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THE MISADVENTURES OF ENRIQUE CHAGOYA: AESTHETIC
MARGINALIZATION IN INTERPRETATIONS OF JESUS CHRIST

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Abstract: This essay is an investigation of the relationship between homosexual interpretations of Jesus Christ and artistic explorations of the meaning of Christ to the LGBTQ community. I begin with an analysis of the public backlash to Enrique Chagoya's 2010 lithograph *The Misadventures of the Romantic Cannibals* which features a depiction of Christ in a homoerotic situation. My analysis focuses both on Chagoya's place in the historical canon of artists that create religious art that challenges heteronormative interpretations of Jesus and also the resulting destruction of Chagoya's work. My analysis examines the cultural importance of homosexual interpretations of Christ in the on-going debates about homosexuality as well as the biblical justifications for such interpretations. More, I argue that the public backlash to art that challenges traditionally held beliefs about Christ creates a cultural force for further marginalizing the LGBTQ community. I argue that traditional power structures, especially in contemporary America, rely upon the aesthetic marginalization of those individuals deemed to be engaged in subversive lifestyles in order to maintain their dominance in cultural discourse. Ironically, I argue, the attempts to subdue such artwork generates the necessary conditions for public discourse that will ultimately undermine the traditional cultural beliefs that undergird the protests against artists like Chagoya.

Key Words: Enrique Chagoya, Jesus Christ, homosexual, aesthetics, marginalization, blasphemy

*For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world;
But that the world through him might be saved.*
--John 3:17

*The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts;
and though all its parts are many, they form one body.
So it is with Christ.*
--1 Cor. 12:12

Introduction

In October of 2010 another battle in the long war over the relationship between religion and art was fought in the small community of Loveland, Colorado—once considered to be one of America’s best artist communities. Stanford professor and artist Enrique Chagoya’s lithograph “The Misadventures of the Romantic Cannibals” was displayed at the community’s art gallery as part of the traveling 10-artist exhibit *The Legend of Bud Shark and His Indelible Ink*. Among the collection of pieces assembled for the exhibit Chagoya’s was among the smallest consisting of twelve 7½-inch-high panels 90-inches-wide when placed side-by-side representing an eclectic and chaotic mixture of pop culture, religious, and fictional characters. The images are assembled in what might best be described as a very weird dream sequence, the kind one would expect to follow a night of undergraduate binge drinking after final exams. However, in spite of its small size, Chagoya’s artwork caused a large-scale ruckus. The twelfth panel is a picture of two men. One of the men is on his knees performing oral sex on the other man. This “other man” is wearing a dress, eyes upturned in ecstatic delight, with the word ‘orgasm’ in big red letters as the backdrop of his pleasure. While provocative in its own right, the panel does not quite transgress the boundaries of the pornographic, and it probably would have gone largely overlooked as a part of the exhibit had it not been for the fact that the cross-dressing man enjoying a blowjob bears a striking resemblance to traditional European depictions of Jesus.

Keeping with tradition, many Christians throughout the United States reacted by protesting the exhibit in various forms and mediums. Their complaints and protestations were aimed at defaming Chagoya and his work, crying foul about the intolerance for Christian beliefs in an increasingly secular society, carping about the use of their tax dollars to support the denigration of their lord and savior, and stumping for the importance of protecting children from such suggestive and terrible images. One angry protestor was photographed for the local newspaper holding a sign that read, “Blasphemy is NOT art!” When I saw the news article for the first time, and its accompanying photograph, I could not help but wonder at the opportunity such art presented for assessing and

reassessing the life and message of Christ and the mission of Christianity today. On the one hand, there are dissenters railing against what protestor Ronald Minto sums up as not art but “smut, pure and simple.” On the other hand, there are people, like Carol Ware, who claims that while she would not hang the piece on her living room wall, “[the piece is] provocative and thought-provoking” going on to add that she “thought that was what art was all about.” Somewhere in the middle are folks like Susan Ison, Loveland’s director of cultural services, who claims, “[The piece] is very complex, I really can’t describe simply what [Chagoya] is trying to get at.”¹ The more I acquainted myself with the controversy the more I began to realize that the residents of Loveland had missed a valuable opportunity to really get at the heart of the issue by focusing on the question of whether or not the depiction of Christ counted as art.

