

Transcript TSV 002:

Decolonial Theology and Queer Feminism w/ Dr. Nancy Bedford

00:07

Axis Mundi

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio) 00:24

Welcome to the Teología Sin Vergüenza, queer and feminist theology from Latin America and its diaspora to get those spiritual justice juices flowing. I'm your host, Reverend Sex. You may not have heard from a lot of folks who live shamelessly as both queer, trans feministas and people of faith, but you're about to. Even if you don't know it, we are everywhere. We do our work, in the academy, in the church, in our homes and on the streets. We fight for our communities and for our own lives. We are not macho, but we are many. We're irreverent queer feminists who are shamelessly faithful, and we're faithful theologians who are shamelessly activistas activistas. We are shamelessly las sinvergüenzas. We pluck the ripest fruit from the Bible to make juicy queer feminist Latine theology that refreshes your spirit and quenches your thirst for liberation. In this episode, you'll find delicious decolonial theology for the real world right now. So get your cup of coffee, pull up a chair, because you belong here. Now, let's get down to pleasure.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio) 01:35

Hello everyone, and welcome to this episode of Teología Sin Vergüenza. Today we have the honor of having Dr. Nancy Elizabeth Bedford with us, who is an author, a theologian, and has been Georgia Harkness Professor of Theology at Garrett Theological Seminary since 2003. Before that, she taught theology in her home country of Argentina. She's written and co-written or edited 11 books and written over 100 book chapters and journal articles which have appeared in six languages. Her forthcoming book Jesús: Una cristología al andar and her latest book chapter "La teología frente a la violencia feminicida" are on their way. So don't miss what she has to say in this amazing episode.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio) 02:23

Hi, welcome to Teología Sin Vergüenza,

Dr. Nancy Bedford 02:27

I'm so happy to be here. Thank you for the invitation.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio) 02:30

It feels like an honor to have you in our studio. I'm so excited for our sinvergüenzas to hear from you. Tell us a little bit about yourself, tell us your name. And also we're just going to jump right in with the same question we always have, which is this idea of sinvergüenza. Tell folks who maybe are not familiar with English or your particular cultural context, do you identify as a sinvergüenza? What does that mean in your terms, in your world? And we'll start getting to know you there.

Dr. Nancy Bedford 03:02

Well, my name is Nancy Bedford. I live on the outskirts of Chicago. I am from Argentina. I have lived here a couple of decades, and I'm in and out of Latin America and North America.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio) 03:18

You are famous among our people.

Dr. Nancy Bedford 03:21

Well I don't know about that, but I'm honored to spend time in different parts of Latin America, personally and virtually. And one thing about living in Babylon, as I call it, in the empire, is you have access to a lot of places that when I lived in Argentina, where I'm from, I did not have.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio) 03:43

Yeah.

Dr. Nancy Bedford 03:45

So it's been great to be closer to the Caribbean, closer to Mexico, to Central America, to the north of South America these years. And I've really enjoyed that. Yeah, the *sinvergüenza* thing, that's a really hard one to translate. What comes to mind as a translation in English is kind of scoundrel, right? And a kind of a male figure, which you could read maybe as a bit of a trickster, but it's not really where I would place myself. But if I separate it into two words, *sin vergüenza*, right, rather than the one noun, two words describing what I do, then yes, sure, *no tengo vergüenza*, right? I'm not ashamed. And what comes to mind is Romans. Romans 1:16, I'm not ashamed of the gospel. Why? Because it's power, the power of God. And that kind of power is a power that it's empowering. It's not power over its power with its power alongside. So I'm not ashamed of that kind of power, that kind. Authority, that kind of movement. You know that word, if you think about that passage, the idea is, I'm not disgraced. I'm with grace. I'm not without grace.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio) 05:14

Yes, like divinely given grace, rather than societally given grace, yes, yes.

Dr. Nancy Bedford 05:20

Yes, yes, like, Mary full of grace. Like, we're all full of grace. And we're not without grace. We're not grace-less, right? So to be unashamed is to be full of grace. You know, riffing on Paul.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio) 05:36

And that is the gospel for our community, Lord, we need that.

Dr. Nancy Bedford 05:41

We really do. We really do. And so rather than *sinvergüenza*, I like *irreverente*, which is another adjective which means irreverent. You can translate that better into English. So a theology that is not afraid of being irreverent in the face of things that we don't need to take so reverently, right? That we don't need to bow down and obey. So I love that word *teología irreverente*. I love the word *porfia*, which can't be translated into English very well either, but it means a kind of resistance, a kind of recalcitrance, a kind of disobedience, once again, to the logic that's the dominant logic. So *la porfia de la resurrección* is a line from a song in Spanish Tango that I took for one of my books, meaning that kind of recalcitrance, or that kind of resistance or disobedience that comes from the power of the

resurrection. So very similar to that you know, Romans 1:16 idea:, revolutionary, irreverent, recalcitrant, full of grace. Those kinds of ideas resonate with me.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio) 07:01

I love it, and thinking about you speaking from that place of power and kind of an immutable right to dignity and grace, I want to jump to a quote that you said that for me, just feels so important because so many of us are told that we can't be both Christian and feminist, or Christian and LGBTQIA, or feminist and activist, and also working on things around theology that we're not allowed to touch it. And so you said to me in our first meeting, I became a feminist and ally because I followed Jesus, not the other way around. And I was like, Oh, that's so beautifully empowering for so many of us who are told, and I've heard so many folks say I had to give up religion, I had to give up God, I had to give up faith, because feminism was a thing that saved my life. It's a struggle that helps me survive, and feeling so much grief that folks feel like they have to separate and divorce those two paths. And so you saying that I resonated so deeply around it is my faith that makes me that compels me to work for justice, that compels me to be recalcitrant in the resurrection. So will you tell us a little bit more about how did you get there? What is that experience for you?

