CHILDHOOD VULNERABILITIES
in South Africa

Some Ethical Perspectives

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CHAPTER 4

RECONCEIVING CHILD THEOLOGY FROM A QUEER THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE: FOR LGBTIQ+ PARENTED FAMILIES AND CHILDREN

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INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, the focus will be on LGBTIQ+ children and LGBTIQ+ parented families from a Christian sexual ethics perspective. The traditional notion of family is contested by a variety of different structures of family. The traditional view of family is often equated to a heteronormative structure in service of patriarchy through procreation. This family consists of a mother and a father who reproduce children that defined the family unit. The family became the space where sexual and gender norms were constructed along societal, religious and cultural belief systems. In recent years in South Africa, literature scholars looked critically at the notion of family, especially pertaining to how the traditional view excludes Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Intersex, Queer and other (LGBTIQ+) parented families (cf. Lubbe-De Beer & Marnell 2013; Morison, Lynch & Reddy 2018). Furthermore, little research exists of children in LGBTIQ+ families and LGBTIQ+ children in heterosexual family units. In theological discourse, sexual and gender identities of LGBTIQ+ parented families and LGBTIQ+ children in heterosexual family units are even less studied.

Since the beginning of the twentieth century, Child Theology has emerged as a global movement with the focus of moving children from the margins to the centre of theological discourse. The focus of this theological interest is influenced by the theoretical lenses and methodologies of liberation and feminist theologies. Theologians from Africa too, contributed to the development of this theological focus on children. Contributors to this theology are also critical that the theology thus far has been constructed by adults rather than children. This criticism highlights that, children do theology, already, from their own embodied experiences. However, within a hierarchical system of power, in many cases patriarchy, their theological contribution is often ignored and denied. Before I outline this chapter further, I want to acknowledge that as a self-identifying gay man of colour, I am not a father and neither in a civil union. In this chapter, I theologically journey with LGBTIQ+ children and LGBTIQ+ parented families as an

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activist-theologian working in the intersection of sexuality, gender and faith in mainline churches and higher theological education training centres in South Africa.

In the following section, the struggles that LGBTIQ+ children and LGBTIQ+ parented families experience will be discussed from various literature sources, my own embodied experiences and the multiple contexts I am exposed to in my work at Inclusive and Affirming Ministries. Hereafter, Child Theology will be briefly outlined to see whether theological principles exist that can assist theological imagination to explore life-affirming theologies for LGBTIQ+ parented families and LGBTIQ+ children in heterosexual family units. Lastly, this chapter will examine whether Queer Theology as a liberation theology can perhaps contribute to the development of Child Theology that are life-affirming towards LGBTIQ+ parented families and LGBTIQ+ children in heterosexual family units.

LGBTIQ+ CHILDREN AND FAMILIES: CONTESTED EMBODIMENT

LGBTIQ+ children in heterosexual families and LGBTIQ+ parented families in the South African context is greatly under reported and studied.[1] The embodied realities of LGBTIQ+ children and LGBTIQ+ parented families are non-normative and for this reason they face multiple challenges to their sexual, gender and family identities.

STIPULATIVE DEFINITIONS OF SEX, SEXUALITY AND GENDER

It is important to pause here for a moment and gain some clarity on sex, sexuality and gender. Ugandan human rights activist and law professor Sylvia Tamale discusses in her chapter 'Researching

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1   Though these embodied realities are understudied in academia, numerous ontological works were published in the last few years by LGBTIQ+ persons. These include, but are not limited to: Kumalo 2018; Mabenge 2018; Windvogel & Koopman (eds.) 2019.

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and theorising sexualities in Africa' (2011:11-36) the intersectional struggle of African sexualities (gender) through colonisation, medicalisation, sexual culture, violence and HIV & AIDS. Even amidst these challenges Tamale (:11-36) is of opinion that African sexualities (and gender) can be rewritten from an ethical perspective that gives voice to the corporeality of African bodies. I want to point out that these epistemologies are influenced by Western discourse. However, there is no reason why it should be diminished from an African perspective. Rather, these epistemologies provide the space to engage our own cultural and religious discourse from the African continent (:26). Theorising our contextual embodied experiences become part and parcel of the African church's justice work.

