

## Article

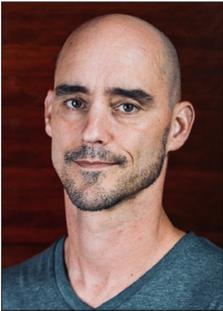
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# Congenital Disabilities and Gender Nonconforming Identities as Parts of God's Intended Creation

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*Some Christians believe that God's creational norm for humanity is binary sex and gender, and that intersex or transgender variations resulted from humanity's fall into sin. Likewise, some Christians believe that conditions like hereditary deafness or Down syndrome would not exist were it not for the Fall. However, scientific study shows that some of these conditions are caused by physical and chemical processes that are inevitable consequences of how natural laws operate. This adds weight to theological arguments that they are intended parts of God's creation, included for human diversity. How we theologically classify congenital disabilities or gender nonconforming identities can profoundly affect how we treat individuals. Psychological studies demonstrate significant positive or negative consequences for physical and mental health of gender nonconforming individuals correlated with the theological views of their religious community.*



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Parents of a child with Down Syndrome overhear church members speculating whether they are being punished for some sin. A teenager who is intersex hears a pastor preach that humans were created "male and female," and that anything different is "not the way it's supposed to be." By anecdotal accounts at least, these are not uncommon occurrences.

What changed in the natural world after humanity sinned? Christians have long speculated whether things such as animal death or earthquakes were parts of God's initial creation, or results of humanity's fall into sin. When these discussions turn to human conditions, they can significantly harm, or help, the way our siblings in Christ think about God, think about themselves, and think about the church.

Many Christians believe that congenital disabilities and gender nonconforming identities are results of the Fall. However, taking into account the genetic basis of some of these conditions, theological considerations from disability studies and gender studies, and psychological research on the effects these beliefs have on the well-being of individuals, we believe it is more likely that at least some of these conditions are parts of God's creational intention for human diversity.<sup>1</sup>

Before considering human conditions, let's examine some less controversial examples in which science provides helpful information when considering what is, and what is not, a result of the Fall.

## Animal Death: Ancient Debates and Modern Science

Some church fathers (e.g., Irenaeus of Lyons and Theophilus, bishop of Antioch) believed that animal death resulted from the sin of Adam and Eve.<sup>2</sup> They quoted prophetic passages such as Isaiah 11:6–7 and 65:25 that portray wolves and lions living peacefully with cows and lambs. While these Old Testament passages pointed forward to messianic times, and today are thought to point to the new heaven and new earth that will appear with Jesus's second coming, these theologians believed these scriptures also described life on earth before human sin.

Other church fathers (e.g., Basil of Caesarea and Augustine of Hippo) argued that these passages apply only to the post-resurrection new creation,<sup>3</sup> and that limited lifespan is a natural part of any animal's creaturely existence. Job 38:39–40 and Psalm 104:21 refer to God providing prey for predators, using language that suggests a celebration of God's original creation, rather than an accommodation to a fallen creation. Moreover, the new heaven and new earth described in Revelation 21–22 are not simply a restoration of this creation to its state prior to human sin, in that the new earth is described as no longer having a sea, and the new Jerusalem no longer needs the sun.

In recent centuries, scientific study of God's "book of nature" has given new insights on this long-standing theological debate. Science doesn't dictate how we interpret scripture; theology decides on the best interpretations. But science sometimes provides additional data for theology to consider.

Animal death was part of God's created system long before humans existed. A predatory animal's anatomy, physiology, digestion, neurology, and social behavior are all geared towards predation; they cannot be changed into herbivores with a few minor tweaks. Predation often forms an important part of complex and healthy ecosystems: for example, when wolves were removed from Yellowstone Park, the ecosystem suffered loss of native plant species, biodiversity, and ecosystem services.<sup>4</sup> These scientific insights strongly support the theological interpretation that animal death was part of God's original created order and not a result of humanity's sin.

## Fundamental Laws of Nature Did Not Change When Humans Sinned

Genesis 3:17–18<sup>5</sup> and Romans 8:20–21<sup>6</sup> have led some Christians to wonder whether the regular operation of nature profoundly changed after humans sinned, perhaps including some fundamental laws of nature. The second law of thermodynamics, about the increase of entropy, is occasionally mentioned as a suspect.<sup>7</sup> But other passages such as Jeremiah 33:20–26, which talk about God's "covenant with day and night and ... the fixed laws of heaven and earth," support a different interpretation, that effects of humanity's sin—whatever they may be—do not extend to the basic functioning of all of creation.

While scripture could support either interpretation, the evidence from investigating God's book of nature strongly supports the second. A study of thermodynamics shows that the second law is an inevitable statistical consequence of any system with many particles interacting in interesting ways; it plays a vital role in nearly every natural process, from star formation, to the sun shining, to photosynthesis, to respiration, digestion, and thinking.

Each type of atom or molecule on earth emits and absorbs light in a unique set of spectral lines. Those lines tell us about atomic structure and the fundamental laws of quantum mechanics, electromagnetism, and nuclear physics. When we look at the spectral lines from nearby stars and the most distant galaxies, we find that they are made of exactly the same atoms, obeying the same laws of nature, as here on earth. Because light takes time to travel, by looking at distant stars and galaxies, we are studying what these laws were in the distant past when the light was emitted. Creation gives clear evidence that its fundamental laws have not changed in the past.

## Things Which Can Harm: Earthquakes, Wildfires, Bacteria, and Mutations

Some natural processes and organisms are dangerous. Were some of these caused by humanity's fall into sin? Here are several examples that show a relevant pattern.

Earthquakes can be terribly destructive. They are caused by tectonic plates rubbing against each other. Tectonic plates move because of convection cycles in the mantle beneath them. These convection cycles are a result of the properties of mantle materials and

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the basic laws of thermodynamics. Tectonic motion has occurred for billions of years. Over time it created a wide variety of ecological niches, from high mountains to ocean trenches, and has recycled mineral nutrients necessary for life back to the earth's surface.

Wildfires can be destructive. But wildfires inevitably result from the basic laws of physics and chemistry under certain environmental conditions that occur periodically. Moreover, some ecosystems are adapted to recurring wildfires, and some tree species depend on fires for reproduction. There is geological evidence that wildfires, like earthquakes, occurred long before humans existed.

Some single-celled organisms live in symbiotic relationships with multicellular organisms, some live in neutral relationships, and some are harmful. The same biological and evolutionary processes lead to both symbiotic and parasitic relationships. Both symbiotes and disease-causing organisms play important roles in complex ecosystems. And there is evidence that both types existed far back in natural history.

Some genetic mutations allow increased adaptation and diversity within a species, some mutations are neutral, and some are harmful. Mutations are a necessary part of the evolutionary processes and have been since far back in the history of life. Moreover, mutations are inevitable results of the laws of physics and chemistry acting on DNA molecules, so that some types of mutations happen with predictable frequencies.

These things sometimes cause human suffering. To prevent all such suffering, God would need to miraculously intervene again and again and again in the regular operation of creation. God can of course do miracles, but God is also in providential control when things happen in ordinary, scientifically explainable ways. Our study of God's world, at least thus far, indicates that God designed creation such that his ordinary providential governance does not require repeated miraculous interventions to keep the natural world functioning as he desires.

In summary, because these natural processes and organisms can cause suffering, it is reasonable to speculate that they were caused by the Fall. However:

1. They have been part of the created world since before humans existed.

2. They inevitably occur because of how the basic laws of nature operate.
3. They are parts of larger systems which, on the whole, are beautiful and complex and life sustaining.
4. God would need to miraculously intervene repeatedly in the operation of creation if God were to prevent that suffering from ever occurring to humans.

This is how creation *is* now. By itself, that does not prove that this is how creation *ought* to be. But given that biblical hermeneutics and systematic theology offer contending arguments—did these things result from the Fall or were they intended by God from the beginning to be parts of this creation—this additional scientific information significantly strengthens the latter case.

### If Not the Fall, Then What?

If these natural processes and organisms are not due to the Fall, scripture offers several other categories. In Genesis 1:28 (NRSV), before sin is mentioned, God commands humans to “fill the earth and *subdue* it.” Hebrew scholars note that the word *kabas*, translated “subdue,” is used elsewhere in scripture<sup>8</sup> to indicate strong action against real opposition.<sup>9</sup> Genesis 2 speaks of a garden, and in the ancient Near East gardens often were walled enclosures. Early Genesis chapters indicate God made a creation with a lot of wildness in it, with a lot for humanity to subdue.<sup>10</sup>

Scripture offers a second category for natural processes that cause harm, but that are not a result of the Fall; they might need to be *healed*. In John 9:1–3, Jesus's disciples asked whether a man was born blind because of his sin or his parents' sin. Jesus answered “neither,” but he then gave the man eyesight. When someone is suffering from a disease or natural disaster, the correct response is seldom to have a theological debate about whether it was caused by their sin, the sin of their ancestors, or some dangerous part of God's original creation. The right response might be to relieve suffering.

This raises theodicy questions. Why would God create a world which includes wild and dangerous things which might need to be subdued or healed? How might those things be transformed, after the resurrection, in the new creation? These very important questions go beyond the scope of this article.

Possible answers involving *soul-making theodicy* and *agape theodicy* have been explored in books and articles in recent decades, including in this journal,<sup>11</sup> and we refer readers to those.