Dr. Nancy Bedford 08:28

Yeah, sure. And I think it's a very contextual matter. I mean, so much of our biography is woven into this kind of thing, so there's not one path or one way to get in any particular place. And I totally understand those who might say, you know, these places are toxic for me. I just can't I can't be there. And in fact, I raised with my husband, three daughters who are now in their 20s. And that was always one of my criteria for choosing a community of faith, was, Is this place healthy for them as young women? Yes, will they be able to flourish or or not? And if not, I'm out of here, right? So I'm very aware of those of those dynamics, and not naive. But I will say that I grew up in young churches, churches that were just beginning, that were very fragile, very horizontal, where there were no luxuries, as if to say, one person in this community can be dispensed with. Everybody was needed, right? So I grew up being needed and being trained to be a leader through things, as you know, might sound funny, but like Sunday school teaching, right? I learned to teach Sunday school to kids. You know, when I was myself, a kid 11/12, taught a lot of pedagogy that now I might think, oh, you know that was Freirean pedagogy. This was about being teacher-learners and learner-teachers. This was about a pedagogy of hope, of transformation. I didn't know it at the time, or we talked about interpretation of scripture, and everybody had an opinion, and that was okay, right? So you might call that, you know, community reading of the Bible. So these hermeneutical ways were kind of instilled in me without me even knowing what they were. Nobody would have talked about a theology of liberation or feminism, but in reality, that was being formed in me.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio) 10:37

So as a girl, you were allowed like your gender wasn't a thing in the church.

Dr. Nancy Bedford 10:42

Never, I did not encounter any of that till I went to seminary, which is another story. So it was the time of a dictatorship in Argentina. I was in high school when the last dictatorship came into power. And so church was a space of formation and of developing leadership that was basically off limits most in most

other spaces, and my parents supported me in things like: No, I'm not going to go to the Te Deum, which is the kind of religious, militaristic at that time, confluence, you know, on a Sunday morning, to carry the flag and to celebrate, you know, nationalism. I'm not going to do that, because I don't, I don't really follow that. That is not my loyalty. Yes, my loyalty lies elsewhere. So that's what I mean about that kind of irreverence and rebellion in the name of you know, what we would call the reign of God or the teachings of Jesus. So and we can talk about kindom, kingdom, if you want to.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio) 12:02

Yes, tell us cause, I bet many people have never heard both female words or pronouns or metaphors being used for God or the Holy Spirit. Many of us have never heard inclusive or feminine words for the for Holy Spirit for any part of the Trinity. Many of us certainly have never heard this very important one letter missing and you change the whole meaning. Will you tell us about that kindom versus kingdom?

Speaker 1 12:33

Yeah. Well, Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz, who was Latina theologian here in North America, coined this idea of Kindom, so kingdom without the "G", to talk about the familial aspect of the project of Jesus. Which I love, and I really believe that it is so. And I, and I even think of it Trinitarianly, because if Jesus is our brother, and the spirit is our mother, and the first person has a parental aspect that we are adopted by, then we enter into the life of the Trinity in a kind of familial way, as brothers and sister, as siblings. So it's a very egalitarian and beautiful metaphor, but families can be just as oppressive as kingdoms too, right? So we don't solve everything by saying kindom, yeah. We have to be careful, because some families can be awful, right? And we don't want the life of faith to be that way, Kingdom or rain or common wheel of God, is the way that we usually translate what Jesus talks about in the Gospels. And I like that part of it in the sense that it has a political dimension. There's always a political dimension to faith. You are in the face of powers that would take on control of all aspects of life, and you're saying, No, I don't. I'm not a citizen of that logic. So if you take away that the rain, common wheel, or even Kingdom idea, you may be throwing out the baby with the bath water. So these notions both of the familial dimension of being in the life of God with each other in a very mutual in a way traversed by mutuality and not complementarity. Mutuality. And the political dimensions that were not party politics, but were polis-based, in other words, having to do with our life in the city or in the town. Or the small little town in which I lived in adolescence, those were embedded in my experience of church. And so, it was by following this path that then I became aware of things like liberation theology, feminist theology, queer theology, right this path of following the Gospels and taking them seriously led me to those other things, and they seem to really fit together, rather than the opposite. Now, churches often if they're reading something like the Gospels, and the Gospels are like dynamite. You never know when that thing might explode, right? Sometimes they create people that then they don't know what to do with.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio) 15:30

Yes, I feel like I am one of those people.

Dr. Nancy Bedford 15:35

Why is it so many that, you know, it's like, let's talk about these things, but let's not really live them out. The minute a young person wants to live them out. Well, no, you're not really welcome here, because that was just talk.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio) 15:46

Right?! And those of us who took them seriously, I was raised Southern Baptist and I'm like, I am literally the product of everything you taught me. You didn't expect this to be the outcome, but here we are.

Dr. Nancy Bedford 15:57

Yeah, absolutely, yeah. So you know exactly what I'm talking about then. And I've seen that again and again that churches just don't have room for people who are trying to live out seriously the very things that supposedly they stand for, right? Yeah. So I developed later, much later, the notion of theological feminism to describe this kind of life of being empowered by the gospel, by the good news of Jesus, without giving it the name feminism. Either because you don't like that name or because you never heard of it, which was my case. I had not heard of it, but it seemed clear to me that things were transformative, that the gospel was transformative, that things like, Okay, you will, you know, be oppressed by your husband, the Adam and Eve story, that was the bad outcome, but the gospel had come to turn that around. Yes, right? And for there to be equality, or the parts about we're all made in the image of God. Incredibly good news, right for all of us. And I've never forgotten what is said one time when she was visiting in Buenos Aires, she said, Let's not forget, just to remember what good news it is for women who are struggling in violent situations, to remember I am in the image of God just as much as anybody else, right?