I imagine there are plenty of people ready to haggle with the protestors about what counts as art and what does not. For my own purposes, I am interested in how a homosexual depiction of Christ can stimulate the kind of discussions necessary to achieve positive, progressive, cultural growth. In fact, the protestors could not merely have been protesting the sexual connotations of the work because there is a long historical tradition of theologians employing sexual metaphors to describe the relationship of Jesus and humankind dating back at least to the third century martyr St. Methodious of Olympus, Bishop of Patara.² For instance, in the twelfth century, St. Aelred of Rievaulx, referencing the individual reclining upon the bosom of Jesus, advanced the idea that “although all of the disciples were blessed with the sweetness of the greatest love of the most holy master, nonetheless he conceded as a privilege to one alone this symbol of a more intimate love.”³ If the protestors were not angered over the sexual nature of the picture, or at least not primarily angered over it, then it stands to reason their anger was aroused by the *homosexual* nature of the depiction of Christ. This it seems to me is the heart of the issue, art stands at the fore of our ability to generate understanding because unlike an idea, or a formal text, art first speaks directly to the emotions and irrational parts of the mind demanding justification for the feelings and thoughts which it produces. Rather than merely protesting unsavory depictions of Christ—or any sacred objects—or championing their causes and critiques, people on both sides of the divide need to address why they feel a certain way about certain things. Only then can disparities in values become tolerable idiosyncrasies.

As such the purpose of this paper is to analyze how works like Chogoya’s “Misadventures” can and should be received by the public writ large. Additionally, I want to investigate the possibility of such works to represent not only new interpretations of traditional norms, but to what extent such works have a legitimate claim to meaningfulness for all the audiences of art—not just the supporters. This seems particularly salient

today as artists continue to co-opt images of oppression as a means of arguing for equality.⁴ As Jerry Meyer argues, “artists intent on engaging contemporary culture in issues of political portent have referenced religious images and formats in order to invest the aesthetic artifact with a power and authority still resonating with the shadow of its former religious context...they do in a real sense speak to some aspects of religious tradition and theological concern: the issue of regendering divinity and broadening or redefining the humanity of Christ, with particular attention to the claim by some that a phallogocentric religion has marginalized women or that the church is too often exclusionist.”⁵ My overarching claim is that such works can produce significant opportunities for public dialogue about divisive social issues. Art is never just about the way we should see the world, but rather how the artist sees the world. The beauty of an artist’s vision is that it is not concrete, and understanding it takes a long time—sometimes even for the artist. Nevertheless, “making and hanging art is a choice and has effects upon self, particular others, and the common good, and therefore is as much the subject of moral analysis as making and dropping bombs.”⁶

Historical Context

Chagoya is not the first artist, nor will he be the last, to produce a work using religious iconography in ways religious adherents will deem sacrilegious, blasphemous, or an affront to their traditional views. Rather than view Chagoya’s depiction of Christ as a latecomer to the feminist and LGBTQ artistic critiques of religion, which really started to flourish in the last two decades of the 20th century, it is probably more accurate to view the work as the next step in the artistic transgression of norms which have traditionally devalued subgroups of the population—that is, not just homosexual groups but all groups on the margins of society. Previous works have defiled the Christ figure, challenged the gender norming of Christ, and openly questioned the legitimacy of the Church’s use of Christ’s message of love. There are several artworks that have already achieved legendary status as provocative interpretations of religious icons and, as far as Christ goes, Chagoya’s is not particularly trailblazing though it is in the vanguard with artworks by artists seeking to break down the barriers of homophobic culture, and especially, of religion. Of course, to some, it might seem as though the uproar over Chagoya’s work stems from the fact that it was displayed in a gallery in Colorado which is notoriously conservative and, arguably, the epicenter for evangelical Christianity. However, the response to Chagoya’s work is similar in many respects to other works that approach the Christ figure in the same way, and, as I will argue below, the reaction to Chagoya’s work was not recognizably more virulent for having taken place in Colorado.

