

Transcript TSV 007:

Spiritual Justice + the Ministry of Protecting Migrants from ICE W/Arelis Figueroa

Axis Mundi: [00:00:00] Axis Mundi.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Welcome to 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 [00:01:00] theologians who are shamelessly 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 'cause you belong here.

Now let's get down to pleasure.

Welcome to this episode of TSV. My guest today is Arelis Figueroa who is a minister, educator, activist, and community organizer working in marginalized communities in New York City. An immigrant herself originally from the Dominican Republic, Arelis now accompanies new immigrants as lead pastor and co-founder of La Iglesia del Pueblo. She holds a [00:02:00] Master's of Divinity from Union Theological Seminary.

Bienvenida to Teología Sin Vergüenza!

Arelis Figueroa: Thank you. Thank you, thank you. Gracias. Un honor estar aquí.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Thank you for being here. I am so excited to talk to you about so many things, but we always start with the same questions, so I'm gonna start with you also. One, do you identify as a Sinvergüenza and why or why not? And also we're an English speaking

audience this time, so they may not know what una Sinvergüenza is. So will you tell us what does sinvergüenza mean to you?

Like when you heard it, did you hear it as a child? Did you, what's your experience with sinvergüenza and do you identify with that thing that you heard?

Arelis Figueroa: Sinvergüenza in English if we translate it right. [00:03:00] Yeah. Literally we be without shame. Yeah. Without shame it and it can have negative connotation. Mm-hmm. Also in, in English, but I'm Sinvergüenza because, I dare to be a Christian in this world in spite of, and I dare to fight for justice, belief in justice and equity, racial justice.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Mm-hmm.

Arelis Figueroa: I am a Sinvergüenza, because I don't, I don't care to stood up and, you know, to say, to speak my mind.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Mm. Did anybody ever call you a sinvergüenza?

Arelis Figueroa: Oh yes.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): And why were [00:04:00] they telling you that? Was it because you were speaking your mind?

Arelis Figueroa: Yes, yes. And then I'm a Sinvergüenza especially, uh, when the whole queer movement and all these discussion in the church Yes. Uh, about homosexuality and not accepting homosexual homosexuality. So, when I have my process of, Hey, no, they are also Christian.

Mm. Some people call it sinvergüenza Oh. Mm-hmm. Tu creciste en la iglesia.

You grew up in church,

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): You grew up in the church, and now look at you.

Arelis Figueroa: And now you're telling me that you're believing this. What happened to you?

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): What happened? What happened to you? What, how did, why did you, why did you go against the like traditional position to be inclusive and accepting? What was your experience that made you [00:05:00] go, no, these are children of God.

These, this, these can people can be Christian also.

Arelis Figueroa: A process of listening. Ooh, empathy. Mm. And that really a process of looking more closer and reading the scripture more closely.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Mm.

Arelis Figueroa: And then you realize, oh my God, it's all there.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Yes,

Arelis Figueroa: it Is here. What we were thinking,

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): I feel proud of people who identify as allies who are aligned with our community because it's harder for you if you don't have the lived experience in your body of knowing what feels right and what feels good and prayer and all of that stuff, I think it is harder for folks who are straight to figure out, like. How can this be good? And so the people who are willing to go on that journey and then be public about it is a really hard process and a [00:06:00] big deal.

So I'm grateful that, that the, the Holy Spirit brought you to us on this side.

Arelis Figueroa: I'm from the Dominican Republic

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Uhhuh.

Arelis Figueroa: I can tell you in New York in the nineties, 1992. Oh yeah. Joined the Riverside Church. I start meeting amazing people doing amazing work.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Mm-hmm.

Arelis Figueroa: Almost in 90% of the people were gay and lesbian. I was like, oh my God.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): We're everywhere. We're everywhere.

Arelis Figueroa: Yeah. No, this is something. This is something. So I start looking more closely because people that I love mm-hmm. People that was doing all this work.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Yes.

Arelis Figueroa: So my first sinvergüenza act was going to the New York Gay Parade.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Ooh, Pride. Did you have a good time? Was it surprising?

Arelis Figueroa: That was amazing. That was surprising. That was life changing. Mm. [00:07:00] To be all the joy, but also the pain that this community have to endure and to learn the history here in in New York.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Will you tell us a little bit about talking about the like joy and pain, that intersection?