So Christology, although that might sound like a repressive kind of a discipline to some, and it could be, because every symbol can be distorted and misused, and Jesus talks about this right in the in the in the gospels, but Christology really well understood and not separated from the life of Jesus, of Nazareth not be not becoming abstract, but really always grounded and fleshly. It puts an end to these ideas that women are somehow secondarily or queer people, or somehow secondarily in the image of God. Yes, we are all in our particularities, beautiful love, beloved by God and made in God's image. And in each of our particularities, we are so and nobody is like the other person, right? So Jesus did not become a generic human, but a particular human, and in that particularity, we're represented, not in his maleness, not in his Galileanness, not in any of his particularities, but rather the particularity itself is the universal, yes.

So, this idea of theological feminism allowed me to kind of connect to women who have felt empowered by their church experience, even though they might not use the word feminism to describe it. Feminism, feminist theory, like decolonial theory, like queer theory, like so many theories, can be very helpful to make sense of a reality and have a language to talk about. And in the case of feminism, there's also a movement that's politically based for, you know, the equal freedom, dynamically equal, not identical, but dynamically equal, freedom of all people, and so I would not want to throw that out the window. It's helpful, right? Teoría, literally means to see, to look at. And so it helps me look at. It's kind of like glasses to help understand reality. And so I would not get rid of that, but I only made my way to it, frankly, as a result of women asking me to do so.

When I, when I, when I was not trained at seminary or later in my doctorate in these theories, I did my doctorate in Germany in the 90s, and when I got back to Argentina, the women close to the institution

where I was working, who were some of them pastors, this kind of a mainline Protestant institution, some of them were pastors, some of them were students were like, well, we've been waiting for you, you know, let's be talking about feminist theory. Let's be talking about gender. And I was like, Oh, my goodness, I don't know much about this. Let me study.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio) 20:25

Many of us come to it that way. Let me catch up with what y'all are talking about.

Dr. Nancy Bedford 20:30

Yeah, exactly. So that was where I realized, okay, no, actually, I have been formed in some of these ways. I just didn't have language for it until now.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio) 20:40

Yes. And I also wonder if you see, or if you could talk a little bit about the difference. I feel like, growing up in the United States, in the US South feminism, one from my very conservative and religious background, feminism was a bad word. It was man haters and, you know, all of this very negative stuff. But then once I got to the academy and even to movement spaces it was a bad word for another reason, because it represented the kind of racist history of white supremacy in our country. And it wasn't until I started spending most of my time in the Global South, both in East Africa and in Latin America that I really let like clung to and continue to cling to the word feminism, because it was a way that people saw each other across so many different lived experiences, and it didn't, it didn't mean the same as it did in the US both from the like the negative, conservative place. Maybe that one was a little bit closer, but certainly not from this race and class analysis. So I'm curious, you having used that as part of your work, and having had that distance and then closeness and then macro view, will you talk a little bit about how that's been for you, that specific word feminism, and how you've seen it be different in different places?

Dr. Nancy Bedford 22:05

Yeah, that's a great question. So many things are different the minute that you cross the border to the north, right? Everything is different. And so what I've tried to learn in that and that crossing back and forth is the power of each context teaching the other context something, not to translate it directly, but to give you new lenses to see the old context. So I've learned a lot about whiteness by being here in the United States, and I am white presenting, right? So what does that mean? But then it has also illuminated some things I hadn't seen before in Latin America, you know, where white privilege also exists, even though it may not manifest exactly in the same way as in the north. So with feminism, the first thing I'd like to say is to presuppose that it's something that comes from the north is a mistake we had in Argentina in the 19th century, so in the time of the first wave of feminism here in the United States, we also had leaders. And one of the ones that is important to me is Juana Manso. Juana Manso was a journalist, woman of faith. She actually became Anglican and a writer who lived in Argentina, then Brazil, who was not even allowed to be buried in a, in a cemetery, because that was before the fight for a civil registry and civil spaces in which to bury people. So if you weren't Catholic, there was no space to be buried. She was buried outside the gate, so to speak. And she had a feminist newspaper or magazine and wrote feminist texts, right? So we're talking mid 19th century. She was a teacher, so she was not somehow derivative from the North.

These are feminisms that are, that are our own feminisms, yeah, right, and our own travails and struggles in the south going further back. Sor Juana. Yes, you know, which is a kind of patron saint for a lot of women, who was not perfect. I mean, she was a complicated figure, but was an incredible intellectual, and wrote theology as well as the love poems and many other things. She wrote in Nahuatl and Spanish, and also brought in *habla de negros*, which was the afro Mexican way of speaking in some of her some of her Christmas poems. So, you know, she is a lot older than any North American feminist movement, right? She's a kind of a feminist hero. So to say that that everything derives from the north or from white women so called would be a big mistake. So that's one of the reasons why these movements are different in our countries. And there's a whole lot of theory that comes with feminism that's not translated into English, yeah, but that isn't Spanish and Portuguese. And there's a whole lot of struggle at the grassroots that one never hears about in the north, right?