North American ethicist Jams Nelson (1978:17) describes sex as "a biologically-based need which is oriented not only toward procreation, but, indeed, toward pleasure and tension release." In other words, this definition pertains to 'having sex' as a wholistic well-being of bodies while the same word also has a different meaning. Sex also refers to the biological composition that differentiate human beings in male and female (Thatcher 2011:4). It was also believed that male and female are the only biological sex bodies that exists (:4-14). On the contrary, intersex bodies today is also understood as being part of the biological sexes.[2]

For South African ethicist Louise Kretzschmar (2013:51), sexuality "is a very basic element of our humanness and is closely tied to our self-understanding and the way in which we relate to others and the world around us."[3] Gender, according to Cranny-Francis, Waring, Stavropoulos & Kirby (2003:4; cf. Boonzaaier & van der Walt 2019), "is the culturally variable elaboration of sex, as a hierarchical pair

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2 "A general term used for a variety of conditions in which a person is born with a reproductive or sexual anatomy that doesn't seem to fit the typical definitions of female or male. For example, a person might be born appearing to be female on the outside, but having mostly male-typical anatomy on the inside. Or a person may be born with genitals that seem to be in-between the usual male and female types, for example, a girl may be born with a noticeably large clitoris, or lacking a vaginal opening, or a boy maybe born with a notably small penis, or with a scrotum that is divided so that it has formed more like labia" (Thatcher 2011:12 cf. DeFranza 2015; Cornwall (ed.), 2015.

3 Ola Sigurdson (2016:429-445) argues that sex and sexuality in the Christian tradition has a painful past. However, Sigurdson develops a convincing argument that Christian sexual ethics can learn from the past in order to contribute to meaningful theological understanding of sexuality in the post-modernity.

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(where male is coded superior and female inferior)." Sex, sexuality and gender are contested terms and, therefore, Thatcher's point that these definitions ought to be understood along stipulative lines is important. Throughout this chapter, these definitions will be the theoretical basis on which the argument of this chapter rests. In conjunction with this definition, Kretzschmar's (2013) view of the importance and function of sexuality (and gender) in Christian ethics will furthermore provide a theoretical framework:

> … our sexuality is not simply a private matter. It has family and social consequences and cannot be separated from our relatedness to God. Humans need to have an openness to life and the integrity to exercise self-control in the interests of inter- and intra-personal wholeness and the willingness to live their sexual life in terms of their love for God. (p. 69)

The embodiment of gender and sexuality cannot be divorced from God. Our bodies are the sites through which we experience God's self-revelation, grace, salvation and love. Kretzschmar (2013) urges us to think theologically about sex, sexuality and gender. Theologians like Jordan (2002), Coakley (2013), Thatcher (2011), Althaus-Reid (2000, 2003), Stuart (2002), Isherwood & Stuart (1998), Loughlin (2007) and Williams (2002) have already started thinking theologically about sex, sexuality and gender. Therefore, contributing to new understandings of sex, sexuality and gender from a scriptural and dogmatic perspective, rather than relying solely on modern science.

SEXUAL AND GENDER PERFORMATIVITY OF THE FAMILY

Contrary to theological inroads that have been made to see sex, sexuality and gender in a new light, heteronormative discourses still exist that dehumanise bodies, especially pertaining to LGBTIQ+ children and LGBTIQ+ parented families. Heteronormativity structures the world based on a hetero-binary worldview that divides the world between masculine and feminine (Butler 1990:22-23) and structures gendered

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bodies according to "[g]ender norms [that] are often written into the constitution of the family, reflecting hegemonic discourses around the ideal reproductive unit" (Sanger & Sanger 2013:55). Blood ties become a normalcy marker that excludes families that do not meet these blood-related criteria (Breshears & Le Roux 2013:2).

In his book, *Theology and Families* (2007), Adrian Thatcher thinks "theologically about families and children" (:ix) based on the doctrine of the Trinity (:3). Thatcher defines family according to Lisa Sowle Cahill's definition as "an organized network of socio-economic and reproductive interdependence and support grounded in biological kinship and marriage" (:6).[4] These two definitions of 'blood-related criteria' and blended kinship differ fundamentally and how the heteronormative definition highlights it as "the family is a key site for hetero-sexualisation …" (Sanger and Sanger 2013:53). As a site of hetero-sexualisation, the family "operates as a performative space where gendered subjects recreate various roles that help sustain and reproduce imaginary notions of an ideal family" (:61). These "imaginary notions" put LGBTIQ+ children (:61) and LGBTIQ+ parented families at risk. For this reason, Breshears and Le Roux (2013:2) point out that "[l]esbian/gay parents are actively aware of the complex implications their 'different' family identity may have on their children." Furthermore, "the negative discourses with which their children struggle most often come from outside the family unit and that these can impact upon the development and maintenance of a healthy family unit" (:2).