I think in this moment, so many of our immigrant brothers and sisters and siblings are living through life that still has joy and still has all of the things that we want to do in the world. But it is a moment of spiritual terrorism for our immigrant communities. And I know you actually work with a lot of folks, so will you tell us a little bit about what life is like in New York right now in our immigrant communities?

What you're seeing and experiencing, what your ministry is. 'Cause you also have a badass ministry that I want our listeners to hear about. Tell us a little bit more about all of that. [00:08:00]

Arelis Figueroa: Yes. Very hard moment. Mm-hmm. And heartbreaking moment.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Yeah.

Arelis Figueroa: And I know this is the time to be with the people.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Yes.

Arelis Figueroa: So. One thing that we are doing is accompanying people to the immigration court, to the hearing. I have seen the solidarity of people. Even for other countries.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Yes.

Arelis Figueroa: And there is this guy from, an Italian photographer. Oh, he go every week. Every, every day he's in the court documenting

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Wow.

Arelis Figueroa: Yeah. And he wanna see, he wanna document the human side of it. Yeah. He want people to know that those people are human being.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Yes.

Arelis Figueroa: And then he came to the church and, you know, have picture of them in, in the church with the kids. And, and he took a picture of me that I didn't realize and when he, when he sent me the pictures, oh, it is a little dark. [00:09:00] When I look at closely, I was next to the elevator. Behind me there were at least six ICE agents. Oh, with this, their masks.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): So scary

Arelis Figueroa: The only passage, and even I posted him in Facebook, I say: aunque anden valle de sombre de muerte. Psalm 23.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Yes, though I walked to the valley of the shadow of death. Woo.

Arelis Figueroa: Because that's how I feel.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): That's so I can feel chills because I do think it's the most important thing that we're doing right now is just reminding ourselves and each other that we are human beings. And that feels like a question that I haven't really had before now.

And what's happening in our country these days feels like what, what happened? That we forgot that we are human [00:10:00] beings. We, they, them, us, like, we are all beings with families and lives and hearts and souls and

emotions, and I think that that work of solidarity that people are doing is in part to hold onto our own humanity.

That we are being trained out of to be apathetic or to be silent or to be, you know, busy with our own lives. And will you tell us a little bit about the ministry? You said we have been accompanying people. Is this the church? What is this ministry? Tell us a little bit about that.

Arelis Figueroa: Yeah, my church, my is La Iglesia del Pueblo, which is Movement Church came out of the Poor People's Campaign, a national call for a more revival. Yes. And the Kairos Center.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Yes. Kairos Center.

Arelis Figueroa: Uh, so the Kairos Center, they start this an English group and for the [00:11:00] poor.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Yes.

Arelis Figueroa: And when they ask us to be like, do the interpretation and we say, you know, no, we

wanna have our own space. You know, we were very sinvergüenza also.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Yes! Naming that. We don't want a translate, a version of your thing.

We want our own thing. Yeah, why not?,

Arelis Figueroa: And they were amazing. They say, oh, go for it. So we started La Iglesia del Pueblo online. And then we get funding also for the Presbyterian church. They have a movement called New Worshiping Communities.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Mm-hmm.

Arelis Figueroa: And they were supporting Kairos and Freedom Church, and they decide supporting us too.

Then came the crisis. The people call crisis, we call it opportunity. Mm-hmm. Of the immigration. We said this is, this is time, so let's. So we start ministering the, the Latinx, the new immigrants and the newest New Yorkers.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Yes.

Arelis Figueroa: And that's what we have been doing.[00:12:00]

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): I love that.

Arelis Figueroa: So now I, having always part of the, the new sanctuary movement.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Mm-hmm.

Arelis Figueroa: And the sanctuary movement is called now the sanctuary coalition. So. I, so we are doing the, doing the accompanying a along with, with the new sanctuary coalition.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): I love it. Now I wanna talk a little bit about you, because I am curious where your heart for justice and organizing comes from, because a lot of us.

Come, or we're first generation, we're immigrants ourselves, whatever our status is, and we come here and we're like, I'm coming to work. And, and that's the focus is just working and mm-hmm. You know, maintaining our families, sending money home, that kind of work. But there's a special brand of folks. Who their work is this call, this heart call for justice and for [00:13:00] organizing. And you've been doing that for a long time in many forms, and I'm curious if you will tell us where did that come from? Like where did that heart for we need to act and we need to do some, where does that come from?