For instance, English sculptor Edwina Sandys 1975 bronze *Christa*, a sculpture of a female nude hung on a cross in the traditional posture of Jesus, reverses the gender of Christ both in title and image.⁷ Probably most famous of all, is Andreas Serrano's photograph *Piss Christ* exhibited throughout the United States, Europe, and Australia, depicting a plastic crucifix against red background being urinated on by the artist. During its exhibition in 1997 at the National Gallery of Victoria in Australia Serrano's work continued to inspire public outrage adding to its already colorful history which included responsibility for closing, for the first time, the Groninger Museum in the Netherlands. The Australian exhibition included photos of a woman urinating into a man's mouth, the genitals and other body parts of dead children, the decomposing victim of a fire, a woman squatting naked before a horse as she masturbates it, and a clergyman with a black studded dog collar among the many other provocative entries, but it was Serrano's *Piss Christ* that was the focus of the majority of the public uproar.⁸ Here we see highlighted the extremely controversial nature of Christ. Serrano, obligated to defend his art, explained that he liked the contrast of the colors as a way of highlighting the suffering of Christ on the cross and at the hands of his Roman executioners.⁹ Elsewhere he defends his work as part of a larger project focusing on 'life's vital fluids' including his works on blood and milk.¹⁰

There are numerous other examples of artworks that parallel Chagoya's provocative message. *Naked Forest* by the artistic team Gilbert & George eroticizes the crucifixion by presenting a nude youth in a traditional crucifixion pose symbolizing a sensual display of male flesh. As Jerry Meyer understands the photo collage, "The rough beams of the traditional cross are gone, and in their place we see a grey forest contrasted to the illuminated male and bright, frozen liquid streamlets, which we may suspect are the residue of libidinous male ejaculate rather than sacrificial blood. The Christian Crucifixion [is] transformed from a message of martyrdom and anguish to lust and desire."¹¹ The transformation of the crucifixion into an eroticized moment is a necessary component of the direct challenge to heteronormativity that exists in the predominant belief systems of contemporary Christianity. A major component of an LGBTQ re-interpretation of Christ is the realization of Christ as a flesh and blood, fully human figure, whose corporeal site marks the boundary of acceptability. That is, humanizing Christ means embracing the possibility that loving Christ might have meant *actually* loving Christ. Such interpretations of Christ bring the depth of love from Christ and for Christ to a surface level without rendering the interpretation superficial.¹²

Martin Scorsese's "The Last Temptation of Christ" re-presents the story of Christ's life and inner struggles, especially Christ's dreams and desires to have intercourse with Mary Magdalene.¹³ Scorsese was the target of numerous protests and public backlash, but the depiction of

Christ as a human being that struggles with the contradictions and desires of life is not unknown in scripture.¹⁴ Doesn't Christ, in the Garden of Gethsemane, struggle to come to terms with his impending fate to the point that he sweats blood? Why is it so hard to believe that a man afraid to die would have sexual urges in his daily life?¹⁵ It is instructive to consider that film has played a key role in constructing the dominant paradigm of Christ in Christian, and particularly American, conceptions of Jesus as the archetypal version of desirable masculinity juxtaposed against the less desirable social identities of 'female,' 'homosexual,' and what might best be described as 'hypermasculinity.' The crude use of such binaries has resulted in what Joey Eschrich describes as "a profound anxiety about gender."¹⁶ Moreover, in addition to these issues, related to the production and employment of an oppressive socio-political understanding of the Christ figure, there are parallel concerns within race theory—beyond the traditional European portrayal of Jesus—which are also linked to the sexuality of Christ.¹⁷

Artist Elizabeth Ohlson Wallin stages photographs of Christ's life in contemporary settings with homosexual subjects. Several of her more provocative pieces include "Annunciation" where the angel Gabriel delivers artificial insemination to a lesbian couple, the baptism of Christ where a fully nude Jesus playfully enjoys being baptized in a bathhouse, "Sermon on the Mount" where leather-clad men cling to the white robes of Jesus, and "Pieta" where a nurse, sitting on a hospital bed, holds a gay man dying of AIDS. Ohlson says her desire to create the images was fueled by her outrage when "some Christians said that [AIDS] was God's punishment for being gay."¹⁸ As a result of her artwork Ohlson received bomb threats, death threats, public abuse, and ultimately required police protection. Many Christians reject that such works can reflect any truth about Jesus, choosing to believe instead that these works are scandalous insults against Jesus' character. However, that these works directly imply Christ had a homosexual, or bi-sexual, orientation grounded in scriptural interpretations is not that far-fetched as I will argue below.