These sexual and gendered norms that are advocated by heteronormativity is fundamentally formed by patriarchy. Patriarchal belief systems stratify bodies hierarchically according to set values

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4   Thatcher (2007:6) elaborates on this definition stating: "This definition draws on historical family forms while also accommodating some of the contemporary changes to families. 'Organized' implies social custom and domestic authority, neither of which is fixed. 'Network' implies a common residence. 'Socio-economic' implies the wider resources of work, social interaction and exchange, necessary for families to survive. 'Reproductive' includes children as a raison d'être of families: 'interdependence and support' implies both mutuality between members and the dependence of some on others. 'Grounded' allows for the extension of families beyond their reproductive base to include adopted and fostered children, elderly relatives, and even residing companions and friends. 'Marriage' accommodates within the definition the expectation that the core of the family unit still remains the married couple." This definition makes room for all different forms of families.

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and norms. LGBTIQ+ children and children from LGBTIQ+ parented families face even more challenges. As an example, Breshears and Lubbe-De Beer (2016:90-93) in their empirical study, focused on lesbian and gay parented family (children included) experiences in South African schools. The study found that these children and families faced numerous challenges. Even though challenges exist, schools that include LGBTIQ+ sexual and gender identities in their curricula, impact the embodied experiences of LGBTIQ+ children and LGBTIQ+ parented families significantly (Breshears & Le Roux 2013:12). Intervention practices of anti-bullying and anti-homophobia contest the dominant cultural, religious and societal heteronormative discourse of binary sexuality and gender identities.

In the southern African region, Francis et al. (2019) analysed gender and sexuality diversity in schools in five countries (Botswana, Lesotho, Namibia, South Africa and Swaziland). Francis et al. (2019:30) points out that in the "Southern Africa region, the viability of inclusive learning environments is compromised by the ongoing denial and exclusion of gender and sexuality diversity which results in more violent and less inclusive educational spaces." Contributors to the violence and denialism according to Francis et al. (:30) are "[p]atriarchal values, Christian values, and a tension between African and western values …" These value systems hinder the inclusion of sexual and gender diverse bodies in the curricula and negatively impacts the holistic well-being and development of all children.

The South African government revised the Comprehensive Sexual Education (CSE) curricula. This decision was met with backlash from especially religious conservative groups. Haley McEwen (2018) in her article 'Weaponising Rhetorics of "family": The Mobilisation of Pro-Family Politics in Africa', states how religious conservatives from America advocate against CSE. According to McEwen (2018:149), these pro-family activists promote "its politics in African countries [as] part of the movement's broader efforts to advance anti-gay agendas globally." For McEwen (:145), this movement has three core focus areas namely: "The use of a rhetoric of 'love' in order to disguise an

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ideology of intolerance[5]; the couching of hate speech in the rhetoric of 'free speech;'[6] and the positioning of the 'natural family' as congruent with development imperatives."[7] Children, who are clearly caught up in this phobia, who are on their own journey of sexual and gender diversity self-discovery are exposed to an environment that is contrary to their holistic development. Because "the cultural productions of Western societies is the bourgeois nuclear family, it is very difficult for other family formations to be granted legitimacy and the material and other support which make it possible to operate" (Cranny-Francis et al. 2003:13).

