrection against each other, Ackermann reorients this understanding towards resurrection hope as hope for new creation.<sup>17</sup> Some might hear these sentiments, of hoping for a new creation, and think it is an impossible task to participate in, so they can just sit back and let God do the work. Ackermann fiercely disagrees; “Hope is not an armchair activity.”<sup>18</sup> Ackermann grounds her understanding of hope in bodies and the Eucharist.

Communion, as an activity and a sacramental practice, is the practice of resurrection and new creation in the body of Christ, and those bodies with which he identifies. “If we are *catholic*, we are in solidarity because we are connected, in communion, with those who are suffering and who experience fear of rejection, poverty, and death”<sup>19</sup>. Practicing new life in the midst of rejection, poverty, and death is done in solidarity through the practices of healing and liberation. Orthodox theology is the practice of the healing and liberation of bodies. “The healing means liberation, justice, forgiveness, and hopefully reconciliation. Healing has to do with bread, a roof over people’s heads, jobs, education, health care – all that is needed to live with dignity. I think what theologians have to say should be measured by whether it contributes to human healing and freedom.”<sup>20</sup> Ackermann points out that the Eucharist is in continuity with this radically

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15 “The Population of Poverty USA”. Poverty USA. [Online]. Available: <https://www.povertyusa.org/facts>.

16 Ackermann, *After the Locusts*, 82.

17 Ibid., 81.

18 Ibid., 81.

19 Ibid., 85.

20 Ibid., 55.

practical vision of healing and liberation, as its origins are in the Jewish Passover meal, a celebration of the Exodus which “was a political event, in which bodies were liberated from slavery and oppression.”<sup>21</sup> Partaking in the Eucharist necessitates that we partake in solidarity with bodies that experience suffering and oppression.

### 3. Human freedom

When we talk about the practice of solidarity, we must discuss the conditions which make solidarity a necessary practice. Solidarity is a reaction against oppression and injustice. At its core, solidarity must be the implementation of healing and liberation through addressing the conditions which bind people in harmful systems. It is a logical conclusion to make that solidarity’s work is towards freedom. But what are we talking about when we say ‘freedom’? Ackermann suggests that there are two main types of freedom. First there is “freedom from” which is the ability to act without interference, coercion or restriction.<sup>22</sup> The struggles against racism, ableism, poverty, and other hegemonies fall under this categorization. The other category that Ackermann suggests is “freedom for”. Her understanding of “freedom for” is a moral category, the ability to work for righteousness and goodness through human action.<sup>23</sup> Freedom for is the ability to make choices and exercise agency towards good and holy ends.<sup>24</sup>

Ackermann’s distinctions within freedom provide a helpful starting ground for the complexities involved in working for human freedom. Ackermann defines oppression as “an extreme form of restraint on freedom that calculatingly diminishes, even denies, human worth in a variety of ways.”<sup>25</sup> She describes how this can be done through legal and political means, social and cultural systems, and even interpersonally.<sup>26</sup> To combat oppression, freedom must encompass more than just dismantling harmful systems, as her definition of “freedom from” addresses, but also the rebuilding of new

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21 Ibid., 92.

22 Ackermann, *Surprised by the Man on the Borrowed Donkey*, 148.

23 Ackermann, *Surprised by the Man on the Borrowed Donkey*, 149.

24 Ibid., 141.

25 Ibid., 145.

26 Ibid., 145.

systems through acting in “freedom for”. All of humanity can progress in the moral category of “freedom for”, as we all work against the power of sin in our thoughts, actions, and systems. However, there are particular groups of people who must work towards “freedom from” coercive interference at varying severities on top of working towards moral agency.

Another aspect of “freedom from” that Ackermann briefly treats, but on which I would like to dwell, is the realm of the imagination. Ackermann goes on a brief excursus on the imagination to show how there are hopeful motivating factors for bodily freedom in our imagination. One of the aspects of oppression is its ability to convince the person who is being oppressed of their subhuman and unworthy status.<sup>27</sup> The oppression of the imagination is a crucial step because it aids in the oppression of the body. When someone thinks they deserve the negative treatment they receive, they will not work to change their situation. If oppressed people believe that their situation has been merited by their actions or personhood, then they will not resist. Ackermann notes how imagination can overcome this oppression by a momentary transcendence beyond the circumstances of our bodies<sup>28</sup>.