Many artists that work with Christ as a subject—homosexual or otherwise—often find themselves at the center of a public storm. What tends to separate artists that reinvent Christ in homosexual trappings is that their work is often targeted for destruction. Two of Ohlson's prints were destroyed, for instance. Prior to Chagoya's work, arguably the most sexually provocative use of Christ was artist Alex Donis's exhibit *My Cathedral*. Donis's exhibit was a collection of paintings on light-up boxes portraying "what forgiveness looks like. [Donis] imagined enemies kissing in same-sex pairs...[and then he sketched] his favorite political, religious, and pop icons, [matching] each one with a partner of the same sex, but opposite viewpoint."¹⁹ Though the exhibit featured some shocking pairs, such as Kennedy and Castro, Hitler and a holocaust survivor, and Martin Luther King, Jr. and a klansman, the pair that generated the most public

outcry was Jesus and the Hindu god Lord Rama. The picture of Jesus tongue-kissing the blue Hindu god drew complaints from Christians and Hindus alike. The light-up box was destroyed in short order by vandals. Chagoya's work also shares the special distinction of having been destroyed. In addition to the death threats, hate mail, scrutiny, harassment, attempts at legal injunctions, and a tacit requirement that he defend his artwork, Chagoya's work was destroyed by 56-year-old Kathleen Folden of Kalispel, Montana. Acting on her faith, and a belief that no one should be allowed to treat Christ in this way, Ms. Folden—screaming “How can you desecrate my Lord?”—used a crowbar to smash the protective plexiglass case, and then ripped the lithograph to pieces.²⁰

Of course, what Ms. Folden was using to justify her actions was the same basic principle that protestors of this sort generally employ, namely, that the work in question is an egregious blasphemous offence against their religious beliefs. Of course, this position assumes that artworks can be blasphemous. To better articulate this point it might be helpful to start with a simpler question about whether or not art can be classified as blasphemous which might otherwise be interpreted as ‘wrong’. Surely, artworks can be good or bad, laudable or done in poor taste, etc., but can art be right or wrong? If we shift the question of blasphemy from the artwork to the artist, that is, if we shift the question of ‘wrongness’ onto the artist, then, yes, the artist can be wrong. However, I will argue that when interrogated in this way the questionability of the use of Christ yields some interesting answers I am afraid the protestors of such art are not likely to entertain.

So, to be wrong in the blasphemy sense of the term the work would have to violate the principles of beliefs of the religion in question. Of course, for that to be the case those principles and beliefs would have to be clearly articulated and shared by all, but as we shall see, there is room in scriptural interpretation for a homosexual reading of the life of Christ. This means that not only are the principles and beliefs not shared by all, but that establishing a fair rendering of those beliefs and principles might entail that the burden for change is on the protestors not the artists and their supporters. As Anthony Fisher and Hayden Ramsey argue, “Respect for sacred symbolism is a mark of any civilized society, and would be valued alike by ethicists across the ethical spectrum.”²¹ Of course, this ‘respect for sacred symbolism’ brings into question what one ought to do when confronted with conflicting values where, on the one hand, we have respect for sacred things, and on the other we have respect for people.