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio) 25:31

So that's a huge reason for Teología Sin Vergüenza, is because there's so much brilliance happening south of the US border, and either because of our bubble in the US or because of just access to information or lack of access to language, I just have felt so much craving, desire for those of us who went through seminary and other things in the north to know that we have so many more things to talk about than just migration. We have so many more things to talk about than just the suppression of women in the church. And so I love that you're talking about this, because I'm like, this is literally the beginning of why we did Teología Sin Vergüenza. Because there's just, like, so much to be said and to be heard and to be talked about that we don't even know because when our families come to the US, there's a lot of assimilation, or institutions don't know how to really dig deep to pull from those resources. And there aren't that many of us in theological education. So there isn't as much demand as there should be for, for our histories as well.

Dr. Nancy Bedford 26:37

That's right, and those histories are so rich. I mean, in Argentina in the wars of independence, there was a black woman named Remedios who was, who fought alongside her sons and her husband and became an officer in the army. Yeah, a decorated officer. Yeah, I didn't learn about her in school. Yes, you know, I

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio) 27:00

I didn't, I didn't even learn about Sor Juana in school!

Dr. Nancy Bedford 27:03

There you have it, you know. I didn't learn, I didn't know that that Argentina was the River Plate area was maybe 1/3 to one half Black. Back in those days, nobody talked about that, right? Because there was a big influx of European immigration in the mid to mid 19th century, late 19th century to early 20th century, that kind of whitened and erased some of what had happened before, right? And yet, there it is. So these, these stories of our of our past and of the women should not be erased, and that is part of the feminist legacy from Latin America. Flora Tristan is another one, the Peruvian Marxist amazing woman. And well, there's so many. So our history is rich, and it questions some of the presuppositions here in North American feminism. That said, the critique of Black women to kind of white first wave feminism and later feminisms, for example, the erasure of Black women from things like Seneca Falls, you know,

when you had amazing Black female preachers doing the good work that that is notable, right? So there have been these packs of, you know, white women with some Black men, or white women with Black white white men, or Black men with white men. You know, all these various pacts that somehow have left some women other women out of the, well, repressed. Their power really put down or attempted to put down by these logics. And so then there is a feminine feminism that is a kind of bourgeois middle class white presenting feminism that's not really about a rupture with the logic of common sense, the dominant common sense, but it is rather about women becoming more like the men in power. Yes. That is not an interesting feminism to me. For me, what's interesting is a logic that ruptures the way common sense says things should be, and changes our relations of power and is based on mutuality. And mutuality is so much richer than these complementarian ideas, because in mutuality, we realize there are some times in our lives when we be will be energetic and we'll be strong, and there are other times in our lives will be weak and sick, and that's okay, totally. Right? Because we'll help each other out at different points, and we'll have gifts to bring, according to what you know, what time of our lives. That is, I live with my my dad lives with us. He's 98 you know. So he is not the strong person physically that he was, you know, even 10, certainly, 20, 30,40, years ago. Yes, but he has a gift to bring.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio) 30:25

That's right.

Dr. Nancy Bedford 30:27

And so a kind of mutuality understands that and values it. And so that's what I also see in some of these movements. So I'm never really that concerned about the adjectives such as feminist or whatever you would like to use. I'm basically a theologian. Yes, you can put the adjective that you would like to put on that, but in reality, if you, if you pursue these matters, you will be seen negatively by some, no matter what you call yourself.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio) 30:57

Totally. I really love what you said about the, it feels very queer, like queering and queer language when you're talking about the difference between we want the same power that you have. You being whoever is, is in authority is in a position of authority or power, in this case, white men. We want that same "power over" which goes back to what you were talking about around not being ashamed of the gospel and the grace is about "power with" and it feels very queer, queerifying to be like right when we say we are queer versus just gay or lesbian or bisexual or whatever, we are actually questioning the foundations and the assumptions around what it means to be a certain gender or a certain relationship, we're actually questioning that entire system. We actually want to take that down and create something new and different that is about that that kind of mutuality. And so I'm just, I'm listening to you talk about that in the terms of what feminism is, what feminisms are interesting to you versus not. And I'm like, that feels so right in a queer body, to be like part of this is a political project around questioning the entire construct that it's built on. And from there, then we get into this.

I think it's worth saying for folks who maybe are new to the conversation that complementarianism is kind of this idea that we hear so much in conservative Christian circles that's like men and women were made for each other, this kind of like, hand in glove, penis, vagina, kind of sexuality that's so basic and

simplistic and not at all based in reality, but that is kind of their lock and key bread and butter. Of this is the proof that God made us in this way to behave sexually in this one kind of dynamic. And so when I hear you talking about mutuality, it actually rings very, feels very connected to pleasure and desire and connection in ways that feel good, both sexually and non-sexually. But it is this like based on, it feels for me, it resonates with my own feelings around God, wanting this kind of mutuality that is satisfying for us, that feels right for who I am, in my particularities, I love how you're talking about it's not Jesus specificities as male, for example. It is that he has those specificities rather than and particularities rather than, like, you know, gray,