Scripture offers a third category of response for parts of nature which are beyond our control and sometimes dangerous: *respectful appreciation* (sometimes from a distance) with acknowledgement that God is their creator. In Job 38:39–41:34, God describes many wild and powerful creatures in glowing terms. Psalm 104:21 and 25 praise God as One who created, and who provides food to, predators such as lions and countless sea creatures. As we study creation, our knowledge and appreciation for this third category—things we have discovered but are still beyond our control—continues to grow. Biologists frequently find new lifeforms when they study new ecosystems, some in environments so extreme that we can barely send probes. Astronomers discover astonishing things every time they build telescopes with new capabilities.

### Implications for Human Conditions

Some human congenital disabilities have clear genetic causes. Many intersex and some transgender conditions also have clear genetic causes.<sup>12</sup> The genetic rearrangements that lead to these conditions result from the fundamental laws of physics and chemistry acting on DNA. These natural processes also occur in nonhuman organisms, sometimes with predictable frequencies, have done so since long before humans existed, and are part of a system used by God to produce a complex living world.

There is a great deal of human genetic diversity (height, body type, skin color, and many other gene-influenced traits) which we are learning to respectfully appreciate as good features of God's creation of humanity. On the other hand, some human congenital disabilities cause so much suffering that we should strive to prevent or cure them. *Medically* these could be classified as disorders while affirming *theologically* that they are parts of God's creation that we should subdue or heal.

We believe that these scientific arguments support a theological case that at least some types of congenital disability, and at least some types of gender nonconforming identities, are part of God's intended creation of humanity. Whether a particular instance is something to be subdued, healed, or respectfully appreciated depends on context. One person born

deaf might wish they had been born hearing; another might contend that their deafness is integral to the person they have grown to become, and that to wish otherwise is, in effect, to wish that they as a person did not exist. One person born intersex might desire medical intervention to help them conform anatomically and hormonally with the gender they identify with psychologically; another might embrace an intersex identity and ask society, and the church, to affirm them as an intersex person. Even if the church agrees that such individuals are part of God's intention for human diversity, wisdom and further scholarship is needed to respond in loving ways to individual circumstances. But such reflection will proceed rather differently if we're antecedently committed to the claim that these conditions are always the result of sin.

### Congenital versus Acquired Disabilities

We first consider disabilities because they are less contested than are intersex or transgender identities. This is not to say that the church doesn't have problematic views about disability. It often does. But disabilities aren't as closely connected with culture-war disagreements.

There are reasons to think that at least *some* disabilities are intended parts of God's creation rather than a result of the Fall. This isn't to make a claim about *all* disabilities. The range of conditions classified as disabilities is sufficiently varied that we often can't properly talk about them as if they shared a distinguishing feature or essence.<sup>13</sup> In making a claim about *some* disabilities, keep in mind that finding an example of a disability that doesn't align with what is said here does not thereby invalidate the central claim. For instance, lead-tainted water in Flint, Michigan, caused a dramatic increase in the number of children with intellectual disabilities. Where only 13.1% of Flint students received special education services in the 2012–2013 year, before the crisis began, the rate had increased by over half to 20.5% by 2018.<sup>14</sup> Insofar as Flint's water crisis was the result of structural racism,<sup>15</sup> at least some disabilities are the result of sin and its effects in the world. But that doesn't entail that all disabilities are a result of sin.<sup>16</sup>

Approximately 83% of disabilities are acquired, rather than congenital.<sup>17</sup> Many of those, like some of the instances of intellectual disability from the Flint water crisis or physical disabilities that result from war, are also the result of sin, either personal or sys-

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temic. Such cases, like all the effects of sin, will be addressed in the redemption of Creation as part of God's eschatological coming kingdom. It may be that disabilities acquired because of sin's presence in the world will be "healed" or "cured" then. But that does not mean the same is also true of every congenital disability. It is not even clear what it would mean to "heal" or "cure" some forms of congenital disability.

### Congenital Disabilities, Neurodiversity, and the Resurrection

It's not clear that it even makes sense to talk about healing a person who has had, say, Down syndrome, or a deletion on every copy of a certain chromosome of genetic coding that results in autism, because these conditions are present from the moment of their conception. People with Down syndrome are not ill. While the condition can have negative effects on a person's health (for instance, Down syndrome carries with it an increased risk of congenital heart disease), such effects are not present in all cases. Many people with Down syndrome are fully healthy despite having Down syndrome. The same is true of various forms of neurodiversity. Furthermore, an individual's congenital disabilities affect the entirety of their life experiences. Their self-identity, their relationship with others, and how they relate to God are shaped by those life experiences. This is not a bad thing. Genetic variation and neurodiversity, like diversity in height or body type, are part of natural human diversity, not something that people need to be saved from. Theologian John M. Hull notes that this diversity is spiritually enriching to all of God's people: "A spirituality of disability helps us to gain a wider concept of the human itself ... The transfigured disabled person knows the variety of human conditions and thus has an opening into other worlds."<sup>18</sup>

Many Christians do not think that there will be disabilities present in the new heavens and the new earth. For some, they have not considered the possibility. Others have considered the possibility and find it problematic.<sup>19</sup> The church has learned, however, that our beliefs about what God's coming kingdom will be like are often skewed by sinful distortions of our present cultures. In James Baldwin's *The Fire Next Time*, in which he reflects on the racism that he found so prevalent in the American Christianity of his youth, he noted: "The vision people hold of the world to come [i.e., God's eschatological kingdom] is but a reflection, with predictable wishful distortions, of the world in which they live."<sup>20</sup>

### Ableism in Christian Theology

The view that there will be no disabilities in heaven, because all disabilities are believed to be a result of sin, is found in much of Christian tradition.<sup>21</sup> On the opening page of her recent book *My Body Is Not a Prayer Request*, Amy Kenny, who is physically disabled, tells the following story of an encounter with a stranger:

"God told me to pray for you," she says. Her words linger like cloying perfume in a claustrophobic space. "God wants to heal you!" She is undoubtedly thrilled by this opportunity.

I've been here before. It never ends well.

This woman does not know me. She doesn't have the intimacy that prayer or accountability or sarcasm require. She simply interprets my case as something that requires "fixing" and ropes God into her ableism, the belief that disabled people are less valuable or less human than our nondisabled counterparts.<sup>22</sup>

As we consider this issue, we should ask ourselves to what extent we might have internalized ableism. There are a number of different accounts of the nature of ableism. Disability advocate Talila "TL" Lewis is especially helpful, writing that ableism is

a system that places value on people's bodies and minds based on socially constructed ideas of normalcy, intelligence, excellence and productivity. These constructed ideas are deeply rooted in anti-Blackness, eugenics, colonialism and capitalism. This form of systemic oppression leads to people and society determining who is valuable and worthy based on a person's appearance and/or their ability to satisfactorily produce, excel, and "behave."<sup>23</sup>

Much traditional philosophy of religion and theology simply assumes that disability is an instance of the problem of evil or suffering that needs to be explained away to justify God's goodness.<sup>24</sup> This leads to the view, summarized so clearly by Richard Swinburne, that "disabilities need to be prevented or cured."<sup>25</sup>

Something similar is found in the writing of Saint Augustine:

By the same token, the resurrection is not to be denied in the cases of monsters which are born and live, even if they quickly die, nor should we believe that they will be raised as they were, but rather in an amended nature and free from faults.<sup>26</sup>

(Some might think Augustine's view here is caused by a faulty understanding of congenital abnormali-

ties, which illustrates how scientific understanding can inform our theology.)

Nancy Eiesland reflects on this history as follows:

Three themes—sin and disability conflation, virtuous suffering, and segregationist charity—illustrate the theological obstacles encountered by people with disabilities who seek inclusion and justice within the Christian community. It cannot be denied that the biblical record and Christian theology have often been dangerous for persons with disabilities.<sup>27</sup>

## Rejecting Ableism and Embracing Diversity

As numerous scholars have documented, much of the Christian tradition assumes that disabilities are a result of the Fall and our bodies will need to be resurrected non-deformed and non-disabled.<sup>28</sup> There are philosophical and theological arguments against this view; however, fully engaging those theological arguments and their criticisms would take us beyond the scope of this article.<sup>29</sup> For now, we point out two things.

First, as noted earlier, there are scientific reasons to reject the view that all disabilities came about as the result of the Fall. Fossil records indicate that congenital disabilities can be found in animal species prior to the evolution of humans.<sup>30</sup> The genetic variation made possible by mutation and natural selection gives rise to new forms, and thus the diversity, of life. Presumably, God had reasons for creating according to such a process. As theologian John Haught argues, we have reason to think that the biological processes that allow for the emergence and evolution of life “are woven everlastingly into the kingdom of heaven.”<sup>31</sup> This evolutionary drama, he continues, “consists, at the very minimum, of the intensification of creation’s beauty, a beauty that, to Christian faith, is everlastingly sustained and patterned anew within the life of God.”<sup>32</sup> If there are good reasons for God to create according to that process, there are good reasons to create the necessary antecedent conditions that would allow for congenital disabilities that are the result of genetic mutation such as Down syndrome or Williams syndrome.