Arelis Figueroa: I grew up in a church. Mm-hmm. My father was a pastor.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Yeah.

Arelis Figueroa: And my father ministry was always a centered in social justice and social services. Mm-hmm. And I think that's when all started. I was always involved in the, in the youth.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Mm-hmm.

Arelis Figueroa: Youth ministry.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): You came by it honest, as we would say.

Arelis Figueroa: Yeah. That, that's how it started. I remember like. You know, I remember in my, at, at some point I was almost like I start criticizing the church, like, oh, we need to be more, more, [00:14:00] more traditional, you know. Because other people were like a more like Santos, maybe we are, you know? So I have that moment too. Yeah. But my father was always open.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): So for you, like faith and justice have never been separate, it's always been together. Faith and justice.

Arelis Figueroa: Yes, yes. Always. Always. So when I say I wanna be, I wanna be a pastor. And then my dad wasn't that happy about it anyway. I went to Costa Rica once, but I went to Brazil.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Mm-hmm.

Arelis Figueroa: And studied liberation theology.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Amazing.

Arelis Figueroa: Get to know people like Oscar, also Leonardo Boff.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Wow.

Arelis Figueroa: Otto Maduro. Oh, uh, so no, I, I met Lula.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Oh, [00:15:00] wow.

Arelis Figueroa: Lula, Lula was a organizer.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Mm-hmm.

Arelis Figueroa: Uh, so Lula went and do a class for, for us.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Wow.

Arelis Figueroa: Ivone Gebara.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Amazing. Uh, names that people should know and go look up if they haven't read and learned about these folks. Part of what we're doing with Teología Sin Vergüenza this season is to try to create that bridge because a lot of folks growing up in the US and speaking primarily

English, don't have the same access, don't even know the names, and we have to learn them later.

Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. And then, so I think this is such a resource, so I hope that folks will go and, and learn more about these folks. Yeah.

Arelis Figueroa: Elsa Támez.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Yes, Elsa Támez.

Arelis Figueroa: All these people, so when I came to New York. I said, oh my God, well I have to stay here. Family issue. What I'm gonna do, [00:16:00] what in my life? Okay, I gonna stay here.

I have to reinvent myself. Mm. I don't wanna go to a traditional Methodist church because I was a little disappointed with my dad and things, so I ended up at Riverside Church. Yeah. That is the very progressive and liberal church and yeah. Los caminos se fueron abriendo.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Yes, opening the way.

Arelis Figueroa: So God start open doors for me.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): That's great.

Arelis Figueroa: I went to Union Theological, I studied at New York theological and Union Theological Seminary.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): But that's not how it was supposed to be. So you come from a family that said, as a woman you're supposed to have very traditional roles and do very traditional things. You said your father wasn't super happy [00:17:00] about you wanting to be a pastor.

Arelis Figueroa: Mm-hmm.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Will you tell us a little bit about your journey?

Because I love the sinvergüenza that you were to really follow and claim your own path, both in terms of your life, your immigration, your studies, your pastor, your marriage, your motherhood. Like I just appreciate so wonderfully. I

feel like there are folks who always come up to me and are like, I'm like a black sheep of my family, my church, whatever, whatever.

And I don't even know where black sheep comes from, but it is a term that I have found so many people identify sinvergüenza and black sheep, like they go together. People like I went against the flow and I did what I wasn't supposed to, but that's how I was able to be myself. So will you tell us just a little bit about that?

Arelis Figueroa: Yeah. Another thing that I'm. Also identify with the sinvergüenzas, and then when I found it, I just found you in face. It was like, a what? Oh my God. [00:18:00] What?

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): I love that.

Arelis Figueroa: The whole, the whole discussion about people that have been hurt by the church. Yes, yes. I was like a, oh my god. Because that is more what really happened to me, you know? Mm-hmm. Not just like a, oh, not gonna be a pastor, but hurt by, by the institution that I, that was so dear to me. That was part of my life. Maybe another person would have been like a, you know, forget it. I was mad with God for a little while. That was almost a breaking point right there.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): So what happened?

Arelis Figueroa: I didn't, ya estaba, everything that my faith, and it was already there and, and my conviction that the way for me to live my spiritual life was in, in the Christian faith. Mm-hmm. And but that Christian [00:19:00] faith. It was more, more than what I learned.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Mm-hmm.