“The truth is that our freedom is limited by our bodiliness, but we can still choose how to speak, when to listen, and how to imagine and hope.”<sup>29</sup> Our imagination can be the first act of resistance and solidarity in oppressive systems. The cultivation of a new imagination can be an initial step towards concrete practices of hope. It can birth new understandings of ourselves and our neighbours can be freed *from* prejudice, but it also can free us *for* imagining ways to practice love, communion, and resistance. Our imaginations have the power to inspire new realities through relationships, practices, and systems to work for.

History is bursting with practices of imaginative resistance. In the late 1970’s after thousands of Argentine children and young adults had “disappeared”, a group of mothers called the *Madres de Plaza de Mayo*, or the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo, began to gather on a weekly basis and protest in

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27 Ibid., 146.

28 Ibid., 145.

29 Ibid., 145.

front of the presidential palace, wearing white headscarves, which would become the symbol of the group and their protest against the government. At the time, they were not allowed to gather in a group of three or more, so they marched in pairs.<sup>30</sup> The Black Sash, which Ackermann participated in, wore black sashes to symbolize their mourning of the death of the civil rights of people of colour in South Africa. They would gather together in public spaces, street corners, and political meetings to protest the apartheid conditions. The #MeToo Movement began from activist Tarana Burke's vision to connect people, especially women and girls, who had experienced sexual trauma or violence to each other, to share their stories and resources together so that they could draw strength from each other to heal.

What then is the basis of our freedom? Ackermann explains that for atheists, a person's freedom is entirely self-constituted,<sup>31</sup> but for Christians “[human] freedom emanates from the good news of God's redeeming love in Jesus Christ.”<sup>32</sup> Our dignity and our agency are not intrinsically tied up only to ourselves, our action, and our character, but it is also tied up with the love of God which was demonstrated in the incarnated God-man. We must read our character and actions in consideration of freedom and oppression, like atheist and secular thinkers do, but our Christian faith must cause us to remember that God's love for us is already the basis for our human dignity and agency. Love must become the basis on which we cultivate our imaginations and moral agency. Ackermann explains, “love presupposes freedom, freedom to choose, to be instrumental in the flourishing of another.”<sup>33</sup> To love our neighbour necessarily means that we must work to eliminate those things which hamper our neighbour's freedom in dignity and agency.<sup>34</sup> To love our neighbour must mean that we are so convinced of God's love for us and our neighbour that we work for a place of resurrection, of new creation, in their lives.

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30 Uki Goñi. “40 years later, the mothers of Argentina's 'disappeared' refuse to be silent”. The Guardian. [Online]. Available: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/apr/28/mothers-plaza-de-mayo-argentina-anniversary>.

31 Ackermann, *Surprised by the Man on the Borrowed Donkey*, 147.

32 Ibid., 147.

33 Ibid., 150.

34 Ibid., 151.

#### 4. Critical solidarity

While we continue to explore how our faith informs our politics, we also must acknowledge that not all practices of solidarity are not inherently good or just. Allan Boesak describes one example of this “critical solidarity”, that is solidarity with a sceptical eye, that the South African Council of Churches committed to practicing with the new post-apartheid government in 1994.<sup>35</sup> Boesak criticizes this because it is an alliance between two powerful parties, more concerningly the two powerful parties that were such powerful enforcers of apartheid itself. This act was reminiscent of the solidarity that white folks, especially those in churches, practiced with each other during the apartheid era to hold onto power.<sup>36</sup> The crucial distinction between the “critical solidarity” and true solidarity is that true solidarity is an alliance with the oppressed and disadvantaged. Solidarity is a practice of justice, and our vision of justice is left unfulfilled until the most marginalized, the poorest of the poor, are seen and cared for.<sup>37</sup> This is not a criticism of South African government itself, but of when alignment with power becomes more important than alignment with the oppressed. “Disobedience to the government is not a duty-obedience to God.”<sup>38</sup>

The importance of the incarnation of Jesus is an affirmation that the character of God is one who is for oppressed and forgotten people, and who works for their liberation. In Jesus of Nazareth, God’s power is revealed as an alternative to the powers and principalities of the world which seek to dominate their neighbours.<sup>39</sup> Jesus embodies the way that God does things differently, even diametrically opposed to the desire for dominion, through his life and work. “Exodus and resurrection, cross and liberation are not

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35 Allan Boesak, *The Tenderness of Conscience: African Renaissance and the Spirituality of Politics* (Stellenbosch, South Africa: Sun Press, 2005). 168. The South African Council of Churches (SACC) is an interdenominational organization which was a prominent voice against apartheid, though it included the Dutch Reformed Church, a denomination that was instrumental to implementing apartheid policies in Christian contexts. In 1994, South Africa held its first democratic elections as a post-apartheid government, with the support of the SACC.