Second, when we think that all disabilities are the result of the Fall, that shapes how we think about and treat disabled people. There is practical (and political) significance that follows from our theological understanding of disability. Even if we do not, like Jesus’s

disciples, try to connect a disability with a specific person’s sin, too many of our interactions with others presume that disability is bad, as evidenced in Amy Kenny’s recent *My Body Is Not a Prayer Request*. When we assume that disability is something that always needs “curing” or “healing,” that makes it easier to devalue the lives of those with disabilities. Disabled people are often instrumentalized. Disabled students are sometimes denied admission to private Christian schools given that these schools are exempt from the Americans with Disabilities Education Act. Church services often are not designed with various sorts of disabilities in mind. Disabled individuals pick up on these slights and may feel unwelcome.

The past few decades have seen numerous scholars, many of them themselves disabled, further explore the question of how misguided views about the nature of disability and the value of lives with disabilities have negatively shaped Christian practices.<sup>33</sup> Many of us have been enculturated to think about disabilities in ways rooted in a version of theological ableism—that to be disabled is to be broken, unwell, less than. When we think of people this way, we treat them in this way.

Just as we envision other kinds of human diversity as contributing to the range of goods God intends, both pre-Fall and eschatologically—not just tolerated but valued as part of God’s kingdom and something that God intended—so we could with at least some disabilities. The ways we imagine the diversity of God’s kingdom plays out in the ways we structure our communities. One of the reasons that racism is so easy and prevalent in the American church is that we have created Jesus in our own image. Our default understanding of the comparative value of lives limits our theological imagination.

## Nonconforming Gender across History and Cultures

A common Christian belief is that the created order of humans comprises a strict gender binary, and that anything which scholars today discuss as gender variance (which includes not only intersex conditions but also a whole spectrum of LGBTQIA+ identities)<sup>34</sup> are a result of the Fall.<sup>35</sup> Intersex and transgender Christians who do not believe they are “disordered” and who do not seek or anticipate “healing” in a coming age pose an important challenge to those who believe that God created *only* male and female. They believe that God’s creation of “human nature”

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included the possibility of individuals with gender nonconforming identities.<sup>36</sup> Their views correlate with those who question the perspective that all disabilities are postlapsarian disorders to be “healed” in the age to come.

Anthropological and historical records, including sacred texts, reveal that definitions of male and female have varied over time and across cultures, as have cultural responses to gender variance. While it may seem to some that LGBTQIA+ identities constitute a new, perhaps trendy, cultural phenomenon, what we are seeing today may be more accurately described as a culture shift around visibility and inclusion. Gender scholars and historians believe the number of gender-variant persons, as a percentage of the population, has not changed over time.<sup>37</sup> Many ancient cultures recognized minority individuals who do not fit into a strict male-female dichotomy, and linguistic records document an expansive nomenclature for LGBTQIA+ persons throughout history and across cultures.<sup>38</sup> All cultures recognize a majority male-female dichotomy, obviously necessary for human survival, but their responses to sex and gender-variant persons vary widely, from reverence to acceptance to acknowledgment to denial to rejection.

### Intersex and Transgender Prevalence

Modern science—consensus views in the fields of biology, psychology, and sociology—acknowledges that while most people can be identified as male or female, sex and gender are not strictly binary but exist on a spectrum that has been common in nature over time. Current research around intersex and transgender persons and identities has advanced significantly over the last few decades.

Research in sexual development has documented dozens of intersex conditions, variations in anatomical or genetic characteristics that have traditionally been used to assign a male or female identity to an individual at birth.<sup>39</sup> When “intersex” is defined broadly as persons born with genetic, chromosomal, hormonal, and/or gonadal variations that “do not fit typical binary notions of male or female bodies,”<sup>40</sup> and that often do not show up until later in life, researchers estimate the incidence as approximately 1.7% of the population.<sup>41</sup> Early research measured incidence only as including children born with noticeably atypical genitalia, commonly cited as 1 in 1,500 to 2,000 births.<sup>42</sup>

Transgender persons, as defined by the American Psychological Association (APA), are those whose “gender identity, gender expression or behavior does not conform to that typically associated with the sex to which they were assigned at birth.” While scientific research into transgender identities does not always point to determinative genetic, neurobiological, or physiological markers, recent studies reveal neurological variances and correlates showing that transgender individuals “have a brain structure more comparable to the gender with which they identify.”<sup>43</sup> Further, most research confirms that psychological attempts to change a person’s gender identity (PACGI) have proved ineffective and often harmful.<sup>44</sup> While historically there is little systematic reporting of the prevalence of transgender individuals, the UCLA Williams Institute reports that in 2022, 0.6% of the U.S. population identified as transgender with higher numbers among youth (ages 13–17) than adults.<sup>45</sup> A 2022 Pew Research Center survey reports that 2% of the under-30 population identifies as trans and 5.1% of the same population identifies as gender nonconforming.<sup>46</sup>

### Intersex and Transgender: Disorders or Integral to Identity?

Some Christian scholars who acknowledge the science on intersex and transgender identities nevertheless argue that these conditions are a result of the Fall and should be bracketed as “disorders of sexual development” in considerations of gender issues.<sup>47</sup> Christians who claim that these identities are postlapsarian disorders sometimes add that the existence of such individuals should be acknowledged, and they should be treated with Christian compassion and charity. Nevertheless, such bracketing has contributed to the historical marginalization, and often erasure, of intersex persons in Western culture.<sup>48</sup>

This perspective, that gender variance constitutes a postlapsarian disorder, is being challenged by other Christian scholars who have conducted research on intersex conditions.<sup>49</sup> Unfortunately, alongside this competent research into intersex and transgender issues, there is a relative dearth of theological discussion regarding the effects of the Fall and what might constitute a disorder to be healed in the age to come. This seems particularly regrettable in that the growing field of disability theology directly addresses questions of postlapsarian “disorders” and the effects of these views on individuals associated with diverse conditions. As noted earlier in this

article, disability theology demonstrates how labeling certain conditions as “disorders” has historically involved subjective reasoning in defining the “normal.” Christians who have experienced the negative effects of being viewed as defective report that much of the suffering involved with having disabilities results not from the physical or psychological condition itself, but, rather, from the social stigmatization, marginalization, and prejudice associated with disabilities labeled “disorders.”

Intersex and transgender individuals share similar stories relating the painful psychological effects of the secrecy, fear, stigmatization, and discrimination they experience. Many intersex individuals have undergone, without their consent, “corrective surgeries” in childhood that ultimately contradict their internalized gender identity. Others have experienced complications from surgeries and subsequent interventions that have negatively affected their health and sexual experience in adulthood.<sup>50</sup> Because many intersex conditions—even those not involving ambiguous genitalia at birth—can now be objectively identified, they often elicit compassion (if not misplaced pity) from the informed public. By contrast, transgender identities involve a person’s psychological concept of themselves that others cannot “see,” often resulting in heightened skepticism and discrimination by our society.<sup>51</sup>

The voices and stories of intersex and transgender Christians have been largely absent in development of theologies of the Fall. Because they are so significantly affected, their voices are essential to the development of just Christian perspectives on gender. Many Christians have shared their stories of the important role their sex/gender identities have played in their spiritual journeys and their joy when embraced by the Christian community.<sup>52</sup> Susannah Cornwall, from her interviews with intersex Christians, reports that “feelings of being acknowledged as acceptable and non-pathological persons were central to their faith journeys.”<sup>53</sup> Studies show that telling their stories and talking about their identities “significantly increases [their] self-esteem and psychological well-being.”<sup>54</sup> These Christians are calling on majority culture to accept the tension and discomfort that challenge their definitions of the normal. All Christians should be particularly sensitive to their appeal, inasmuch as we believe that every human being is an image bearer of God, and Jesus specifically identifies with the “least of these.”<sup>55</sup>

## Nonconforming Gender Historically and Biblically

Cultures throughout history have acknowledged gender-variant identities. In Hebrew and Greco-Roman cultures, the eunuch was a significant example of gender variance, acknowledged by Jesus, in Matthew 19, when he responded to the Pharisees’ test question about divorce under Mosaic law. He quotes Genesis as it applied to men and women, but he continues with comments about eunuchs, acknowledging people who do not clearly fit the male-female paradigm associated with traditional marriage in his culture. Jesus refers to three types of eunuchs: (1) those who are “born that way” (v. 12): which would describe intersex individuals and, arguably, other sexual minorities (today, some LGBTQIA+ persons) who, by birth, do not fall into a male-female classification;<sup>56</sup> (2) those who are “made eunuchs,” which describes the castrati, who were impressed into service in that culture; and (3) those who “choose to live like eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven” (v. 12). The first two types of eunuchs, identified in Hebrew texts and in Jewish law, faced many cultural and religious restrictions and were prohibited from entering “the assembly of the Lord.”<sup>57</sup>

The third type of eunuch—individuals either cisgender or gender nonconforming who choose to live like eunuchs for the “sake of the kingdom”—is absent from other historical references but seems crucial in that Jesus chose to give this group—a group which includes himself—a label with negative connotations in that era. Although scholarship on eunuchs varies widely among historians, they were clearly a minority and marginalized group. While in the Greco-Roman culture of the first century, eunuchs could be found serving in official, sometimes even prestigious, roles, they were nevertheless considered “effeminate, gender-liminal figures with ambiguous social and sexual roles.”<sup>58</sup> As Brittany Wilson points out, the literature of the period presented eunuchs as embodying “not only all that was unmanly, but also all that was non-elite and ‘foreign.’”<sup>59</sup> Jesus’s inclusion of this third type of eunuch seems quite radical because it places people like himself (and later, Paul) alongside sexual minorities who experienced cultural, legal, and religious discrimination.<sup>60</sup>

Eunuchs—biblical sexual minorities—lend insight into the marginalization surrounding gender variance, an injustice that Isaiah prophesies will be corrected in the age to come, not by “healing” of

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bodies but by healing of the suffering caused by religious exclusion:

Do not let the foreigner joined to the Lord say, "The Lord will surely separate me from his people"; and do not let the eunuch say, "I am just a dry tree."