In one sense the dispute is between value judgments, but in another, more relevant, sense it is about what counts as blasphemy. What if the artwork is meant to be a sign of reverence, as Serrano claims *Piss Christ* was intended to be, or if the artwork is an attempt to understand the relation of the divine to the artist's personal experience with religion, such as Chagoya's? Can art be reverent and blasphemous as the same

time? More importantly, ought we respect a “sacred” tradition that denigrates people? Are proponents of the defamed and the defamed themselves obligated to respect a tradition that devalues their existence? No, certainly not, especially if we want respect to demarcate civilized society. Perhaps, more than anything, the intentions of the artist for the artwork to express a unique and alternative relationship with the divine is troubling, in terms of blasphemy, precisely for the feelings, fleeting or repressed, among the viewers of such art who have been seduced into conniving in the violation of our beliefs; we permit the fantasy of what we believe to be wrong to enjoy a momentary hold on our imagination and our resulting reaction is to reject the artwork and condemn it. However, once seduced, the possibility of the truth behind the claims made by the artwork is difficult to discount.²²

This brings up an interesting point about the relationship between the blasphemer and the religion being blasphemed. What is blasphemy? In most of the texts surrounding the idea—assuming there is a viable definition today²³—the idea would seem to have its roots in the biblical notion of an abomination, that is, an abominable practice or belief. What does scriptural history tell us about the traditional Judeo-Christian understanding and usage of abominable? Abominable is usually understood as meaning ‘away from man’ an interpretation that came to mean ‘beastly’ in late medieval usages. However, in Genesis (46:34) shepherds are described as detestable to Egyptians. Egyptians, biblically, used the term to describe shepherds, for whom they had much loathing, primarily because of the lawlessness of shepherds wandering the countryside. The word detestable in the passage can also be, and often is, translated abominable. Yet, at the same time, it is easy to see the nonsensical nature of the Egyptian position, if we interpret it to mean that shepherds are abominable and guaranteed an eternity of damnation.

I only point it out here to make the point that the use of the term abomination in the biblical sense, while employed in a variety of ways, means little more than a disapproved of different lifestyle—not a sin in the strict interpretation of the word.²⁴ The passage most commonly used to support an anti-gay position is Leviticus 18:22 which cautions “Do not lie with a man as one lies with a woman: that is detestable.” This is, however, one prohibition of seventeen which also includes prohibitions against numerous forms of incest including the vague notion of ‘any close relative’ in 18:6 which also extends to step-brothers and sisters in 18:9. Along with incest of various types there are prohibitions against sex during menstruation, adultery, bestiality, and, oddly, sacrificing children to Molech. All of these things are considered abominations. However, the Lord supposedly told Moses that these things are to be prohibited because they are the ways that the nations to be driven out became defiled (18:24). These prohibitions were, then, meant to distinguish Moses and his people from both the Egyptians “where [they] used to live” and the Canaanites

who lived “where [God was] taking them” (18:3). So not only was homosexuality known to the biblical peoples, its condemnation was meant solely to create an identity for the Jews in a crowded land. More importantly, many of these things are now considered normal, or at least tolerable, in society—each moral position gently eroded over time by generational indifference to the consequent of moral claim and now it is homosexuality that breaking free from its religious shackles by seducing imaginations and entering into a dialectic between church and state.

There is another important question about the use of blasphemy to challenge the church and that regards the relationship between the blasphemer (or his/her work) and the power structure being critiqued. In the case of *The Misadventures of the Romantic Cannibals* Chagoya has said that the work was his way of addressing spiritual corruption and decay in the church. Specifically he cites the rampant abuse of young boys at the hands of priests. Even on this straightforward artist interpretation of the work the metaphor of Jesus receiving oral sex is apt since the priestly figure represents the earthly connection of God and, in recent history anyway, the same figure has been enjoying oral sex provided by young boys. Still, we ought to observe the maxim of Hans-Georg Gadamer and remember that “we should not take the self-interpretation of the artist too seriously.”²⁵ Taking the work as a public provocation intended to incite people to examine the decay of the church, or, perhaps, just their own beliefs, it still seems fair to argue that the artist ought not be expected to defend the grounds of his or her artistic provocations. After all, they may not fully understand those grounds themselves. Instead, maybe it is the task of the artist to create space and opportunity for dialogue and the burden for defense of the artwork and artist falls to us, the viewers and supporters, so that by confronting the provoked we might achieve a synthesis in the dialectic created by artwork and community.