CONTESTING HETERONORMATIVE FAMILY NOTIONS

Contrary to religious conservatism, the Johannesburg Declaration (JD)[8] advocates for an inclusive understanding of family that contributes to the well-being of children. The Global Interfaith Network for People of all Sexes, Sexual Orientations, Gender Identities and Expressions (GIN-SSOGIE), convened "rights defenders, scholars, researchers, and religious leaders from diverse family backgrounds and traditions, including African traditional religions, Islam and Christianity, for its first dialogue on Family and Traditional Values" (GIN-SSOGIE 2018). Throughout the five sections of the declaration, the importance of family is discussed through international and continental rights charters, reclaiming of sexualities and culture, interrogation of sovereignty

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5   "in disguising 'hate' as 'love,' Western and Okafor attempt to create ambiguities about the exclusionary and oppressive intentions of the pro-family movement by softening its oppressive edges and inoculating the movement against being labelled as a 'hate' group. Yet, violent undercurrents of the movement become evident in such efforts to eradicate and 'invisibilize' hated bodies so that other loved bodies (namely, Christian, heterosexual, cisgender, middle class bodies) can retain hegemonic social status" (McEwen 2018:159 -160).

6   "Here, the pro-family movement exploits the idea of 'freedom of speech' in order to protect their ideology and policies that exclude, oppress, and engender multiple forms of violence against LGBTIQ+ people" (McEwen, 2018:161).

7   "… neoliberal imperatives of economic growth and individual wealth are given as reasons why individuals should choose the 'natural family' model" (McEwen 2018:166).

8   Global Interfaith Network, Johannesburg Declaration, viewed 10 October 2019, from http://www.gin-ssogie.org/johannesburg-declaration/

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and the reclaiming of faith. The JD correlates with Thatcher's understanding of the fluidity of family and particularly acknowledges a contextual understanding of family.[9] The JD provides a basis for a contextual understanding of family not only as fluid but a life-space for the nurturing and well-being of children, family and society.

In the following section, Child Theology will be discussed and analysed to provide possible insight to reconceive Child Theology towards the inclusion of LGBTIQ+ children and LGBTIQ+ parented families.

CHILD THEOLOGY: A BRIEF OVERVIEW

French philosopher Michel Foucault's (1990) analysis of power led him to understand that power is both repression and resistance.[10] Those who are repressed always resist the discursive practices of

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9   "1. That the definition of the "natural family" as being limited to the nuclear family, which is promoted by the extreme religious right and the proponents of so-called cultural and traditional values, does not reflect the diversity of family life in contemporary Africa. 2. That family has always evolved and today manifests itself in many forms such as the nuclear family, single parent (mother/father/caregiver) family, cross-generational (grandparents-grandchildren) family, same-sex (parents) family, childless family, and child-headed family. All these models of family can and must find their place in the African family and policy-making processes. 3. That these diverse forms of extended family into which members are born, married, formally or informally adopted, or invited, is the true, natural African family. 4. That extended families are communal, characterised by interdependence, and are constituted by mutual love, care and accountability, especially for their most vulnerable members. 5. That we recognise that the family has always been more than biology, both historically and in our sacred texts. 6. That all our sacred texts present the family as a unit that provides social, psychological, economic and emotional support and security to all its members, as well as a place of belonging, which is in line with the African understanding of family. 7. That the African family is grounded in the concept of ubuntu – "I am because we are"; "I relate therefore I am" – which does not imply the domination of the one by the many but entails the achievement of balance between the one and the many. Therefore, we affirm Article 18 of the African Charter on Human and Peoples Rights. 8. That it indeed takes a village to raise a child and therefore the communal nature of family, within the diversity of family systems and parental models, promotes the child's own understanding of being in community. 9. That the natural African family was attacked and undermined by colonialism, Christianization … and now is under attack from the extreme religious right; and these are, in fact, the forces from which the institution of the family requires protection."

10 In the History of Sexuality: Volume 1, Foucault describes power as repression and resistance as follows: "[…] Where there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power" (Foucault 1990:95). Power, therefore, can be viewed as not only negative but also positive. See Grobbelaar and Breed (2016a and 2016b) – in various chapters, contributors reflect critically on how power construct the lived realities of children, their powerlessness as well as empowerment.

knowledge formations that concretises bodies and identities. Those who are repressed, stand on the margins of meaning making and resist the centre forces. In recent years, children, who are on the margins of theological meaning making, were brought into the centre by Child Theology, for example in the Child Theology Movement (CTM) (cf. Bunge 2006). Children were not regarded by theological disciplines, especially in systematic theology and ethics, as a priority (Bunge 2001:3). Child Theology was born, and children became a theological "lens through which some aspects of [God's] revelation can be seen more clearly" (White & Wilmer 2006:6). In other words, "the child is like a light that throws existing theology into new relief" (:6). Children moved from the theological margins of theological meaning making into the centre (cf. Grobbelaar 2016a:51-91).