For thus says the Lord: To the eunuchs who keep my sabbaths, who choose the things that please me and hold fast my covenant, I will give, in my house and within my walls, a monument and a name better than sons and daughters; I will give them an everlasting name that shall not be cut off.<sup>61</sup>

This promise begins to be realized in Acts when Philip encounters the Ethiopian eunuch. The Holy Spirit directs Philip on a wilderness road where he runs to encounter the eunuch, who is reading Isaiah 53. When the eunuch asks for help identifying the suffering servant described (notably, his question suggests that he identifies with the suffering described), Philip shares the good news of the gospel and the eunuch exclaims, "Look, here is water! What is to prevent me from being baptized?"<sup>62</sup> Under Jewish law, there was much to stand in the way; eunuchs were prohibited from full inclusion into Jewish worship and life. At this point, rather than healing the eunuch as he had just done for many individuals in Samaria, Philip cites no difficulty: "both of them, Philip and the eunuch, went down into the water, and Philip baptized him."<sup>63</sup> Brittany Wilson argues that when Philip includes the Ethiopian eunuch as a "member of 'the Way,'" he signals the "eschatological in-breaking of God's action in the world," that is, the introduction of a new covenant of inclusion, as prophesied in Isaiah 56.<sup>64</sup>

Isaiah 53 reminds us that Jesus was "despised and rejected by humankind ... Like one from whom people hide their faces, he was despised, and we held him in low esteem ... We considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted ... *cut off* [emphasis added] from the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people."<sup>65</sup> The stigmatization experienced by those whom society has devalued, *cut off* and oppressed, identifies them with the "despised and rejected" Christ, who, on his resurrected body, carries the physical marks of that stigmatization. As disability theologians remind us, Christ's resurrected body is not a "healed" one; it is a human body carrying the signs of Christ's divine identity and sacrifice. Jesus's life reminds us of the danger of excluding others, of stigmatizing them with labels that facilitate their oppression.

Susannah Cornwall challenges Christians who enjoy the power and privileges of majority culture to "empty themselves" of that privilege (*kenosis*) and of their expectation that others be like them. And she cautions against the dangers of believing that any of us fully understands the mind of God regarding the mysteries of gender and sex:

Phil. 2:5-11 counsels that humans are to emulate Jesus, who did not consider equality with God something to be grasped; but to exploit, to cling to, or to grasp at equality with God is exactly what is happening when humans decide that a single present or historical reading of gender tells the whole story of God.<sup>66</sup>

The privilege enjoyed by those in the majority, who fall easily into a male-female binary, often causes them to dismiss those who fall outside these cultural categories as mere exceptions, whose voices and testimony do not matter. But we are reminded again that these are the very persons with whom Jesus identifies.

Christ reminds us that "you will know them by their fruits" (Matt. 7:20). What are the fruits of a theology labeling those who fall outside the norms as disordered? What are the effects on persons who have been told their gender-variant identities result from the Fall? If empirical evidence exists that certain theological ideas correlate with harm to individuals, it should alert us to the need to reexamine our theology.

### Research about Views on Gender Nonconforming Identities within the Church

Considerable sociological and psychological data exist on correlations between religious identities and the mental health of LGBTQIA+ individuals. We now summarize some of those results. In doing so, we must broaden the scope of this article beyond our earlier focus on conditions with clear genetic causes. We don't know of any large-scale studies which examine the consequences of attitudes within the church, specifically affecting individuals with genetically caused intersex conditions. However, numerous studies offer data on the effects of attitudes within the church more broadly on LGBTQIA+ individuals. In these studies, religious spaces are typically categorized as "affirming" or "non-affirming."<sup>67</sup> While there are obviously more than just those two groups, even studies which identify more than two groups of

religious response usually collapse them into those two groups for analysis, either because of the number of participants per group or because there are no statistical differences between some groups.

Multiple factors beyond human control contribute to a person's sexual orientation. Research in recent decades documents evidence for genetic, prenatal environmental, hormonal, and other nonsocial environmental factors, while also noting the relative lack of empirical evidence for significant contributions of individual choices or social environment.<sup>68</sup> When it comes to sexual *behavior*, individual choices and social environment matter deeply, and the effects of human sin can be quite evident in hetero-, bi-, or same-sex behavior. When it comes to *orientation*, however, research points to factors largely beyond human control in a complex mixture that is incompletely understood.<sup>69</sup>

Despite this complexity, some Christian churches and organizations teach that all nonheterosexual orientation is a result of the Fall and/or individual sin.<sup>70</sup> The posture and policies within various denominations have implications for the ways that LGBTQIA+ people are treated within faith communities.

Christian denominations vary widely in their support for same-sex marriage: for example, with a majority of White mainline and Catholics in support, Black Protestants evenly divided, and the majority of White evangelicals opposing.<sup>71</sup>

Increasingly, psychologists and other social scientists have accumulated evidence regarding the impact of responses by religious communities toward LGBTQIA+ members on LGBTQIA+ religiosity/spirituality, mental health, and self-concept. In general, large-scale studies on the impact of religiosity and spirituality on mental health and coping have found a small but positive relationship between personal religious beliefs and involvement, and reductions in depression and anxiety accompanied by improvements in well-being and self-concept.<sup>72</sup> However, those studies do not report on disaggregated data regarding participants who have minoritized sexual orientations or gender identities; there are other studies that suggest that religious involvement may actually worsen mental health among LGBTQIA+ persons. For example, research has found that among young adults, self-rated importance of religion predicted reduced suicidal ideation and attempts for straight participants but actually increased the

odds of experiencing suicidal ideation and attempts among LGBTQIA+ participants.<sup>73</sup>

LGBTQIA+ Christians have written extensively about the difficulties experienced within some churches and the personal harms of poor treatment from fellow Christians.<sup>74</sup> This includes dual messages that create dissonance across religious and sexual or gender identities for LGBTQIA+ Christians. Several of these dual messages are described at length in "At the Intersection of Church and Gay" by Eric Rodriguez, including the following:

- "God is love," while also enacting harsh and uncaring punitive judgment condemning LGBTQIA+ persons;
- "We are created in God's image," while also emphasizing that a piece of you that you did not choose is inherently unacceptable;
- "Jesus cares for the marginalized and vulnerable," while also experiencing greater hostility and exclusion from Christians than non-Christians.<sup>75</sup>

In studying the experiences of LGBTQIA+ persons within the church, psychologists have identified the ways in which attitudes from the surrounding community and the cognitive dissonance created by dual messages can become internalized. In particular, internalized homonegativity or internalized heterosexism are terms that refer to the negative feelings, such as shame, embarrassment, or anger, that one can hold regarding one's own sexual orientation or gender identity.<sup>76</sup> In addition, LGBTQIA+ Christians may experience identity conflict between their religious identity and their sexual orientation identity: distress and dissonance are experienced when these two aspects of their identity are viewed as being incompatible.<sup>77</sup> In contrast, identity integration occurs when LGBTQIA+ Christians have a positive view of both aspects of their identity—religious and sexual orientation—and do not view them as inherently incompatible. These responses, by themselves, don't determine whether a non-affirming or affirming theology is correct; however, they are important data to consider in conjunction with other theological arguments.

## Negative Causes for Concern of Non-affirming Religious Spaces

Experiencing negative treatment within religious communities due to their sexual orientation has been linked with increased depression symptoms among

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LGBTQIA+ adults.<sup>78</sup> In particular, experiencing discrimination in religious settings increased internalized heterosexism (negative views about their own gender or sexual identity), which then led to greater psychological distress and poorer well-being among LGBTQIA+ Christians.<sup>79</sup> Similarly, involvement in non-affirming religious communities has been linked with greater internalized homophobia, resulting in higher levels of depression.<sup>80</sup> This relationship has been replicated by Jeremy Gibbs and Jeremy Goldbach using the identity conflict framework with samples of young adults.<sup>81</sup> They found that young adults who had been raised in religious communities that viewed religious and LGBTQIA+ identities as inherently in conflict had elevated rates of internalized homophobia compared with those raised in religious settings in which religious and LGBTQIA+ identities were not presented as in conflict. In addition, parental anti-homosexual religious beliefs also increased rates of internalized homophobia. Ultimately, higher levels of internalized homophobia, internalized because of the church community and/or parent views, increased rates and severity of suicidal thinking among these young adults. Leaving these faith communities that endorsed identity conflict actually resulted in lowered internalized homophobia and better mental health.