Arelis Figueroa: And so when I start learning about we need to change our glasses

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): mm-hmm.

Arelis Figueroa: Like independent of the, the land. Yes. Your, wow. I hear about the experience of the wilderness that we mm-hmm. all have maybe have to go through sometime, go through.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): So what happened for you that you, even without that encouragement to be a pastor, to be independent, what was it for you that made you say, yes, I'm gonna go study. Yes, I'm going to immigrate to the, to the US and to New York. Like, what was that for you? Because not everybody makes those choices.

Arelis Figueroa: Went to Brazil. After [00:20:00] I finished in Brazil, my dad told me to come to New York so we can talk. Mm. That's how I came to New York. He decided that it was the best thing for me to stay here.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Mm, that's right. So does New York feel like home? 'cause it's been 30 years. Does New York feel like home? Does the DR feel like home? What will you, what is your, what is home to you? What does that mean? What does that feel like? Where is that? Is that a place?

Arelis Figueroa: I always feel an immigrant here.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Yes.

Arelis Figueroa: I'm an immigrant. Mm-hmm. It feel home, thanks to the people that I met here. Mm-hmm. Tend to be family. People who became family, friends who became family. Yep. That is home. Home. Because of the work that we have done.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): I've asked this question to, to our guests this season, and I think every single person has talked [00:21:00] about how people are home.

For folks who are immigrants especially, I feel like we create home with those around us. And it's like a skill that we have. It's like a gift that we offer, I think, to others is learning how to rebuild home and rebuild home and what that means for it to be in people and not just in a place. And I think that's part of what the violence that's happening right now is so intense is because people are being stolen from their families and from their communities.

People who have immigrated into the US from other places, and then to be snatched unexpectedly feels like a particular kind of violence because of so many of us finding home in people.

Arelis Figueroa: The other thing is that, you know, that we formed communities like, so we have a big [00:22:00] Dominican community, and then if I really wanna feel at home, I go to Washington High.

It's a music, it is the food, you know? Oh, that you, you think that you are in the DR.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): You bring home with you

Arelis Figueroa: Yeah. We bring home with us here.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): I'm gonna change the subject a little bit, which is, we talked about resurrection and I feel like you, of all people, I know you have something to say about resurrection because we talked about lived experiences of mm-hmm. Living, resurrection una y otra vez, like, over and over and over again and

Arelis Figueroa: Yeah.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): I wonder if you will tell us a little bit about one of, one or more of your experiences of this, you know, experience of being, feeling like you're [00:23:00] just one foot in the grave and then the resurrection moment. Mm-hmm. I think that's central to our faith, and I love that you embody that and claim that for yourself.

Arelis Figueroa: I like to speak about that because that bring the issue of mental health.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Yes.

Arelis Figueroa: For many years the church don't wanna talk about it. Mm-hmm.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): You have Jesus, so you should be happy and well.

Arelis Figueroa: Yeah. And people going through all of this, I'm feeling like that, oh, you should have to pray harder or something. And no, it's a real, uh, problem of mental health in our.

In our community and I wasn't, I was not the exception. And also in my family, my mother have a mental health issues. And then when I have my daughter, mm-hmm. And when I became pregnant, then I have my daughter. I went through all this postpartum depression and it [00:24:00] was very hard. It was very dark time.

Then I ended up in the hospital and I remember feeling that I was, I was gone.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Yeah.

Arelis Figueroa: That I was, that it wasn't any future. I feel like-

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): That was it.

Arelis Figueroa: That was it. But then God always have to wait to do things. I start telling the people at my doctor. That I was feeling that my home having been taken away from me. He brought, he said, oh, no, no, no. I'm gonna, he, I'm Jewish, so let me, let me, let me bring a Christian chaplain to talk to you.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Bless that Jewish doctor who was like, let me get somebody from your faith to talk to you.

Arelis Figueroa: Yeah, because I, I don't think that the thing about feeling you, you thought that way. But it was just, you know, thanks to all the care that I received [00:25:00] from that community when I was in that place.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): What was the, what was the thing that you were feeling that you needed a Christian pastor to come and speak to?