36 Boesak, *The Tenderness of Conscience*, 152.

37 Boesak, *The Tenderness of Conscience*, 157.

38 *Ibid.*, 151.

39 Allan Boesak, *Farewell to Innocence: A Socio-Ethical Study on Black Theology and Black Power* (Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 1977). 96.

disparate entities, but caught up in the same liberation movement, represent the same divine reality effected by the same liberating God.”<sup>40</sup> If Jesus is God, and this is the way God is working in the world, then the principle of praxis applies, and it must have implications for Christian ethics. The content of Christian ethics must be working *with* God’s mission to change inhuman conditions, to be with and for the oppressed in a way which ultimately leads to their liberation.<sup>41</sup> This vision of Jesus and the solidarity he inspires were revealed over and against the vision of a “White Christ” that was used by the white Dutch Reformed church in South Africa.<sup>42</sup>

## 5. Black Solidarity

Instead of “critical solidarity”, Boesak explices the practice of black solidarity in his dissertation, *Farewell to Innocence*. Boesak’s exposition is of blackness as a category of experience which interprets Scripture, faith, and experience through the lens of the experiences of oppression that various black communities have experienced, but also the beauty and excellence that they have responded to these situations with. Black Theology is a reflection on the experiences of marginalization that black folks have experienced and the revelation of God’s character as one who sets people free from bondage. In the context of Black Theology, this would mean working towards total liberation from the forces of whiteness, the racial construction created to convince black folks of the lie that they are subhuman.<sup>43</sup> “Black Theology seeks a God who will not rest until his children are liberated and who will not permit a lie to exist unchallenged.”<sup>44</sup> Since the experiences of black communities have been of oppression, their “Black Consciousness” highlights the aspect of God’s character which is always sided with the oppressed through their experience and reading of Scripture. “Black Consciousness here means a decision toward and an act

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40 Ibid., 122.

41 Ibid. 145.

42 Boesak, *The Tenderness of Conscience*, 143.

43 Boesak, *Farewell to Innocence*, 124–125.

44 Ibid., 140.

of solidarity, a *black* solidarity which encompasses all the different ethnic groups in the black community, sharing the solidarity of the oppressed.”<sup>45</sup>

Black solidarity is not ego or issue driven but is centred on the dignity and needs of people. Solidarity is not a practice to prove the legitimacy of one’s politics or viewpoint. Solidarity is the praxeological conclusion of the doctrine of the *imago dei*, that all humans are created in the image and likeness of God.<sup>46</sup> When one’s neighbour is treated in any way less than the standard of a divine image-bearer, solidarity is the necessary corrective practice. The minimization of our neighbour’s dignity is a heterodox practice in Christianity which reveals a heterodox theological belief. An orthodox theology affirms that the liberator God who brought the Exodus and raised Jesus from the dead is identified with the people being dehumanized<sup>47</sup>. Boesak also explains the eschatological nature of solidarity, which “lives from a vision of the future, rather than from an idealized past, and it is guided by its solidarity with the poor and the oppressed, the weak and voiceless, and what it believes to be the radical demands of the Scriptures.”<sup>48</sup> Solidarity is hopeful, imagining a radically better future. This also means solidarity rests in discontent with the current order of things<sup>49</sup>. It is not satisfied with “good enough” or “better than it used to be”. It is expectant of the eschatological inbreaking which God began through the life and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

In this discussion of solidarity being rooted in a liberator God, one might ask *why* this God acts for liberation in human history. Like Ackermann, Boesak answers that God’s love for their creatures is the motivating drive behind their commitment to liberation.<sup>50</sup> A good God who loves their creatures cannot be satisfied with their situation of dehumanization, or else it would prove that God is not good. God’s discontent cannot rest in their realm of a private feeling of sadness, but it must motivate a mission to liberate creation. If this is true, then a new epistemology is in order for those of us

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45 Ibid., 139.