In a separate study, Maurice Gattis et al. found that attending an affirming church that endorses same-sex marriage actually served as a buffer for LGBTQIA+ college students, resulting in lower levels of depression even when interpersonal discrimination in their daily lives was present.<sup>82</sup> Similar findings have been found when looking at other outcomes such as anxiety. Specifically, frequency of attendance at a church that either describes same-sex attraction as sinful and/or same-sex marriage as sinful increased anxiety among LGBTQIA+ participants as compared to frequency of attendance at accepting and affirming churches.<sup>83</sup>

Ultimately, this research suggests that religious settings that view either an LGBTQIA+ identity and/or same-sex relationships as the product of the Fall and inherently sinful lead to increased internalized homonegativity, which in turn worsens depression, suicidality, anxiety, and self-concept among LGBTQIA+ individuals. This can lead to fear of rejection, isolation, and grief over the loss of faith communities that LGBTQIA+ folks had been

raised in.<sup>84</sup> As one participant in a qualitative study described,

I wound up having to leave that church, that really was my central identity in terms of my faith and upbringing, and kind of who I understood myself to be, where I understood my call [to become a pastor] to have originated. That required also leaving all the people who had nurtured that call.<sup>85</sup>

## Positive Impacts of Affirming Religious Spaces

Despite this significant potential for harm for LGBTQIA+ persons within the church, other studies suggest that an authentic, supportive, and affirming faith community that celebrates LGBTQIA+ identities and relationships can lead to positive outcomes. Suzanne Lease et al. measured affirming faith experiences, such as LGB acceptance and celebration of anniversaries of LGB couples within the church, and found that involvement in these communities was associated with lower internalized homonegativity and higher spirituality, which predicted better mental health outcomes.<sup>86</sup> Similar findings have been reported where there existed affirming religious experiences for social support, self-esteem,<sup>87</sup> and frequency of church involvement.<sup>88</sup>

Qualitative studies of LGBTQIA+ Christians reveal ways that they are seeking out or creating affirming religious spaces. As one participant who joined an affirming congregation stated,

[This church] played a big part in me learning I can be out and loud and proud. You know, they were very accepting of me. You know ... to have little old ladies accepting of me was ... I know that sounds funny, but it was a different level of healing. I didn't know that there were little old ladies that would love me.<sup>89</sup>

Other participants reflected on ways they engaged in activism to work toward transformation of their religious community:

I am staying in the church, in part because I now understand the church has to be ministered unto, it needs the ministry of gay/lesbian spirituality and life experiences and the gifts and the talents they bring. The church does not, in any way, shape, or form, understand the losses to itself, the damage and the losses of gifts, the time, the talents, professional skills, passion, service [with the exit of many LGBTQIA+ people]. It has no clue of what it has lost or what it is stifling when it wants the gifts of people and the people have to stifle or leave in order to be truly themselves. I stay in the church to

fight for the voiceless or those who must leave the church in order to survive.<sup>90</sup>

However they access supportive faith communities, it is clear from this research that when churches are able to affirm and support their LGBTQIA+ members, this bears positive fruit in terms of mental health, well-being, self-concept, and deeper spirituality and church involvement. Integration of religious and sexual orientation identities allows LGBTQIA+ Christians to move away from internalized homonegativity and more fully participate in the life of the church. It also allows the church to more faithfully reflect the diversity that is present in the kingdom of God.

## Conclusion

Scripture alerts us to some natural events or processes that we might, at first, attribute to the Fall. Nevertheless, they might be part of God's intention for creation: in some cases, things to be subdued or healed; in other cases, to be respectfully appreciated. This article summarizes three arguments which do not on their own prove, but together support, the idea that some congenital disabilities and gender nonconforming identities are part of God's intention for human diversity.

First, some congenital disabilities and some gender nonconforming identities occur as consequences of how natural laws have operated since creation.

Second, voices in disability theology and in theology of gender are making a case – from scripture and from their own lived experience of their relationship with God – that their disability or gender nonconforming identity is not something which must be changed in order for them to become the child of God that God wants them to be.

Third, when we attribute, to the Fall, various ways of being embodied, this provides the conceptual frame for how we think about *persons* who have these kinds of embodiment. There is scholarly research<sup>91</sup> and anecdotal evidence regarding harmful effects of this theology on persons with congenital disabilities. Likewise, there is both psychological data and anecdotal evidence for harmful effects on LGBTQIA+ church members of a theology which sees them as damaged.

In the relatively recent past, it was common to attribute racial diversity, in some theological circles, to the sin evidenced in the biblical story of the Tower of

Babel. This made it all too easy for those in positions of power and privilege to think of, and ultimately treat, those of other races in ways that devalued them. This frame became part of the justification used by many Christians to defend chattel slavery and the oppression and death of millions of fellow humans who were equally created in the image of God.

The church has learned from several painful historical examples that when our theology is used to justify behaviors which systematically harm those with less power, then those theological justifications need examination. Perhaps the underlying assumption, that all congenital disabilities, intersex conditions, and other gender nonconforming identities are the result of the Fall, is in error. We welcome a broader discussion of these ideas with Christian scholars.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>The authors began interdisciplinary discussions on this topic and organized a seminar series at Calvin University in spring 2023. This article is an outgrowth of those discussions. We seek feedback and discussion of these ideas with a broader group of Christian scholars.

<sup>2</sup>Irenaeus of Lyons (c. AD 130–202), *Adversus haereses* 5.33; and Theophilus, bishop of Antioch (died c. AD 193), *Ad Autolyicum* 2.17. The belief that animal death resulted from humanity's fall into sin is prevalent today among young earth creationists. For example, the Answers in Genesis organization maintains a webpage summarizing some of these arguments: <https://answersingenesis.org/death-before-sin/death-not-good/>.

<sup>3</sup>Basil of Caesarea (329–79), *Hexaemeron* 9.2; and Augustine of Hippo (354–430), *The City of God* 12.4, <https://ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf102/npnf102.iv.XII.4.html>. The belief that animal death was part of God's creational plan is prevalent today among old earth creationists. For example, the Reasons to Believe organization maintains a webpage summarizing some of those arguments: <https://reasons.org/explore/publications/articles/animal-death-before-the-fall-what-does-the-bible-say>, as does the BioLogos organization: <https://biologos.org/common-questions/did-death-occur-before-the-fall>.

<sup>4</sup>For a survey of studies see, for example, Robert L. Beschta and William J. Ripple, "Riparian Vegetation Recovery in Yellowstone: The First Two Decades after Wolf Reintroduction," *Biological Conservation* 198 (2016): 93–103, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.biocon.2016.03.031>.

<sup>5</sup>Gen. 3:17b–18, NRSV:

God says to Adam that because of sin, "Cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field."

<sup>6</sup>Rom. 8:20–21, NRSV:

For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from

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its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God.

<sup>7</sup>This idea that the second law of thermodynamics started after humanity's fall into sin occurs mostly in casual conversation and is seldom put into print or on the web (although see, for example, <https://earlychurchhistory.org/daily-life/gardens-and-the-2nd-law-of-thermodynamics/>). Still, the idea is advanced frequently enough that you can find, with a little searching, several websites written by Christians trying to dissuade other Christians from this idea.

<sup>8</sup>For example, Num. 32:22; Josh. 18:1; 2 Sam. 8:11; 1 Chron. 22:18; 2 Chron. 28:10; Neh. 5:5; Esther 7:8; Jer. 34:11, 16; Mic. 7:19; and Zech. 9:15.

<sup>9</sup>Douglas Clement Spanner, *Biblical Creation and the Theory of Evolution* (Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster, 1997), 62, <https://www.creationandevolution.co.uk/Creation%20&%20Evolution%20-%20Prof.D.C.Spanner.pdf>.

<sup>10</sup>In recent decades, we've learned that we need wisdom in how we subdue the earth. Forests and swamps can be dangerous places to live or travel, while cities and farms can promote human flourishing; however, we should not drain all the wetlands or cut down all the forests to make cities and farms. We must maintain some wilderness and promote healthy biodiversity. Eradicating smallpox was a great achievement; however, we have also learned that dangerous predator species, like lions and wolves, play important roles in ecosystems.

<sup>11</sup>See, for example, Junghyung Kim, "Naturalistic versus Eschatological Theologies of Evolution," *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* 63, no. 2 (2011): 95–108, <https://www.asa3.org/ASA/PSCF/2011/PSCF6-11Kim.pdf>; Keith B. Miller, "'And God Saw That It Was Good': Death and Pain in the Created Order," *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* 63, no. 2 (2011): 85–95, <https://www.asa3.org/ASA/PSCF/2011/PSCF6-11Miller.pdf>; Bethany Sollereder, "Evolution, Suffering, and the Creative Love of God," *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* 68, no. 2 (2016), <https://www.asa3.org/ASA/PSCF/2016/PSCF6-16Sollereder.pdf>; and Chris Barrigar, "God's *Agape*/Probability Design for the Universe," *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* 70, no. 3 (2018): 161–62, [www.asa3.org/ASA/PSCF/2018/PSCF9-18Barrigar.pdf](http://www.asa3.org/ASA/PSCF/2018/PSCF9-18Barrigar.pdf).