DOING CHILD THEOLOGY FROM THE MARGINS OR CENTRE?

The movement from the margins to the centre urged Jan Grobbelaar (2016b:63-70), to pose critical questions to Child Theology that describes children as theological lenses[11], similarities with theologies of liberation[12] and the impact of Child Theology on the lived realities of children.[13] From these critical questions Grobbelaar proposed a possible shift in the epistemology and methodology of Child Theology.

For Grobbelaar (2016b:71), the epistemological change of Child Theology starts with the acknowledgement that children are sites of revelation. Grobbelaar's starting point connects Child Theology with

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11 "'The child' tends to become only an object or instrument, an analytical tool, a utility in the hands of adults to serve, hopefully improving and liberating, their own thinking about God and God's kingdom. In the process, children tend to become only a means to achieve a goal: a better understanding of God and God's kingdom" (Grobbelaar 2016a:65).

12 "In liberation theology in South America it is the poor people who are doing feminist theology rather than liberation theology. In Black theology it is black oppressed people who are doing Black theology in reaction to colonialisation and some aspects of the mission history in Africa. In feminist theology it is women who are doing this type of theology to overcome gender bias in church and society. The moment one uses the concept Child Theology, it creates the impression that it is similar to other liberation theologies and is thus theology done by children" (Grobbelaar 2016a:65).

13 "Therefore, Child Theology has to become doing theology, not just about or for children, but with and by children. As long as it is done only by adults it will tend to be only self-centred adultism" (Grobbelaar 2016:70).

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Body Theology where the body's experiences are taken seriously as "occasions of revelation" (Nelson 1992:9) which "creates theology through the body and not about the body" (Isherwood & Stuart 1998:22). The body becomes the subject of revelation through the incarnation of God in Jesus. Grobbelaar's incarnational theological approach lays bare the perceptions, bias and power of adults over and against children.

Grobbelaar's epistemological approach, from a theological perspective, I would perhaps argue, recalls the kenotic hymn in Philippians 2 in the New Testament which describes "[i]n Jesus Christ, God and humanity are united in mutual self-giving love" (Migliore 2014:186) through Jesus's self-emptying. This hymn inspires and teaches followers of Christ to follow the triune God's example of "a union … in which there is reciprocal self-limitation and total openness of each to the other" (:186). A kenotic discipleship entails a letting go of perceptions, bias and power whereby space for the other, in this case, the child, is made. Making space, ought not to be perceived as a hierarchal power structure that would still be in place when the adults 'decide' to surrender their power. Earlier, it was pointed out that power could be, through a Foucauldian lens, understood as both repression and resistance. Therefore, in the making space process, contestation will transpire through children's multiple creative ways of resistance. For this reason, Grobbelaar sees in this letting go or rather self-emptying process of adults, a space where children are doing "their own liberating theology" (2016b:76). Doing theology requires a methodology.

Methodologically, Grobbelaar proposed some of the core Contextual Bible Study (CBS) method values as outlined by South African biblical scholar Gerald O. West. Though Grobbelaar indicates that some of the values will be discussed, three other values that characterises CBS are excluded without Grobbelaar providing sound reasons why the other values like criticality, change and contestation were excluded. These values, criticality, change and contestation, are explained by West (2015) in the following way:

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- "Criticality: 'analyses the self, society, and the biblical text, using a range of structured and systematic questions; [that facilitates] a critical dialogue between a critical reading of life (the first text) and a critical reading of the Bible (the second text)' (p. 239).

- Change: '… primary focus of transformation is the structural and systemic, and the … ideo-theological' (p. 240).

- Contestation: 'recognises that struggle is a key characteristic of reality, and so CBS takes sides with the God of life against the idols of death …'" (p. 241).

For West (2015:242), these core values, including community, collaboration and context, as discussed by Grobbelaar (2016b:78-82), "inhabit a collaborative nexus, captured by the six core values, between the epistemology of the poor and marginalised and the critical capacities of socially engaged biblical scholarship." Although one could argue that Grobbelaar's proposal of implantation does entail subtle nuances of criticality, change and contestation, omitting these values from the pillars of doing Child Theology create serious questions about the methodology, as proposed by Grobbelaar. Furthermore, criticality, change and contestation are part of the making-room process of a radical hospitality that sees the embodied lived experiences of children as sites of the triune God's revelation.