Dr. Nancy Bedford 33:32

Yeah, so rich. And I do need to say something about complementarianism, which is the complementarianism that I'm critiquing is this binary based ontological separation of people, you know, basically on the basis of a uterus or not a uterus, or something like that. There is another kind of complementarianism in indigenous communities in Latin America, which is, it's, I can't wrap my mind around it totally because I'm not indigenous. But I learn from friends about this kind of complementarianism, which is a kind of understanding more like yin yang, right, and the way that things kind of bleed back around into each other. So I've learned from my Kuna friends in Panama, that Baba Inanna is the way that they talk about God, kind of mother/father, right? And so. So I don't want to say that those kinds of complementary understandings are necessarily opposed to the to the mutualities, but I am speaking from a context in which these Eurocentric categories predominate. And so that's what I'm critiquing, right? And especially these binaries. If you're this, you can't be that, and so, so José Muñoz, you're probably familiar with him, he was a queer theorist, he takes Althusser's ideas, this is a kind of Marxism, and that's then queered about identification, counter-identification and dis-identification, right? And so if you identify with something, you incorporate it and you want to be that way. Some white feminisms have been that: I want to be exactly as the men, the dominant men have been, and that's it, right? Yes, Counter-identification is: I will be exactly the opposite of that thing that is dominating, right? And but you I'm not realizing that I'm not outside of the binary. That's right, because in my counter-identification, I'm letting the dominant structure define the thing that I am and am not.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio) 35:46

Yes, it's like jumping in their frame.

Dr. Nancy Bedford 35:49

Yes, yes. So what we want is the DIS- identification, which is outside of either one of those, and saying, This is a new thing. This is by and I would use that pneumatological categories have to do with the Holy Spirit to think of, you know, we're going to do a new thing. I love John, the Gospel of John 14 through 17, where Jesus has his farewell discourses and he says to the disciples, you know, I'm going to send this other, this other advocate, yes, the Ruach, feminine figure in the Old Testament, in the Hebrew Bible, and the Ruach, this other advocate, the Spirit, is going to help you do new things and greater things, Different things, greater things than I have done, that means that we can do a new thing. Yes, the things that we've done before may be valuable, and we'll keep what's good. And it's not that we need to destroy everything. I am all about retrieval, but also about transformation. So in that Discourse, Jesus opens up this possibility for renewal, transformation, liberation, new things and yes, pleasure as part of that right enjoyment. Lacan the famous psychoanalyst, once said, If you want to know about

pleasure, you need to ask the mystics. Mystics know about enjoyment. Jouissance. This deep enjoyment that is both spiritual but also physical, right? So, so we need to have a spirituality that is able to be fleshly, that's incarnate, because that's part of that good news. And so that has to do with also enjoyment and not only suffering through in order, you know, to for the cause to continue, or something like that. Yes, I mean, that may come. Yes, our testimony may lead us to places where we didn't want to go. It can come, but we also need to celebrate and and enjoy meanwhile and so not be so grim. If you look at the history of liberation theology, the ones who hung in there and continued with this liberative path were the ones who were also able to celebrate Yes, and were not grim in that way.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio) 38:31

I feel like that some of our early queer and trans movement people was like we we're, we fought in the streets, and then we were in the clubs dancing, and then we get up the next morning and we'd be doing. It's like that kind of rhythm of play, hard, work, hard, love, hard. And not to say that we're careless with ourselves, with our spirits, with our hearts or with our bodies, but it is to say that if there are not these moments of spiritual reprieve where we are in community, and fully reminded, for me, at least, I know the longer I spend in books and in the computer without being with community, I lose the like deep drive in my soul of why I do this to begin with, and then as soon as I'm with our community again, having these conversations for TSV is a perfect example, I'm like, oh, there's so much brilliance. This is worth all of that effort to get it out there, to help more people connect with this work. So I feel like 1,000% I'm there with you.

Dr. Nancy Bedford 39:32

Yeah, and the matter of community is so important because it's, it's it's varied, right? It's varied in age, it's varied in all kinds of ways. And so how can we communicate in a way that's intelligible to all these different folks? And then how can we be questioned by what they are bringing to the table in various ways? And so that really grounds us. I think, for me, church is that. Community of faith is that it's being grounded. I often say that theologians have the privilege of having a community of accountability in a way that really almost nobody else has, because if you're a sociologist or an anthropologist or a philosopher, you may have some communities of accountability, but you know, you're often not going to have that kind of every Sunday community that says, I don't understand a word you're saying. What are you talking about?

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio) 40:40

Well, I would love to shift us a little bit, a same line, but a different, a different pathway, which is going back a little bit to what you said around this idea of Mother God. And so I want to just return your, your Trinity. Some of the work that you're doing around going deeper and giving a fresh, new, ancient look at some of the roles of that are part of the Trinity that don't get spoken to often, or that look in a new way. I can imagine somebody hearing our episode and hearing you say, thinking about the Holy Spirit, and again, that study that field is Pneumatology, thinking about that in this way of "mother". I when I asked people, have you ever heard a feminine, you know, pronoun, ever anybody saying, Dear Mother God, or anything like that in your church? I can count on one hand of the hundreds of people that I've asked that question to, I can count on one hand the number of people who said yes. And so I think it might be shocking or a jolt to hear you just casually talk about the Holy Spirit as mother and I know you

have work coming up on Pneumatology. Will you tell us a little bit about how do you how does that work for you? How do you wrap your mind around that?

Dr. Nancy Bedford 42:05

Sure, sure. One of the things that struck me when I was a young a young professor, was one of my older colleagues, Néstor Míguez, who's a New Testament scholar, saying, one time you want to talk about the Bible, let's talk about the Bible. Let's look seriously at the Bible. You know, in other words, you think that these very closed ideas are based in the Bible, but when you start looking closely at that text, maybe you'll find something else. Yeah. And one of the things that I find in John three, which is beloved of some folks, because of John 3:16, right? When God so loved the world, etc. Jesus is talking about being born again, but how we're born of the Spirit? Yes, so the spirit in that text, in John three is being described as our mother, from whom we are to be born again. Which makes the waters of baptism an amniotic fluid of the spirit.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio) 43:08

Wow

Dr. Nancy Bedford 43:10

Which makes me love baptism by immersion, all the more because of all those waters, the deep waters of the spirit.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio) 43:19

As a Baptist you would!