<sup>12</sup>Some individuals who initially appear to have an unambiguous biological sex, and who later identify as transgender, are then found to have a clear sex hormone-related genetic condition (e.g., some version of congenital adrenal hyperplasia). See, for example, William G. Reiner, "Gender Identity and Sex-of-Rearing in Children with Disorders of Sexual Differentiation," *Journal of Pediatric Endocrinology and Metabolism* 18, no. 6 (2005): 549–54, <https://doi.org/10.1515%2FJPPEM.2005.18.6.549>. More generally, however, for many transgender individuals today, the genetic contributing factors are unknown. This is an ongoing area of research, including studies of genetics and brain anatomy. See, for example, J. Graham Theisen et al., "The Use of Whole Exome Sequencing in a Cohort of Transgender Individuals to Identify Rare Genetic Variants," *Scientific Reports* 9, no. 1 (2019): 1–11, <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-019-53500-y>; and Florian Kurth et al., "Brain Sex in Transgender Women Is Shifted towards Gender Identity," *Journal of Clinical Medicine* 11, no. 6 (2022): 1582, <https://doi.org/10.3390/jcm11061582>.

<sup>13</sup>Kevin Timpe, "Denying a Unified Concept of Disability," *The Journal of Medicine and Philosophy* 47, no. 5 (2022): 583–96, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jmp/jhac021>.

<sup>14</sup>Corey Mitchell, "In Flint, Schools Overwhelmed by Special Ed. Needs in Aftermath of Lead Crisis," *Education Week* (August 28, 2019), <https://www.edweek.org/teaching-learning/in-flint-schools-overwhelmed-by-special-ed-needs-in-aftermath-of-lead-crisis/2019/08>.

<sup>15</sup>Layla Chaaraoui, "What the Water Crisis in Flint Shows about Racism in Public Health," *Harvard Political Review* (2022), <https://harvardpolitics.com/flint-crisis-racism/>; The Michigan Civil Rights Commission, "The Flint Water Crisis: Systemic Racism through the Lens of Flint," February 17, 2017, <https://www.michigan.gov/-/media/Project/Websites/mdcr/mcrc/reports/2017/flint-crisis-report-edited.pdf>; and Anna Clark, *The Poisoned City: Flint's Water and the American Urban Tragedy* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2018).

<sup>16</sup>There are, of course, some congenital disabilities whose causes, at least in part, can be traced to sinful acts by one or more persons; these, therefore, could be classified as being (indirectly) a result of the Fall. One example of this might be birth defects caused by prenatal exposure to toxic chemicals dumped into the environment. We believe there is a second category: congenital disabilities which result from the normal operation of the natural world (e.g., genetic mutations), which should not be classified as being a result of the Fall. Is there a third category? Are there some congenital disabilities which are a result of the normal operation of the natural world the way it works today, but which are nevertheless a result of the Fall because they result from *changes* which God imposed on the normal operation of the natural world as a result of humanity's fall into sin? Our tentative conclusion is that the weight of theological arguments presented in this article is against there being congenital disabilities in this third category.

<sup>17</sup>Sue Regan and Kate Stanley, "Work for Disabled People," *New Economy* 10, no. 1 (2003): 56–61; statistic from page 60, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-0041.00290>.

<sup>18</sup>John M. Hull, "A Spirituality of Disability: The Christian Heritage as Both Problem and Potential," *Studies in Christian Ethics* 16, no. 2 (2003): 27, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/095394680301600202>.

<sup>19</sup>Two examples of contemporary Christian scholarly treatments that at least seem to equate disabilities with natural evils that should be prevented or cured in this life, and eliminated in the life to come, include Richard Swinburne, *Providence and the Problem of Evil* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1998); and Chad Meister and Paul K. Moser, "Introduction," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Problem of Evil*, ed. Chad Meister and Paul K. Moser (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 2. For critical engagement, see Hilary Yancey and Kevin Timpe, "Disability and Suffering," in *T&T Clark Handbook of Suffering and the Problem of Evil*, ed. Matthias Grebe and Johannes Grössl (New York: T&T Clark, 2023), 524–37.

<sup>20</sup>James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time* (Visalia, CA: Vintage, 2013), 40. While Baldwin was making a claim about racism, the authors in Ableism in Christian Theology, the next section of this article, argue that something similar is also often true of our theological imagination regarding disability.

<sup>21</sup>For discussions of the prevalence of ableism in the history of Christian theology, see Kevin Timpe, "Defiant

- Afterlife—Disability and Uniting Ourselves to God,” in *Voices from the Edge: Centring Marginalized Perspectives in Analytic Theology* (Oxford Studies in Analytic Theology), ed. Michelle Panchuk and Michael Rea (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2020), 206–32; and Brian Brock and John Swinton, eds., *Disability in the Christian Tradition: A Reader* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2012).
- <sup>22</sup>Amy Kenny, *My Body Is Not a Prayer Request: Disability Justice in the Church* (Ada, MI: Brazos Press, 2022), 1. Maria Palocios, a founding member of Sins Invalid, a disability justice based performance group, has an excellent poem “Naming Ableism” which, like Kenny’s book, shows how deeply rooted ableism is in our contemporary culture and institutions, including many Christians’ attitudes and assumptions; see <https://cripstory.wordpress.com/2017/04/01/naming-ableism>.
- <sup>23</sup>Talila A. Lewis, “Ableism 2020: An Updated Definition,” <https://www.talilalewis.com/blog/ableism-2020-an-updated-definition>.
- <sup>24</sup>Yancey and Timpe, “Disability and Suffering,” in *T&T Clark Handbook of Suffering and the Problem of Evil*, ed. Grebe and Grössl.
- <sup>25</sup>Richard Swinburne, *Revelation: From Metaphor to Analogy* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2007), 304. For an argument against this view, see Yancey and Timpe, “Disability and Suffering.”
- <sup>26</sup>Augustine of Hippo, *Enchiridion* 87, trans. and ed. Albert C. Outler, [https://www.tertullian.org/fathers/augustine\\_enchiridion\\_02\\_trans.htm](https://www.tertullian.org/fathers/augustine_enchiridion_02_trans.htm).
- <sup>27</sup>Nancy L. Eiesland, *The Disabled God: Toward a Liberatory Theology of Disability* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1994), 74.
- <sup>28</sup>Brock and Swinton, eds., *Disability in the Christian Tradition*; and Timpe, “Defiant Afterlife,” in *Voices from the Edge*, ed. Panchuk and Rea.
- <sup>29</sup>Joshua Cockayne, David Efirid, and Jack Warman, “The Social Epistemology of Deconversion by Spiritually Violent Religious Trauma,” in *Voices from the Edge*, ed. Panchuk and Rea, 119; Timpe, “Defiant Afterlife,” in *Voices from the Edge*, ed. Panchuk and Rea; and Christina Van Dyke, *A Hidden Wisdom: Medieval Contemplatives on Self-Knowledge, Reason, Love, Persons, and Immortality* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2022).
- <sup>30</sup>See, for example, Florian Witzmann et al., “Rarity of Congenital Malformation and Deformity in the Fossil Record of Vertebrates—A Non-Human Perspective,” *International Journal of Paleopathology* 33 (2021): 30–42, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijpp.2020.12.002>; and Erik Trinkaus, “An Abundance of Developmental Anomalies and Abnormalities in Pleistocene People,” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 115, no. 47 (2018): 11941–46, <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1814989115>.
- <sup>31</sup>John F. Haught, *Making Sense of Evolution: Darwin, God, and the Drama of Life* (Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), 53.
- <sup>32</sup>*Ibid.*, 72.
- <sup>33</sup>Amos Yong, *The Bible, Disability, and the Church: A New Vision of the People of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2011); John M. Hull, *Disability: The Inclusive Church Resource* (London, UK: Darton, Longman & Todd Ltd., 2014); Shane Clifton, *Crippled Grace: Disability, Virtue Ethics, and the Good Life* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2018); Nancy L. Eiesland, *The Disabled God: Toward a Liberatory Theology of Disability* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1994); Benjamin T. Conner, *Amplifying Our Witness: Giving Voice to Adolescents with Developmental Disabilities* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2012); Courtney Wilder, *Disability, Faith, and the Church: Inclusion and Accommodation in Contemporary Congregations* (New York: ABC-CLIO, 2016); Hans S. Reinders, *Receiving the Gift of Friendship: Profound Disability, Theological Anthropology, and Ethics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2008); and John Swinton, “From Inclusion to Belonging: A Practical Theology of Community, Disability and Humanness,” *Journal of Religion, Disability & Health* 16, no. 2 (2012): 172–90, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/15228967.2012.676243>.
- <sup>34</sup>LGBTQIA = Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, and asexual identities. Many also include 2s (two-spirit).
- <sup>35</sup>This article argues that many nonconforming gender identities are part of God’s intention for creation and not a result of the Fall. These arguments are relevant to the question of whether or not the church should accept same-sex marriage, but they do not settle that problem; additional hermeneutical and theological matters that we do not engage here are also relevant.
- <sup>36</sup>Some versions of gender theory put strong emphasis on the *social construction* of gender roles and identities. It is not our intention in this article to debate the relative weights or interplay of genetics which all humans share, individual genetic variation, and social factors in any individual’s gender identity. The argument here is simply that there are sound reasons for concluding that some sorts of non-binary gender identities are part of God’s intended creational diversity for humanity.
- <sup>37</sup>See G. G. Bolich, *Crossdressing in Context: Transgender History and Geography* ([https://openlibrary.org/publishers/Psyche%27s\\_Press](https://openlibrary.org/publishers/Psyche%27s_Press): Psyche’s Press/Open Library, 2007); Leslie Feinberg, *Transgender Warriors* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1977); and Susan Stryker, “(De)subjugated Knowledges: An Introduction to Transgender Studies,” in *The Transgender Studies Reader*, ed. Susan Stryker and Stephen Whittle (New York: Routledge, 2006), 1–17.
- <sup>38</sup>Consider, for example, Sekhet (Ancient Egypt), Androgyne (Greco-Roman), Hermaphrodite (European), Hijras (Indian), Mudang (Korea), Shih-niang (China), Mudoko (Uganda), Khuntha and Mukhannathun (Islamic), Two-Spirit (Native American/First Nations), Chibados and Quimbanda (Angola), and more, too numerous to mention.
- <sup>39</sup>*Scientific American* has published a helpful visual image outlining the numerous intersex conditions as identified in the scientific literature: <https://blogs.scientificamerican.com/sa-visual/visualizing-sex-as-a-spectrum/>.
- <sup>40</sup>Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR).
- <sup>41</sup>Melanie Blackless et al., “How Sexually Dimorphic Are We? Review and Synthesis,” *American Journal of Human Biology* 12, no. 2 (2000): 151–66, [https://doi.org/10.1002/\(sici\)1520-6300\(200003/04\)12:2%3C151::aid-ajhb1%3E3.0.co;2-f](https://doi.org/10.1002/(sici)1520-6300(200003/04)12:2%3C151::aid-ajhb1%3E3.0.co;2-f); Valerie Arboleda, David Sandberg, and Eric Vilain, “DSDs: Genetics, Underlying Pathologies, and Psychosexual Differentiation,” *Nature Reviews Endocrinology* 10, no. 10 (2014): 603–15, <https://doi.org/10.1038/nrendo.2014.130>; and Intersex Human Rights Australia, <https://ihra.org.au/16601/intersex-numbers/>. Estimates of intersex prevalence vary widely because most conditions are not identified at birth. Some may be identified at adolescence or later in life, when seeking help for infertility issues or later health anomalies.