Arelis Figueroa: Because the depression take you to another level of, so it was just feeling that that wasn't me. 'Cause you know. I wasn't feeling myself. I need that community. I need that reminder. But also that care, and I,

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): If I remember correctly, you organized inside the hospital,

Arelis Figueroa: Inside a church? Yes.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): You created a whole group in the, in the institution for your co patients.

Arelis Figueroa: I remember. Oh, I remember that. I, I have written some devotional

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Uhhuh

Arelis Figueroa: For the, in for Christ. Yes. And I ask them, oh, I, I can use the computer. And then I went. I'm printed. I'm printed all that.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): You're like running a Bible study. You're having your whole own mental [00:26:00] health crisis, and yet you are still running a devotional Bible study group at the church. That is an organizer right there. That's amazing.

Arelis Figueroa: So I did all of that. When I came out, I was like the only thing that I was saying like, oh my God, I feel that I went to hell and back to hell and back.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Yes, yes.

Arelis Figueroa: Really. So that's when a friend of mine told me that's why we believe in resurrection.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): That's right. It's not just Jesus.

Arelis Figueroa: Oh my God. Yeah, it So, yeah, that is, that's why we believe in resurrection. That was a period of death. But now you came to light again.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Mm-hmm. That's right. We create the resurrection.

We make it happen. Yeah.

Arelis Figueroa: We make it happen. The- accompany those people at this moment of their life more vulnerable. And, and the beauty right now is that we [00:27:00] saw so many people from all walk of life accompany them. We have a lot of people, not just Latinx.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): And we protect us. We keep us safe. I think that's one of the messages that our people need to hear right now. I'm curious, you are working so directly accompanying immigrant families and being part of that same immigrant community. What are some of the things, theologically, you think that we need to be hearing or we need to be confessing, or we need to be preaching. What is the good news in this moment? What do you, what do you, what advice do you have for others who are just starting to come into their consciousness and awareness around what's going on and how this intersects with Christianity and, and our theology?

What, what words do you have for us?

Arelis Figueroa: Yeah, we were talking about love. If you say that you love God that they haven't, haven't seen mm-hmm. [00:28:00] But hate your brother and sisters that live with you, that you see.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Yes. Your neighbors.

Arelis Figueroa: That's a liar. Yes. Your neighbor. So

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): That is a liar.

Arelis Figueroa: Love your neighbor. And em- empathy. You know, be, be with the people in this moment. And remember, especially for the immigrant, all those verses in the Bible, they talk about protection of the immigrant love the foreigner. Prevention. You know, when you leave something where you are, you know, harvest at least something for the people, for the poor.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): That's right. There's literally like thousands and thousands of verses about that.

Arelis Figueroa: About that.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Yes. It's hard to believe for me how anyone could somehow make the current political situation of terrorism against our immigrant communities [00:29:00] match with Christianity, especially because Jesus and Mary were immigrants and there was so much mandate around hospitality and welcome and care. I, I don't quite understand how anyone who identifies as Christian could maintain a political position that is indifferent or apathetic to what we're seeing, the violence on the streets every day. And I wonder what keeps folks from standing in that gap of justice. I don't, I don't know what it is, but I wonder what keeps Christians clinging to their faith in private, but not behaving as Christians in public.

Arelis Figueroa: The, the other thing that we are learning right now that is so true is the Christian [00:30:00] nationalism. Many people don't understand what it is still. That I didn't know what it was when I came. Christian nationalism is no religion, it's politics, and is how people are using. The faith to preach hate and divide us. That's how people can justify the unjustified.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): We talk at Soulforce we talk about Christian supremacy and white Christian supremacy, which is like the

foundations from colonization way, way, way back where Christianity got merged first with the Roman Empire and then European empires and that colonizing religion that laid the groundwork that somehow made some of us more human and some of us less human. And therefore, like, created that divide in a way that is [00:31:00] totally against Christianity in the Bible. Like literally we're all supposed to be an equal standing before God. So I think Christian nationalism is this current moments version of that supremacy culture.