Dr. Nancy Bedford 43:21

Yes. So they can also, you know, they can also be by aspersion, but there's something so powerful as someone who has also had children physically, to think about that commitment of God as our mother, as our the mother, who is the spirit, but the spirit is also our midwife. Romans eight. And the spirit is helping this new thing that has never happened before come to Life. So we have two kind of female oriented figures in John and in Paul in Romans to guide us in this reflection, which I find very interesting. And you know, when I had my first baby, she was in a position where her head was down, but she was looking upwards. It's called occipital sacral position, and so that's very hard to push out. And the midwife, who was with me in Argentina, you would have a physician, but you'd also have your midwife with you in birth, and this is no drugs, natural childbirth. The whole thing, she actually put her knee at the top of my stomach and pushed and it my husband, who was with us, was like, What is she doing? She looks like she's about to squash you, but that pressure that she put was the exact thing that I needed to give that push to bring the child into the world, right?

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio) 44:55

Isn't that a word? My goodness.

Dr. Nancy Bedford 44:57

And so I always think of that big, rather robust knee of that midwife helping push out new life into the world, right?

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio) 45:09

But not without pain, not without struggle.

Dr. Nancy Bedford 45:11

Not without pain, no, not without pain. But as Jesus said, then, then the, the new life is worth it, right? And you celebrate the new life. So those are two images of the motherhood of the second person of the third person. I would not limit motherhood to any one of the three divine persons of the Trinity, the Father or the first person, is depicted in motherly terms in the Hebrew Bible and elsewhere. In medieval piety, Jesus was considered to be our mother by people such as Anselm, who has beautiful language about Christ our mother. He's well known for the satisfaction theory of the atonement, but he has some very beautiful things to read that we should read that instead. Yes, we should read those things. We should we should take the whole Yeah, sorry.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio) 46:10

Before we jump to the next one, I want to ask what you thought about this moment on the cross where the spear is placed in Jesus' side. And some people talk about that also being an amniotic fluid, because water, quote, unquote, water and blood run out. And it was shocking to me when, when the first time I learned somebody said like, well, when you pierce someone's side, it isn't water that comes out. That's a birth metaphor. Would you include that in that perspective?

Dr. Nancy Bedford 46:41

Absolutely. Medieval piety made a whole lot of that, and that's where Anselm is coming from. And there are many images of a kind of divine vulva. Where Christ is crucified, but there's a kind of oval Mandela, like vulva like surrounding which symbolizes Jesus as our mother. And indeed, we are born of his side, and he feeds us with His blood and with His own flesh, you know, in the in the Eucharist and and the ancient symbol of the Pelican, who was also thought in ancient times to pluck its own blood, to give to the to the babies when it was necessary. And really, in reality, the Pelican was eating bloody things and getting red on its on its chest. If a bird has a chest, I'm not sure what the word would be, but anyway, on the feathers, but that was interpreted as a self-sacrificial gesture on the part of the Pelican, the female Pelican and like and that was understood to be a symbol of Christ. So Christ the mother, the mother bird, the mother out of whom our new life is born. And certainly there was a whole lot of medieval piety and iconography in Europe around those symbols which people are just blown away by. So you know, when you have fundamentalism, which is a fairly modern phenomenon, yeah, of certainty, absolute certainty about how something should be interpreted. That is, that is not the Christian tradition

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio) 48:30

At any point in time.

Dr. Nancy Bedford 48:32

No, no, no. And the characteristic of fundamentalism is to confuse your own interpretation of something with absolute truth we don't have access to that. We only have interpretations which can be further closer or further away from the way of Jesus, right? But, but we don't have absolute truth that would be considering ourselves to be God. So what does Augustine say when he talks about hermeneutics,

interpretation of Scripture, another guy that we need to reread, because he, you know, he has some really great stuff.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio) 49:09

Along with the terrible stuff.

Dr. Nancy Bedford 49:11

Along with some of the terrible stuff. And often, how would that's been interpreted as with his film, right? Yeah, I call these guys my brothers.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio) 49:19

Do you? I just want to throw them out. So I'm grateful that they're people who are willing to keep them.

Dr. Nancy Bedford 49:26

They're siblings, and we've got stuff to learn from them, and but we don't have to, you know? We don't have to accept everything. Yeah, I have a theory or an interpretation that I call something against something. Like Augustine, against Augustine, Paul against Paul. And so you take the good parts, the liberatory parts of anybody, any thinker, including myself, and use them to test the more negative parts. And so Augustine says, look, if any interpretation is, leads to love of neighbor, love of oneself and love of God, he includes love of oneself in that triad. Then that's a good interpretation. Any interpretation, there's a multitude of interpretations. What they need to do is lead to love. So he gives us the criterion to say, you know, Augustine, you kind of glue some things. Let me use your own interpretation to say that and lead to that, and not leave to love, right? Yeah. And Paul likewise says, Look, if even an angel of God says to you something that's against the Good News of the Gospel, let that one be anathema. And even if myself, even if I myself, am used in that way, let me be anathema. So I'm like, Thank you, Paul. You just gave me a way to critique the ways that your supposed writings have been weaponized.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio) 50:51

That's a beautiful way to talk about Paul, because some of the most empowering pieces of the New Testament are in Paul and some of the most oppressive pieces are in Paul.