And many may live with intersex conditions that are never identified. As a result of the activism of the intersex community (e.g., Interconnect, interAct, Intersex Australia), intersex conditions, initially labeled "Disorders of Sexual Development," or DSDs, are increasingly referred to in the literature as "Differences of Sexual Development."

<sup>42</sup>Intersex Society of North America, "How Common Is Intersex?," <https://isna.org/faq/frequency/>.

<sup>43</sup>Sven Mueller et al., "The Neuroanatomy of Transgender Identity: Mega-Analytic Findings from the ENIGMA Transgender Persons Working Group," *Journal of Sexual Medicine* 18, no. 6 (2021): 1122-29, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jsxm.2021.03.079>; and Ferdinand Boucher and Tudor Chinnah, "Gender Dysphoria: A Review Investigating the Relationship between Genetic Influences and Brain Development," *Adolescent Health, Medicine, and Therapeutics* 11 (2020): 89-99, <https://doi.org/10.2147%2FAHMT.S259168>; Jiska Ristori et al., "Brain Sex Differences Related to Gender Identity Development: Genes or Hormones?," *International Journal of Molecular Sciences* 21, no. 6 (2020): 2123, <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijms21062123>; and Janet Hyde et al., "The Future of Sex and Gender in Psychology: Five Challenges to the Gender Binary," *American Psychologist* 74, no. 2 (2019): 171-93, <https://doi.org/10.1037/amp0000307>.

<sup>44</sup>Jackson L. Turban et al., "4.10 Exposure to Conversion Therapy for Gender Identity Is Associated with Poor Adult Mental Health Outcomes among Transgender People in the US," *Journal of the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry* 57, no. 10 (2018): S208, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jaac.2018.09.236>; and American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry, Policy Statement on Conversion Therapy, 2018, [https://www.aacap.org/AACAP/Policy\\_Statements/2018/Conversion\\_Therapy.aspx](https://www.aacap.org/AACAP/Policy_Statements/2018/Conversion_Therapy.aspx).

<sup>45</sup>UCLA Williams Institute, "How Many Adults and Youth Identify as Transgender in the United States?," 2022, <https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/publications/trans-adults-united-states/>.

<sup>46</sup>Pew Research Center, "About 5% of Young Adults in the U.S. Say Their Gender Is Different from Their Sex Assigned at Birth," 2022, <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2022/06/07/about-5-of-young-adults-in-the-u-s-say-their-gender-is-different-from-their-sex-assigned-at-birth/> (TGNB: transgender and non-binary, defined as those whose "gender is different from their sex assigned at birth"; estimates of those over 30 are 0.6% trans and 1.6% non-binary.)

<sup>47</sup>See, for example, the "integrity" and "disability" views described in Tony Jelsma, "An Attempt to Understand the Biology of Gender and Gender Dysphoria: A Christian Approach," *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* 74, no. 3 (2022): 130-48, <https://www.asa3.org/ASA/PSCF/2022/PSCF9-22Jelsma.pdf>. See also Mark A. Yarhouse and Julia Sadusky, *Emerging Gender Identities: Understanding the Diverse Experiences of Today's Youth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2020); "Report of the Committee to Articulate a Foundation-Laying Biblical Theology of Human Sexuality," Christian Reformed Church of North America, 2022, [https://www.crcna.org/sites/default/files/human\\_sexuality\\_report\\_2021.pdf](https://www.crcna.org/sites/default/files/human_sexuality_report_2021.pdf); and Heather Looy and Hessel Bouma III in 2005 raise early questions regarding this perspective in "The Nature of Gender: Gender Identity in Persons Who Are Intersexed or Transgendered," *Journal of Psychol-*

*ogy and Theology* 33, no. 3 (2005): 166-78, <https://doi.org/10.1177/009164710503300302>.

<sup>48</sup>Many highly educated people in Western culture know little about intersex. This erasure in Western culture has been facilitated by what gender historians refer to as the "medicalization of sex" in the twentieth century, which included medical intervention to assign a clearly male or female identity onto the intersex person. See Alice Dreger, *Hermaphroditism and the Medical Construction of Sex* (Boston, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998); and Anne Fausto-Sterling, *Sexing the Body: Gender Politics and the Construction of Sexuality* (New York: Basic Books, 2000).

<sup>49</sup>Megan DeFranza, *Sex Difference in Christian Theology: Male, Female, and Intersex in the Image of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2015), and Susannah Cornwall, *Sex and Uncertainty in the Body of Christ: Intersex Conditions and Christian Theology* (London: Equinox, 2010).

<sup>50</sup>Intersex individuals' stories are now widely available online. See interAct, "Intersex Support and Advocacy Groups," <https://interactadvocates.org/resources/intersex-organizations/>.

<sup>51</sup>The violent crime rate against transgender persons is four times that of cisgender persons and is even higher for trans women of color: Andrew R. Flores et al., "Gender Identity Disparities in Criminal Victimization: National Crime Victimization Survey, 2017-2018," *American Journal of Public Health* 111, no. 4 (2021): 726-29, <https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2020.306099>.

<sup>52</sup>Justin Tanis, *Trans-Gendered: Theology, Ministry, and Communities of Faith* (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 2003); Virginia Mollenkott, *Omnigender: A Trans-Religious Approach* (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 2001); Austen Hartke, *Transforming: The Bible and the Lives of Transgender Christians* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2018); Susannah Cornwall, "Telling Stories about Intersex and Christianity: Saying Too Much or Not Saying Enough?," *Theology* 117, no. 1 (2014): 24-33, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0040571X13510228>.

<sup>53</sup>Cornwall, "Telling Stories about Intersex and Christianity," 29.

<sup>54</sup>*Ibid.*, 29.

<sup>55</sup>Matt. 25:40.

<sup>56</sup>While "eunuch" cannot be interpreted as a term describing LGBTQIA+ persons as we understand them today, it clearly referenced gender-nonconforming persons in a cultural context.

<sup>57</sup>Deut. 23:1; Lev. 21:20. Brittany Wilson explains that eunuchs, under Jewish law, were "ritually unclean because they mixed boundaries and their genitals did not meet the standards of bodily wholeness," in Brittany Wilson, "'Neither Male Nor Female': The Ethiopian Eunuch in Acts 8:26-40," *New Testament Studies* 60, no. 3 (2014): 410, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0028688514000083>.

<sup>58</sup>Wilson, "'Neither Male Nor Female,'" 403-22. Some church scholars believe that "eunuchs" in the Jewish tradition may not have been intersex or castrated, but it is clear in the context of Matt. 19 that Jesus refers to a sexual minority.

<sup>59</sup>*Ibid.*, 407. Note that in Isaiah 56:3 both foreigners and eunuchs are promised inclusion.

<sup>60</sup>Jesus moves from a discussion of married couples (the sexual majority) to eunuchs (sexual minorities) and then goes on to advocate for children: "let the children come to me" (Matt. 19:14). Thus, in these verses he covers the entire human family. No one is marginalized or erased.