INTERSECTING CHILD THEOLOGY AND QUEER THEOLOGY

Child Theology, as a liberation theology, does not stand alone in reclaiming marginalised embodied experiences. In recent years, LGBTIQ+ people too had to reclaim their bodies as sites of God's revelation. Intersectional similarities exist between marginalised groups. West (2015:241) points out that in their CBS work, even though the traditional focus was on the poor, an intersectional

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reality began to form part of their work.[14] If Child Theology devises a methodology based on CBS's core values, intersectionality[15] will have to be taken into account. For this reason, I want to point out that sexuality and gender diversity as an intersectional reality does not feature in Child Theology. In *Children and childhood in world religions: Primary sources and texts* edited by Don Browning and Marcia Bunge (2009), as an example, the Christianity section made little mention of the sexuality and gender diversity of children, although holistic child development should be focusing on the complete well-being of children. An indicator of this theory is the decision of the Department of Basic Education to implement Comprehensive Sexual Education (CSE) in the South African school curricula.[16] However, the church (Smit 2016:15; Davids & Jones 2018:101-103) and theology (West, van der Walt & Kaoma 2016:1-2) are institutions that are dominated by patriarchal ideologies and, therefore, new insights into sexual and gender diversity must go a long way before being incorporated into the Church's teachings. The family, according to Cranny-Francis et al. (2003:13-14), is an example of patriarchal ideologies. Thatcher points out that sexual theology, in this case 'queer theology', "for all their liberatory intent, generally collude with the hiddenness of children" (2007:144). It is interesting that children are hidden in queer theology since religious conservatives use the notion of children and traditional family as strategy against LGBTIQ+ parented families.

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14 West (2015: 241) describes the intersectional themes that they have encountered in their work as follows: "Bible reading movements, in both Brazil and South Africa, have given priority to economic dimensions of reality – because it is the primary reality of 'the poor' – there has been increasing recognition of the intersectionality of marginalisation, including class, race, gender, HIV status, disability, sexuality, etc.in our work."

15 "Intersectionality means that discrimination is both vertical and horizontal and takes place at multiple levels among various identities. Thus, racists are likely to be homophobes and sexists. Multidimensionality suggests that oppression takes place in multiple dimensions. We can be oppressed as women but also women who are lesbians" (Mutua 2011:461).

16 Cf. Department of Basic Education, 2019. Comprehensive Sexuality Education, viewed 14 November 2019, from https://www.education.gov.za/Home/ComprehensiveSexualityEducation.aspx; Department of Basic Education, clarifies comprehensive sexuality education to Portfolio Committee, viewed 14 November 2019, from https://www.gov.za/speeches/sexuality-education-portfolio-17-sep-2019-0000.

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QUEER THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE ON CHILD THEOLOGY

The hiddenness of children, as discussed above, is the result of value systems that hierarchically positions children. Proponents of Queer Theology like Marcella Althaus-Reid (2002, 2003) focus on sexual abuses that children endure in Latin-America, however, the embodiment of children's sexual and gender diversity are hidden. The hiddenness of children in queer theology, is a fundamental challenge to this liberative theology. In the discussion that follows, I am cognisant of the limitations of doing queer theology as an ally in the absence of LGBTIQ+ children and LGBTIQ+ parented families. However, what will be discussed, is broad contours that might consist of insights that are able to facilitate conducive theological investigations that can assist Child Theology in collaboration with LGBTIQ+ children and LGBTIQ+ parented families in hopefully various contexts to critically contest current patriarchal and heteronormative embodied experiences.

DOING QUEER THEOLOGY

Doing theology was always regarded as the privilege of a few elite heterosexual men, from developed countries. In developing countries, doing theology was subsequently modelled after the style of the developed countries. These theologies complimented the church as a heteronormative institution (Davids & Jones 2018:93). Queer theology contrary to these homogenous heteronormative theologies privilege the embodied experiences of LGBTIQ+ people. Patrick Cheng (2011) provides the following definition of Queer Theology:

> First, queer theology is [LGBTIQ+] people 'talking about God.' Second, queer theology is 'talking about God' in a self-consciously transgressive manner, especially in terms of challenging societal norms about sexuality and gender. Third, queer theology is 'talk about God' that challenges and deconstructs the natural binary categories of sexual and gender identity. (p. 9)