Dr. Nancy Bedford 51:05

That's right. I wrote a book on Galatians, and one of the things that I learned in writing that book was how he shifts from a kind of fellow centrism in the first part of the book, where he's very focused on circumcision and what is or not done with the penis to positioning himself as a mother of the congregation. So he does a kind of gender bending in that letter that is just very interesting. And so Anselm picks up on this in his prayers, and he talks about Paul as mother. Wow, not just Jesus's mother. So there are you know theology is is really worth going into deeply.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio) 51:55

Yes, I love that so much. I'm a huge fan of the Bible and a huge fan of theology, and I find it endlessly interesting, because there's always more and being of religion and a book that has a couple of millennia, there's so so much to engage with, but there's always these surprising places that I every single day, I feel like I'm learning something else that surprises me. And I would think, after this long of

trying to learn and grow, that it wouldn't be so much still, but there just is so much That's shocking. So I also want to encourage folks who are listening, who might be thinking about things like theological education, that you don't have to necessarily know what you're going to do with it. You don't necessarily have to be a professor, but there is, if you take your faith seriously, it is worth seriously studying it, rather than just taking what we're told as like, this is what's true. It's, I can't tell you the number of times I've been told by conservative folks it's right there in black and white in English. And I'm like, okay, yes. And I wonder if you have a word for us and for folks who are listening, who either have kind of thrown the baby out with the bathwater of like, you know, religion this, the religion thing is so toxic because of lived experiences, or who are curious and who really want to know more. Like, what does theology have to say to us in this political moment, in this time in the world, in this moment where we now have AI and fake news and war and genocide. Like what is it that you, I see you as such a core theologian and your work as such a core part of so many folks' queer theologies, feminist theologies. I'm wondering what you think, what does it have to offer us in this moment, particularly those of us who have never lived through a dictatorship before? What does theology, this study, this serious study, have to do?

Dr. Nancy Bedford 53:55

I mean, that's now. That's such a profound question. I am part of the racial justice team at my church, and we're going to have a retreat this this weekend. And one of the things I want to talk about is the power of prayer and of contemplation in a time such as this, in this country, in the United States. Because there are so many things pulling at our attention, and so the desire of the dominant forces is to fracture our attention and put fear into us so that we are immobilized. Yes, but prayer, prayer focuses our attention. Contemplation focuses our attention and love casts out fear. Yes, so we can't afford not to take advantage of this amazing possibility of contemplative prayer and of not saying thoughts and prayers, but actually following that example that Jesus gave us, of let's pray. And that may seem like a lame, you know, suggestion, but I suggest that it's something incredibly powerful to center ourselves and to realize, okay, what is the scene we should be concentrating on, because we cannot fight all of the battles and all of the fronts right now, but we're called to be faithful in specific ways and studying resistance in the Second World War.

I've been reading Jacques Sémelin. He's a French writer who talks about civil resistance, because that resistance in France is so famous, right, that we have all of these ideas of armed resistance, but there was civil resistance in France and elsewhere that was amazing that we don't even know about. Yeah, for example, he tells the story of some women who were not Jewish, but married to Jewish men in in Berlin, who go out and say, when the Nazis want to take their husbands, we're not going to let you do this. And they go out publicly to defend these spouses and partners. And they have, they have success, wow. So you know, but we don't know these stories. And he talks about, why is it that in some countries, so many Jews were taken Yes, and in others, almost none? Yes? What were the ways that people resisted?

And I'm very interested in studying this and learning for our own circumstance, how to live out this nonviolent, civil resistance in effective ways. And one of the things that he mentions is the importance of maintaining your cultural values, your you might say humanist or religious values, yes, in a time when there's a barrage that is dehumanizing, that is trying to destroy everything that is beautiful or true

or good, till you almost forget that it ever existed. And he said that one of the functions that that civil resistance has is to hang on to those values that are beautiful, good and true, that that's my language, right, that will help us reconstruct when we have a chance. Because if we allow everything to be destroyed, there'll be nothing with which to reconstruct.

So theology in this moment has a value. One, it teaches you how to think critically, how to read carefully, how to sift through information in a way that is cunning as a serpent, but mild as a dove, right? Jesus taught us to be very suspicious about religious discourse that is dehumanizing, even if it says Lord, Lord, right. So it helps us with that critical thinking helps us with the retrieval. How do we get something good, even out of the bad things? How do we how are we able to subsist? And you know, Luke 21 Jesus has that little apocalypse, and he's talking about these bad things are going to happen, these institutions, the temple that you think is so strong, nothing's going to be left. And you know what? There are going to be tsunamis and they're going to be earthquakes, and they're going to be fires and they're going to be wars. Jesus doesn't bring up the theodicy question. He doesn't say, where's the good God in the middle of all this? He just says, don't be afraid.

You continue your path with determination, with with this kind of tenacity that that we talked about, this irreverence, right? And you know what? Even your family is going to hate you. The bad news doesn't stop in that passage. But don't worry too much, because you can't anticipate every circumstance. Just focus and the Holy Spirit will give you the words that you need. He says, a mouth and a word. So this idea a mouth and wisdom. So this idea of, I'll give you the words, or I'll give you the silence according to what you need, and the spirit will be with you, or the wisdom will be with you. So, so that passage can teach us a lot, and I'm giving you an example of how to retrieve from the gospel, you know, stuff that will help us right now. It can help you not worry, not be afraid, not be fearful, because then we can't think well, we can't act well because we're overly fearful. Let's relax. Let's understand that the Spirit will help us discern how to be wise, and to continue along this path where we don't hate the enemy, because this is key. We don't want to mirror the enemy, we don't want to do the counter-identification, yep, but rather, in prayer, we are able to go outside of that logic toward that dis-identification that doesn't dehumanize us, because if we fall into hating those who hate us, then we're no different than they are, right?