- <sup>61</sup>Isa. 56:3–5, NRSV. Isaiah 56 addresses injustice that will be corrected in the new age, including the exclusion of eunuchs, who were denied a family or legacy. Some scholars note the wordplay in no longer being “cut off” and the castration associated with eunuchs.
- <sup>62</sup>Acts 8:36, NRSV.
- <sup>63</sup>Acts 8:38–39, NRSV.
- <sup>64</sup>Wilson, “Neither Male nor Female,” 411.
- <sup>65</sup>Isa. 53:3–4, 8b, NRSV (emphasis added).
- <sup>66</sup>Susannah Cornwall, “The Kenosis of Unambiguous Sex in the Body of Christ: Intersex, Theology and Existing for ‘the Other,’” *Theology & Sexuality* 14, no. 2 (2008): 189, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1355835807087061>.
- <sup>67</sup>A “non-affirming” stance typically includes both a teaching that same-sex attraction (or, more broadly, any gender nonconforming identity) is a result of the Fall, and opposition to same-sex marriage. An “affirming” stance typically includes both teaching that gender nonconforming identities are part of the diversity of creation, and acceptance of same-sex marriage. One study which used more than just these two categories to describe various religious stances is R. Nugent and J. Gramick, “Homosexuality: Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish Issues; A Fishbone Tale” in *Homosexuality and Religion*, ed. Richard Hasbany (New York: Harrington Park Press, 1989), 7–46. As mentioned in an earlier endnote, the studies cited here may contain relevant information for churches considering questions about same-sex marriage, but this article is primarily addressing the question of whether gender nonconforming identities are a result of the Fall.
- <sup>68</sup>See, for example, Christopher C.H. Cook, “The Causes of Human Sexual Orientation,” *Theology & Sexuality* 27, no. 1 (2021): 1–19, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13558358.2020.1818541>; Yan Wang, Haoda Wu, and Zhong Sheng Sun, “The Biological Basis of Sexual Orientation: How Hormonal, Genetic, and Environmental Factors Influence to Whom We Are Sexually Attracted,” *Frontiers in Neuroendocrinology* 55 (2019): 100798, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.yfrne.2019.100798>; and J. Michael Bailey et al., “Sexual Orientation, Controversy, and Science,” *Psychological Science in the Public Interest* 17, no. 2 (2016): 45–101, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1529100616637616>.
- <sup>69</sup>In between sexual orientation and sexual behavior, we could also discuss an individual’s sexual attitudes, desires, and habits of thought. In these things, as with sexual behavior, individual choices and social environment matter deeply. They can be changed over time—in hetero-, bi-, or same-sex attracted individuals—in ways which are more sinful or less sinful. Delving into these complexities would take us beyond the scope of this article.
- <sup>70</sup>Some Christians regard the existence of non-heterosexual orientations as a result of the Fall, but one for which the individuals themselves are not culpable, while other Christians regard an individual’s non-heterosexual orientations as, itself, some kind of sinful action. For the purposes of this article, we do not make that distinction because the psychological studies we cite do not find differences in mental health outcomes between these two positions, for example, religious attendance in both “Rejecting – punitive” and “Rejecting – non-punitive” churches resulted in worse emotional well-being in LGBTQIA+ individuals. Rebecca Hamblin and Alan M. Gross, “Role of Religious Attendance and Identity Conflict in Psychological Well-Being,” *Journal of Religion and Health* 52, no. 3 (2013): 817–27, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10943-011-9514-4>.
- <sup>71</sup>Pew Research Center, “Support for Same-Sex Marriage Grows, Even among Groups That Had Been Skeptical,” June 26, 2017, <https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2017/06/26/support-for-same-sex-marriage-grows-even-among-groups-that-had-been-skeptical/>.
- <sup>72</sup>Julie E. Yonker, Chelsea A. Schnabelrauch, and Laura G. DeHaan, “The Relationship between Spirituality and Religiosity on Psychological Outcomes in Adolescents and Emerging Adults: A Meta-Analytic Review,” *Journal of Adolescence* 35, no. 2 (2012): 299–314, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.adolescence.2011.08.010>; and Bert Garsen, Anja Visser, and Grieteke Pool, “Does Spirituality or Religion Positively Affect Mental Health? Meta-analysis of Longitudinal Studies,” *The International Journal for the Psychology of Religion* 31, no. 1 (2020): 4–20, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10508619.2020.1729570>.
- <sup>73</sup>Megan C. Lytle, John R. Blosnich, Susan M. De Luca, and Chris Brownson, “Association of Religiosity with Sexual Minority Suicide Ideation and Attempt,” *American Journal of Preventive Medicine* 54, no. 5 (2018): 644–51, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.amepre.2018.01.019>.
- <sup>74</sup>Bridget Eileen Rivera, *Heavy Burdens: Seven Ways LGBTQ Christians Experience Harm in the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2021); and Justin Lee, *Torn: Rescuing the Gospel from the Gays-vs.-Christians Debate* (New York: Jericho Books, 2012).
- <sup>75</sup>Eric M. Rodriguez, “At the Intersection of Church and Gay: A Review of the Psychological Research on Gay and Lesbian Christians,” *Journal of Homosexuality* 57, no. 1 (2009): 5–38, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15538605.2015.1029204>.
- <sup>76</sup>Psychologists measure internalized homonegativity with survey items such as “Sometimes I feel that I might be better off dead than gay,” “I feel ashamed of my homosexuality,” or “I am disturbed when people can tell I’m gay.” Wayne Mayfield, “The Development of an Internalized Homonegativity Inventory for Gay Men,” *Journal of Homosexuality* 41, no. 2 (2001): 53–76, [https://doi.org/10.1300/j082v41n02\\_04](https://doi.org/10.1300/j082v41n02_04).
- <sup>77</sup>Brenda L. Beagan and Brenda Hattie, “Religion, Spirituality, and LGBTQ Identity Integration,” *Journal of LGBT Issues in Counseling* 9, no. 2 (2015): 92–117, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15538605.2015.1029204>.
- <sup>78</sup>Angi Dahl and Renee Galliher, “Sexual Minority Young Adult Religiosity, Sexual Orientation Conflict, Self-Esteem and Depressive Symptoms,” *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Mental Health* 14, no. 4 (2010): 271–90, <https://doi.org/10.1080/19359705.2010.507413>.
- <sup>79</sup>Melanie E. Brewster et al., “Minority Stress and the Moderating Role of Religious Coping among Religious and Spiritual Sexual Minority Individuals,” *Journal of Counseling Psychology* 63, no. 1 (2016): 119, <https://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.1037/cou0000121>.
- <sup>80</sup>David M. Barnes and Ilan H. Meyer, “Religious Affiliation, Internalized Homophobia, and Mental Health in Lesbians, Gay Men, and Bisexuals,” *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* 82, no. 4 (2012): 505, <https://doi.org/10.1111%2Fj.1939-0025.2012.01185.x>.
- <sup>81</sup>Jeremy J. Gibbs and Jeremy Goldbach, “Religious Conflict, Sexual Identity, and Suicidal Behaviors among LGBT Young Adults,” *Archives of Suicide Research* 19, no. 4 (2015): 472–88, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13811118.2015.1004476>.
- <sup>82</sup>Maurice N. Gattis, Michael R. Woodford, and Yoon-sun Han, “Discrimination and Depressive Symptoms among Sexual Minority Youth: Is Gay-Affirming Reli-

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<sup>83</sup>Rebecca J. Hamblin and Alan M. Gross, "Religious Faith, Homosexuality, and Psychological Well-Being: A Theoretical and Empirical Review," *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Mental Health* 18, no. 1 (2014): 67–82, <https://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.1080/19359705.2013.804898>.

<sup>84</sup>Megan E. Gandy, Anthony P. Natale, and Denise L. Levy, "'We Shared a Heartbeat': Protective Functions of Faith Communities in the Lives of LGBTQ+ People," *Spirituality in Clinical Practice* 8, no. 2 (2021): 98, <https://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.1037/scp0000225>.

<sup>85</sup>Kirk A. Foster, Sharon E. Bowland, and Anne Nancy Vosler, "All the Pain Along with All the Joy: Spiritual Resilience in Lesbian and Gay Christians," *American Journal of Community Psychology* 55, no. 1-2 (2015): 191–201, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10464-015-9704-4>.

<sup>86</sup>Suzanne H. Lease, Sharon G. Horne, and Nicole Noffsinger-Frazier, "Affirming Faith Experiences and Psychological Health for Caucasian Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Individuals," *Journal of Counseling Psychology* 52,

no. 3 (2005): 378, <https://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.1037/0022-0167.52.3.378>.

<sup>87</sup>Angie Dahl and Renee Galliher, "Sexual Minority Young Adult Religiosity, Sexual Orientation Conflict, Self-Esteem and Depressive Symptoms," *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Mental Health* 14, no. 4 (2010): 271–90, <https://doi.org/10.1080/19359705.2010.507413>.

<sup>88</sup>Eric M. Rodriguez and Suzanne C. Ouellette, "Gay and Lesbian Christians: Homosexual and Religious Identity Integration in the Members and Participants of a Gay-Positive Church," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 39, no. 3 (2000): 333–47, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1387818>.

<sup>89</sup>Foster, Bowland, and Vosler, "All the Pain Along with All the Joy," 197.

<sup>90</sup>*Ibid.*, 198.

<sup>91</sup>Additional examples include Lamar Hardwick, *How Ableism Fuels Racism: Dismantling the Hierarchy of Bodies in the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2024); and Devan Stahl, *Disability's Challenge to Theology: Genes, Eugenics, and the Metaphysics of Modern Medicine* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2022).

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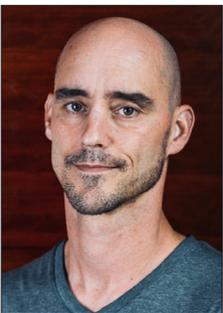
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