However, if we seek to broaden the metaphor, and table for the time being questions of abuse, we are able to ask deeper, more substantive questions about domination by the church of the lives of so many it seeks to disenfranchise. So, we are left with the question of the legitimacy of the interpretation of Jesus as a homosexual, or as a man whose sexual desires could be sated by another man. Those who protest on the grounds of blasphemy often condemn such works because, as Kevin Fauteux argues, “they are afraid to examine the particular aspects of Jesus [being] portrayed...they cannot appreciate the various qualities that contributed to his identity, including his sexuality and temptations.”²⁶ Furthermore, the protestors, even those very high up in the church hierarchy, often hold a unified biblical image of Christ as blemish-free, a paragon of morality, and incapable of lowly human frailty. However, as Fauteux, again, correctly argues, “Christians who hold such a unified image of the Bible fail to understand that the Bible presents no such unified image of Jesus. Each Gospel writer painted a picture of Jesus which arose from his

own experience and which he presented in such a way as to be comprehensible to the people of his culture.”²⁷ If there is no illegitimacy in the gospel writers presenting Jesus in a way that is culturally representative of their understanding, then why is it so difficult to accept that others may, in the fragmented narrative of Jesus, find ways of making Jesus culturally relevant to their lives? It is to this question of the legitimacy of translating Christ’s body and message in this way that I now want to turn.

Translating the Body and Message of Christ

The history of the church is patriarchal, male-dominated, and power-oriented; that this is true should come as a shock to few people. So is it any surprise that women, members of the LGBTQ community, and powerless peoples would want to react to the structure of the church by re-interpreting it so that it better reflects Christ’s message in their lives? Christ was a champion of the poor, a healer of the sick, a defender of the powerless and downtrodden, and he never, anywhere in the scriptures, preaches anything but love for these people. As Kittridge Cherry, a long-time minister to the LGBTQ community, reasons, “Jesus is supposed to represent all people, including the outcasts and the sexually marginalized. Nobody owns the copyright on Christ, so the uniformity of the ‘holy’ images raises important questions about who controls them and what purposes they serve.”²⁸ Christ is the definitive social outcast so how is it that so many believers in his message find it inappropriate that the outcasts of today would find hope and strength in his message as it resonates in their lives? Chagoya’s work, and the historical tradition it is a part of, are not necessarily attempts to destroy the church, but rather, they are attempts to redefine the message according to the inclusivity with which Christ first delivered it.

How can a message of love be abominable? How can two people loving one another be a sin? Not once in the scriptural sayings attributed to Jesus does he condemn homosexuality. The people who show up to protest artworks like Chagoya’s are doing more than missing the point of the artwork; they expose their own biases, their own prejudices, their own ignorances—cultural, historical, and religious—and they reinforce a power structure designed to be psychically and socially controlling. Worse, perhaps, is the fact that they want to own the exclusive rights to interpreting the life of Jesus that is not passed down to us in the scriptures. Huge chunks of Jesus’s life are omitted and many stories are told differently, including his last days. With so little information actually provided is it not possible that there is room for interpretation that is more inclusive? If we hope to carry the broader metaphor of Chagoya’s work through to its logical conclusion, then these LGBTQ interpretations need to be grounded in scriptural readings and nuances.

There are at least three places in the biblical scriptures where there are genuine possibilities for homosexual readings of Christ's life. The first is his encounter with the Roman Centurion during which Jesus heals the Centurion's "boy" (Matt. 8:5-13), the second is the unidentified "beloved disciple" in the gospel of John, and finally, though not exhaustively, the betrayer's kiss. The importance of the Centurion's "boy" is that the relationship between the Centurion and the boy was quite possibly homosexual in nature. The importance of this cannot be understated because of the cultural milieu of the time. Romans and Roman soldiers in particular, were notorious for engaging in same-sex acts, especially with their servants, slaves, and underlings. According to Jack Robinson, "some scholars maintain that the Torah prohibition of male homosexual activity among the Jews was meant to protect the ritual purity of the Jews and cannot be seen as a condemnation of homosexuality in general."²⁹