So there's a lot of spiritual strength that is needed right now. Theology, a liberating reading of Scripture, community. These are incredibly strong elements that are part of what we can do as people of faith, alongside the big marches, which are also needed, right? Yes, and the saying, no, no, I'm not going to follow this in times that are quite extreme cruel, there's a cruelty at play that is that is quite breathtaking and hurtful and that is undeniable.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio) 1:01:13

Yes, I think holding on to our humanity, at least for me in this moment, it is remembering who I am as a beloved child of God that allows my heart to continue to break for others, and demands that I hold on to with every shred of my being, my own humanity, whether whatever that looks like, whether it's kindness, whether it's ethics, whether it's practice of remembering who I am and who we are and and that feels like that is something that cannot be easily taken away, and that religion has to offer us at its best, has to offer us that identity.

Dr. Nancy Bedford 1:01:52

Right, right? And you know the what's happening in this country. It's not new. It is a new iteration of the very worst of the history. But you know, even FDR put people in concentration camps, put Japanese Americans in concentration camps, Andrew Jackson was also of a stripe, similar to this administration. So these things are not new. The Black church is a resource also for us right now, of not every Black church, but many of how to resist this logic of annihilation of those who are not straight white people or trying to pass for such. So we have resources, spiritual resources, that are helpful. And so even though religion can be used in awful ways, and I certainly don't doubt that that's not everything, that's not the whole picture, right? And so we are in difficult times, but we do have resources.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio) 1:03:06

Yes, and it's ours also. It's not it doesn't just belong to those who use it as a weapon, but it also belongs to those of us on the margins, and maybe even more centrally so. It belongs to us as that source of companionship, accompaniment, empowerment and fortitude.

Dr. Nancy Bedford 1:03:24

Oh yes, absolutely. I do think so. If you look at who Jesus prioritized, I think you have your answer right there, right?

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio) 1:03:32

Absolutely. Well, let's wrap up. I can't believe how fast this time has gone. I feel like we could talk forever, but I do want to always include, for those of us who are listening, where you come from, so who are the ancestors that you pull from that you claim, whether they are theorists, whether they are part of your own family bloodline, whether they're cultural, whether they're spiritual and religious or divinity, like, where do you go? Where's your well or your fount of fortitude, of strength, of reminders of who you are when you need that?

Dr. Nancy Bedford 1:04:09

That's such a great question. And you know, there's such a cloud of witnesses,

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio) 1:04:14

Amen.

Dr. Nancy Bedford 1:04:15

But recently, one of my colleagues retired, and they had an iconographer make an icon for him as a goodbye present of his favorite saint. And when they did that, when my colleagues did that, I thought I wonder who I would choose, you know, this kind of thing, who would I want on my icon? And I thought, las tres Marías, the three Marys, Mary Magdalene, Mary of Bethany and Mary of Nazareth, because Mary Magdalene, to me, is this rebellious, irreverent, strong woman, disciple, the first witness of the resurrection, the preacher, to the preachers, amazing. Amazing, misrepresented woman, right? They tried to make her into something she was not amazing, amazing figure that appears not only in the gospels, but also even in the in the apocryphal gospels later, right? And then you have Mary of

Bethany, whom, I mean, I love both Martha and Mary, but Mary sat at the feet of Jesus, she was a theologian, right?

Martha was great because she's the first one to really recognize that Christ is a Messiah, and she has this declaration that is even more powerful than Peter is, because she doesn't get into trouble later with Jesus, as Peter does. But, but, but Mary, sitting at this at the feet of of Jesus, is very powerful, and that he defends her right to do so, because that was to be a student of a rabbi, that's what that is, right? And then Mary of Nazareth, who, you know, I grew up with in Argentina, surrounded by her, and as a Protestant, you know, we were like, Oh no, we don't, we don't do that. We're not, that's not our devotion. But she, as I had kids, and my girls loved Mary, just just naturally, because it was un mamá con un bebé, a mom with a baby, and my older daughter would say, Mommy, Dios con su mamá! You know, when she was little, God with God with his mother. And I was like, wow, okay, I've come to love her as well, very much.

So, and the tradition confuses the three Mary's and conflates them. And that that happens with women, our particularities are denied, we're made into a collective without any particularity. So the thought that there are three of them, and then the three stars in the southern hemisphere sky, las tres Marías, that are also very close to the Cruje Sur, those are my kind of constellations that I love in the south. So those are kind of the biblical characters. And then there's so many more from history, Sor Juana, Julian, many more that are the awichas, as we say in South America, the ancestors, the female ancestors. Not to speak of my grandmother as my mom, my sister, you know, strong female women who have formed me. And you know, frankly, my students who have taught me so much and inspire me. So there's a renewal that comes in the in the younger generations, which is just very satisfying.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio) 1:07:58

Yes, we are grateful for your work and your being in the world. And thank you so much for being part of Teología Sin Vergüenza, this was an amazing episode.

Dr. Nancy Bedford 1:08:08

Thanks so much for having me. It was lots of fun.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio) 1:08:14

Thank you for joining us today for Teología Sin Vergüenza, I'm Reverend Alba Onofrio, but you can call me Reverend Sex. Let us know what resonated for you from today's conversation, and make sure to like, subscribe and share this episode with someone in your life who might need it. Check out all of our other juicy content on this channel, and find us on social media @soulforceorg or Teología Sin Vergüenza in Spanish. Cuídate mucho, and remember we are las sinvergüenzas. Are you one of us? Oo, sí! Sí, sí, sí.