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West et al. (2018:4) articulate Cheng's definition that LGBTIQ+ people and their allies do theologies from their lived experiences through engaging developments in the African faith contexts. West et al. point out the following benefits:

> we must draw on other established African forms of biblical and theological hermeneutics, such as those found in inculturation, liberation, feminist/womanist, and postcolonial theologies. These theologies offer communal and systemic perspectives and resources … Each of these overlapping and intersecting theologies seeks to interrogate the Christian faith from the perspective of the oppressed as opposed to the powerful. (p. 4)

West et al. (2018:4) state the intersectional benefit of doing queer theology by taking African faith tradition seriously. However, West et al. (:4) also point out the non-transgressive manner of "inculturation, liberation, feminist/womanist, and postcolonial theologies." These liberation theologies, Isherwood and Althaus-Reid (2004:3) remark, "have been traditionally gender- and sex-blinded", however, "much of theology has developed forms of sexual orderings into doctrinal reflection or the reading of the Scriptures" (:5). For this reason, Queer theology "takes seriously the queer project of deconstructing heterosexual epistemology and presuppositions in theology, but also unveiling the different, the suppressed face of God amidst it" (:5). Davids and Jones (2018) unveil the "suppressed face of God" by looking at the doctrine of Christology from a queer African theological perspective based on holism and ubuntu, stating:

> [f]rom a Christological perspective, holism and ubuntu finds theological meaning in the incarnation-crucifixion-resurrection of Christ. Christ's incarnation brings interdependence between human beings. (p. 116)

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INTERSECTING SEXUALITY AND GENDER: FROM A QUEER TRINITARIAN PERSPECTIVE

In the doctrine of the Trinity, the interdependence that Davids and Jones speak of, is elaborated on even more. British theologian Sarah Coakley (2013:6), for example, provides a "trinitarian ontology of desire". Throughout her book, Coakley analyses Christian texts to discover how the Trinity function in prayer (:100-151) and Christian art (:190-265). Coakley's (2013:55-56) exegetical analysis of Paul's well-known exposition on prayer in Romans 8 lead her to conclude that the triune God invokes desire in human beings when our words are failing us. Thus, desire and sensuality begin in God and are known in our bodies through God's incarnation. For Jordan (2002:168), "[o]ur intimate encounters with God through prayer are erotic because they are pleasurable intimacies of creatures with bodies." Prayer according to Sigurdson (2016:438) is, therefore, "… an instruction in the art of love." Jordan (2002) argues that prayer as an art of love also sheds light on masturbation, although self-pleasure is frowned upon. Prayer also transpires in private as masturbation, however, persisting in prayer "often find [that we] are led out of this selfish insistence into generous intimacy with God and with others" (:167).[17] This intimacy of growth is for the former archbishop of the Anglican Communion, Rowan Williams, the body's grace. Williams understands desire through the doctrine of grace and argues that as human beings we discover how God desires us.[18] Thinking theologically about the

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17   Parents were told in the 19th century how to surveillance their children. Foucault's analysis of 19th century surveillance led him to understand that this "was the sexualising of the infantile body, a sexualising of the bodily relationship between parent and child, and a sexualising of the family domain . . . sexuality is far more of a positive product of power than power was ever a repression of sexuality" (1980:120). In Christianity, especially in the Catholic and Protestant tradition, masturbation is viewed as sin based on Natural Law in the case of the former and in the latter based upon the reading of Genesis 38:8-10. Thatcher (2011:185) points out: "Onan's capital offense, of course, was his failure to perform his duty, under the law of Levirate marriage (Deut. 25:5–10), to provide children for his dead brother and his dead brother's wife. He was practicing the earliest known form of contraception".

18   "Grace, for the Christian believer, is a transformation that depends in large part on knowing yourself to be seen in a certain way; as significant, as wanted. The whole story of creation, incarnation, and our incorporation into the fellowship of Christ's body tells us that God desires us, as if we were God, as if we

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sexuality of LGBTIQ+ children and LGBTIQ+ parented families to experience their bodies grace and contest the rigid hold of biological reproduction as the only criterion for sexuality is an act of justice.