Arelis Figueroa: Is hard to talk about it, but it's liberating also because when we. The Bible say when we, you, you know the truth and the truth will make you free.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Yeah. I think that's also, we're taught in a lot of Christian spaces to believe that the bad things that happened to us are because of something that we did, or God is mad with us, or mm-hmm. This is how it's supposed to be, and so that creates an orientation of just accepting whatever we get as like, well. It's, that's my cross to bear. And I think the kind of liberation theology and the work of Freedom Church and what you're doing is a really important ministry because it shows a different version of [00:32:00] Christianity that for folks who weren't brought up in Liberation Theology, whether Black Liberation Theology or Latin American Liberation Theology, mujerista womanist theology. We have to learn that later if that wasn't the religion we were given as children. And so having those examples of different ways to be in the faith and be Christian, but also be centered on justice and not just passively accepting what's happening to us as though God did it, but be like, that's not God.

Those are principalities. That's not Christianity. We claim a different faith and we claim a different orientation of the divine. I think it's just. So, so, so important.

Arelis Figueroa: We are in that moment of calling things out. We are now fighting to have the 10 amendment at the school. Mm-hmm. Great. And then you go and vote against giving the student. [00:33:00] Lunch.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Lunch.

Arelis Figueroa: So those are now giving us us. All those teaching moment.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): I think we have a role to play as faith leaders, and part of that is being vulnerable and sharing our own journeys. I think to go back a little bit to what you were saying around your own dark night

of the soul and your resurrection process, sometimes even just talking about things changes culture, like talking about mental health as a health issue and it doesn't, isn't something that you pray away or sing away, it doesn't make you less of a Christian. And I think a lot of our listeners need to hear that, that if you are going through depression, if you are having some other sort of emotional, spiritual, psychological crisis, it's okay. It doesn't mean that God has abandoned you. It doesn't mean that you aren't a person of faith because of your sexuality, [00:34:00] because of your gender.

Mm-hmm. Because of your life circumstances, whatever those things are. That doesn't make you less of a Christian. That just is about mental health. And while faith can help, absolutely. There's a whole mental health guild full of people and different areas of study that can support, and so bringing awareness to that I just think is like, it's brave and it's critically important because it makes sense that we respond to moments like these with crisis.

Because it is a crisis moment. It's a normal reaction to terrorism, to be anxious, to be depressed, to be scared. That doesn't make you less of a Christian

Arelis Figueroa: Crisis and, and Kairos moment. Is this, this moment when something is gonna happen and something is going to change because what is here is [00:35:00] it's no longer gonna serve us. But it is a possibility of a new resurrection. A new world is possible, and this is the moment, and this is something that we are, those teaching moment come many times now with the Latinx community. People coming from Venezuela. Colombia. These other countries and coming with the idea that they were coming to the Promised Land.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): The American dream.

Arelis Figueroa: The American dream, and look now what happened. Everything that we have in this country, having fight, nothing was given to us. Having the work of the people, the organizing. So don't believe that lie that, Oh, they are giving you, [00:36:00] they're giving all those thing because there's, because they're so good. If people are, if Black people are free, it was a fight then with the women.

So all, all that I, I have been talking with people before all this mm-hmm. When they're, now we are seeing this now in, in real time. Yes. And it, it is hard. It's hard 'cause it's now people feel really like el piso se ha movido.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Right, that those narratives, that so much of what our cultural myths are about the US those are gone. Like those are no longer true. And so what do we do in this moment?

Arelis Figueroa: What do we do?

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): We organize.

Arelis Figueroa: We organize, organize, organize.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): That's right.

Arelis Figueroa: And. That's, we always say in, in the campaign, this is not about left and right. It's about right or wrong.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): That's right.

Arelis Figueroa: And [00:37:00] it is hard that people have to learn that way. It is like I learning the hard way.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Mm-hmm.

Arelis Figueroa: But it is good when now they're seeing that another world is possible and that they have people who willing to, to walk with them. And the other thing that is happening is that people come to us to, la iglesia, and I have the, we did a form mm-hmm.

For people to let us know when they have court. Yeah. And we prepare the, the team that's gonna accompany them. So as you can imagine, people are sharing this form with everybody. So we got to come with people that I just meet that day. Yeah. Or I met because they fill out the form. And many of them, they're so [00:38:00] grateful and they have look at my eyes and telling me that people in the churches that they go to, nobody come with them.

They don't talk about this, and they just keep praying and singing, and don't accompany them in this moment. Don't tell them what to do at this moment.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): What is the dream? What is the like when you think of new creation, particularly from your lens of sinvergüenza, of faith, of justice. When you talk about this new, this other world that's possible, I would say that's like new creation that we're called to participate in.