46 Boesak, *The Tenderness of Conscience*, 151.

47 Ibid., 154.

48 Ibid., 151–152.

49 Boesak, *Farewell to Innocence*, 146.

50 Ibid., 146.

who are actively or passively participating in these dehumanizing systems. We must begin with identification with the oppressed, which means a re-education and re-engagement of their stories and experiences in order to uphold their dignity and agency.<sup>51</sup> Our old stories told from the perspective of the powerful must be put in their place by the stories of those they hoped to silence. The only thing this re-education and re-engagement could do is lead to the transformation of the oppressive and inhuman systems which created their circumstances in the first place.<sup>52</sup> These actions must change the situation for the oppressors too, as their humanity is minimized by their rejection of God through their treatment of their neighbour.<sup>53</sup>

## 6. Conclusion: A theology of solidarity

What does our discussion with works of Denise Ackermann and Allan Boesak teach us about our practice of solidarity? The first thing is that solidarity is a necessary Christian practice which is birthed out of orthodox theological affirmations. The doctrine of the incarnation reveals God's love for their creatures, a love so strong it was not content to stand idly by as their beloved suffered. The incarnation is God's practice of solidarity, born out of their love. Everything which is believed is shown through our bodies, as seen in praxeological nature of theology that Ackermann is especially cognizant of. The incarnation of Jesus is crucial in Boesak's Black Theology because Jesus of Nazareth embodied the loving and liberating character of God. Our inquiries about God about who God is and what God's mission are become clear in the character and mission of Jesus.

Our practices of solidarity are grounded in an orthodox theological anthropology. The incarnation of Jesus affirms that humanity is holy and loved by God. God could have become incarnate in any form, but God chose to enter flesh identifying with the characteristics that are the “lowest of the low of humanity”, in poverty and criminality. In the American context, black and brown women and men are trapped in cycles of poverty, born out of economic and political systems that then force them into incarceration

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51 Ibid., 145.

52 Ibid., 145.

53 Ibid., 147.

in various forms. These realities that they have to contend with were created by, and upheld by, a white racist Christian society. Even those white Christians who claim to reject explicit racism now still grasp onto the policies and narratives which maintain these dehumanizing systems. The white imaginary believes that their black and brown neighbours, especially those who are poor and/or criminal, deserve what they have and are just dealing with the consequences of their own actions. A praxeological theology of the incarnation reminds that that when we see our neighbour, who seems poor and dirty, or who we have labelled as a criminal and a threat to society, our Biblical faith must stop and remind us that the person in front of us is just like Jesus. If God incarnate is identified with those who we believe are the worst and most undeserving of humanity, then our assumptions of what is good must be overruled by Christ's revelation that these people are holy. If we are to be in communion with God and God's body, we must be in communion with these people too.

The practice of solidarity is the praxeological response to faith, hope, and love in the Christian life. Solidarity through faith is found in seeking after the truth of God's character through our particularities. It is asking God who they are, and what they are doing, and being willing to learn that this God is one of compassion and justice, love and righteousness,<sup>54</sup> whose mission is to cultivate these characteristics in their creatures, whom they love. Solidarity through hope is embracing discontent and rebellion in the current broken order of things. It is rejecting sin for the vision that we find God has through our faith. This hope is eschatological in that it works for the future vision of the God of liberation in the systems and circumstances in the present, and it does not just ponder them. Solidarity through love is the heart of the Gospel. It is confidence in the reality that the resurrection of Jesus is a promise of eternal relationship with the God of love.<sup>55</sup> It is the affirmation that the resurrection was an act of love for us from a loving God, so it must also be an act of love for our neighbour. We are then called to participate in this love by working with God in their mission to make a new creation. It is through this that we are brought back to the theological anthropology that the incarnation reveals, which Ackermann lets Marjorie

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54 Boesak, *Farewell to Innocence*, 147.

55 Ackermann, *Surprised by the Man on the Borrowed Donkey*, 162–163.

Suchocki explain, “holiness does not require a transcendence of our human condition but a full utilization of our condition toward the concrete reality of love.”<sup>56</sup>

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