Marcella Althaus-Reid (2003), a bisexual, liberation theologian from Latin-America, proposed a more radical understanding of the Trinity pertaining to sexuality and gender. In the *Queer God* (2003), Althaus-Reid argues that the doctrine of the Trinity could be understood as gender-fluid and God as a polymerous Being. This analogy of Trinity is a critique against heteronormativity and monogamy (2003:52-58). In the current state, Althaus-Reid (:58) points out, the Trinity is nothing else than a "restricted polyfidelity". Althaus-Reid's theological reconceiving of the Trinity strikes a chord with Thatcher's (2007) discussion of two influential figures' understanding of the Trinity as analogy for children and family. Analysing theological texts of the Swiss Reformed theologian Karl Barth and the late pope John Paul II, Thatcher (:88-94) concludes that both Barth's and the Pope's theological premise is entrenched with masculine bias and excludes same-sex relations and gender diverse identities from communion. Thus, Althaus-Reid's queer theological understanding of the Trinity as gender-neutral, non-sexed, but as an example of mutual indwelling, reciprocity and love, ought to constitute the relations and the identities of human beings, especially in this case of LGBTIQ+ children and LGBTIQ+ parented families.

The Trinity, therefore, consists of a fundamental reconceiving of sexuality and gender, moreover of family from an *Imago Trinitatis* perspective. If human beings are created in the Image of the triune God, does this mean that masculinity and femininity could be found in God? According to Miroslav Volf (2003), we project masculinity and femininity onto God through our human language. Volf (:169), for this reason argues that the Trinity "serves as a model for how the content of 'masculinity' and 'femininity' ought to be negotiated in the social process." The Trinity for Volf (:169) is an example of the self-giving

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were that unconditional response to God's giving that God's self makes in the life of the Trinity. We are created so that we may be caught up in this, so that we may grow into the wholehearted love of God by learning that God loves us as God loves God" (Williams 2002:311–312).

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love and mutual indwelling of the three persons in one another. In the Trinity, there is no hierarchical ordering of the persons, for the Trinity as a model rather shows how equality between human beings can be embodied (Volf 2003:164-169). The Trinity as a radical model of equality "is an eternal dance, a perichoresis of grace" (Stuart 2007:72). This understanding of the Trinity as dance and grace leads Stuart (:72) to conclude that sexual and gender identities will eventually cease and that our baptismal identity is the one identity that will never cease.[19]

When sex, gender and sexuality of LGBTIQ+ children and LGBTIQ+ parented families are reconceived from a trinitarian perspective, heteronormativity that places a high premise on reproduction and bloodlines cannot and may not water down theological reconceiving by toxic doctrines of exclusion, prejudice and bias.

CONCLUSION

LGBTIQ+ children and LGBTIQ+ parented families ought to form part of doing Child Theology. As indicated in the introduction earlier, the shortcoming of this chapter is the lack of the voices of LGBTIQ+ children and LBGTIQ+ parented families that ought to speak on their own behalf. As an ally, I hope this chapter will stimulate robust discussion that leads to justice for LGBTIQ+ children and LGBTIQ+ parented families in theological discourse.

Bearing in mind that culture and colonial history rests firmly in institutional practices of our continent, West (2019:57-79) argues convincingly though that all CBS core values contribute to a process

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19   "The church is the only community under a direct mandate to be queer, and it is only within the church that queer theory reaches its telos, with the melancholia of gender replaced by the joy born of the death and resurrection of Christ – into which the Christian is incorporated through baptism – and the delight of sacramental growth, whereby the Christian is conformed more and more closely to the body of Christ – which parodies and subverts all culturally constructed identities. Queer flesh is sacramental flesh nudging the queer performer towards the Christian eschatological horizon and sacramental flesh is queer flesh nudging the Christian towards the realization that in Christ maleness and femaleness and gay and straight are categories that dissolve before the throne of grace where only the garment of baptism remains" (Stuart 2007:75).

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that empowers ordinary readers to interpret the text. Biblical texts usually used to discriminate against sexual and gender diverse bodies, could be read in a liberating manner.

The reconceiving of Child Theology from a queer theological perspective ought to remind us that we are created in the Image of the Trinity. The createdness of LGBTIQ+ children and LGBTIQ+ parented families in the Image of the Trinity, paves the way for theological imagination that can contribute to responses of justice by the Christian church in Africa.

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