What is the dream vision? What is that that we are looking toward? When you imagine that? Because sometimes I think. We have to do the work of prophetic imagination toward what is possible. Mm-hmm. What is that? What is that horizon line? What, what is that for you? Where do you see God in that? Where do you see [00:39:00] new creation?

Arelis Figueroa: One, the reason I join and stay with the Poor People's Campaign, that analysis that we do about how all those issues or problems are interconnected and that we are all connected. And then, we have a song that say, my liberation is your liberation. And your liberation is my liberation. Amen. So the dream is when we understand that, that nobody is free until everyone is free. So that's the dream. And to break with this so individualistic society and now we are seeing there's gonna be people, saving people.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): And I think it's possible, you know the barriers to why we might wanna stay in our own little casita over here, and you stay over there. Those, those reasons are quickly [00:40:00] disappearing. So the possibility of being together feels more and more realistic because we are all suffering in our own ways. Some of us sooner, some of us later, but we're in the same sinking boat together. So it feels like, all right, this is the time people, let's get it together. Well, we always end, I can't believe we've been here already an hour, but I would love to end with the same question we always end with, which is, who are your ancestors, whether they're thinkers or family or religious icons?

Who are those cloud of witnesses that you come to again and again in your prayer life, in your quiet time to help you feel renewed and remind you who you are?

Arelis Figueroa: The first one is Doña Tina, which is my grandmother. Mm. That we always call her the first [00:41:00] liberated woman in the Dominican Republic. Like she was so amazing woman and she was so like herself and her faith, and she lead the way. Yes. And raise a, a amazing family and love my grandfather.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Mm-hmm.

Arelis Figueroa: And that was like a very, not very common to see a person at that time when you was see that the woman was, that she was the, the, you know, she was the one who, who was leading Yes. And she was stronger,

So. Doña Tina is the first one. Then in the liberation movement in the Dominican Republic, there was this woman, Mamá Tingó who fight for the

land, and also [00:42:00] because was a Black woman a campesina, the Dominican Republic with we have that racial issues and all know that. So always thinking, Mamá Tingó

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Mm-hmm.

Arelis Figueroa: Uh, give me the land below to those who work the land. Amen. And she was killed defending her land. Her land. Hmm. And then there was this woman that I met and she's an icon now. She's, 'cause she was a Haitian Dominican woman, Sonia Pierre. And she fight so much for the right of, of Dominican, Haitian.

And this is an issue that we, I don't know when we are gonna resolve it, but I have this hope that some someday we are going to, to do right to our neighbors, the, the [00:43:00] Haitians. Now here, I that I would say that, but also. Being in this country for so many years and learn about the whole civil right movement, Fannie Lou Hamer. Hmm. And Martin Luther King. But I didn't know about Malcolm X.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Mm-hmm.

Arelis Figueroa: And when I was able to put together those two, that also was, you know, change my life in many ways. Being how, how those forces was, they're necessary.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Mm-hmm.

Arelis Figueroa: Yeah. I can mention more and more, but I, I stayed with those. But yeah, I stayed with my grandmother and Doña Tina. And we were just thinking about that and yesterday about the calling out our ancestors in a meeting that, that I was having with, with the Poor People's [00:44:00] Campaign and with Kairos yesterday.

And I'm glad that, that you bring that out because as a Protestant, this is something that we didn't do well.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Yay.

Arelis Figueroa: I don't, Por eso porque que nosotros entendemos a olvidar. Pero no. Ellos están, están aquí.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): And recuperating that ancestral like honoring because they are in us. I feel like you're so right that that's been taken away from so many of us in the Protestant traditions, like we've been robbed of that remembrance, rituals, honors because that also makes us stronger when we remember who we come from.

And the fights that they went through, and that those lessons and those memories and those [00:45:00] resilience strategies and resistance strategies flow through our DNA through our cultural generational experience. Not just the trauma, but also that power and knowledge. Thank you for blessing us with your voice, with your stories, with your ministry.

Thank you for being a blessing to our people, and thank you for being a Sinvergüenza.

Arelis Figueroa: Thank you for inviting me. Oh my god, honor.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): No, the Honor is, is mine and ours. Thank you.

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 @teosinvergüenza in Spanish. [00:46:00] Cuídate mucho, and remember, we are Las Sinvergüenzas. Are you one of us? Oo, sí! Sí, sí, sí.