This demarcation of ritual purity would have been essential in a region where a wide variety of cultures and lifestyles was common, as I highlighted above. Barring homosexual activity, particularly between masters and servants, would have been critical in creating a Jewish cultural identity. However, when the Centurion approaches Jesus he implores him to heal his sick servant not with the demeanor of someone concerned about his chores going undone, but rather as one who cares deeply for the ailing servant. The interesting point here is that the Greek word usually used for 'servant' was *doulos* and might have indicated any type of slave. The Greek word used in the passage quoting the Centurion is *pais*, a word that is typically translated as 'boy' and also usually conveyed a different type of relationship than did *doulos*, that is, it usually indicated a more intimate connotation in the parlance of the day. This greater intimacy need not have been sexual in nature though one would have to wonder at the spectacle of a Centurion seeking immediate aid for a servant he did not care for, especially when there was, presumably, an abundance of replacements ready at hand.

So, there is ample reason here to believe that Jesus knew he was dealing with a man, the Centurion, outside his own culture, who was asking for help healing in all possibility the man's lover. Yet, Jesus does not condemn the relationship; quite the opposite. Not only does Jesus heal the *pais*, he also holds up the faith of the Centurion as exemplary. What ought a follower of Jesus take away from this exchange? Jack Robinson argues that Jesus' willingness to help an outsider is a "level of openness to 'the other' on the part of Jesus [that] would certainly have challenged first-century Palestinian Jews to rethink their prejudices—as it should challenge some people to do so today."³⁰ That Jesus would have come into contact with homosexuals during his lifetime is virtually unquestionable, that Jesus never explicitly condemns homosexuality is equally unquestionable,³¹ but that Jesus likely healed a gay man and spoke

approvingly of the faith of another also has grounds in history and scripture.

While there is much literature about the 'beloved disciple' and who it could have been there are some things that are equally certain about the relationship Jesus had with this disciple. While the most likely candidate is Lazarus³², there is no conclusive proof that is true, though there is, in John (11:3), a report that Jesus was informed that "the one you love is sick" by Lazarus's sisters. On this point Filson is clear that when Jesus talks to his disciples about their friend Lazarus in verse 11 "the Greek word translated 'friend' has the same root as does the verb...which is used in [11:3] to express the love of Jesus for Lazarus."³³ More interesting is that both the Greek words used to describe Jesus's love for Lazarus, *philos* and *agape*, are used interchangeably in John's gospel as employing a practically identical meaning.³⁴ To love in the sense of *philos* is to love in a deep, caring way, as one would a friend—or, as a philosopher is a lover of wisdom—but *agape* is to love with all your heart. One might argue that it is a spiritual love—as in soul mate or the love that God has for humankind—but neither type of love is exclusive of *eros*, an erotic desiring love. That these terms are used interchangeably is instructive when we consider the other ways that the Beloved Disciple is talked about in the gospel. The scripture says that the 'beloved disciple' rested his head on Jesus' bosom during the Passover meal, a posture that was certainly more than friendly.³⁵ Jesus commends his mother to the care of the Beloved Disciple before his death by crucifixion.³⁶ No other disciple is mentioned as attending the crucifixion of Christ, but we might ask which of the disciples would risk it, those who loved Jesus or the one in love with Jesus? Reading the relationship this way, combined with the ink spilt over the possible intimate relationship Jesus had with Mary Magdalene, including their possible marriage, it is quite possible that Jesus was bi-sexual. Bi-sexuality would have been frowned upon in the Jewish community, but would not have been unknown, or viewed as abnormal, in the wider Mediterranean world at the time.

The issue of the kiss between Judas and Jesus is of a different type of concern. That a kiss should pass between friends at the time was not unusual, not unlike the cheek kissing in modern day France that passes between friends who have not seen each other for a long while. However, this is not the 'good-to-see-you' variety of kiss on the cheek. It is a common misconception that Judas kissed Jesus to identify him for the arresting mob, but this overlooks two important facts about the story. One, Jesus was well known in the region, he had taught in synagogues and cities, he had healed the sick, and been with the people, both high and low born, spreading his message; he was, in other words, well-known enough that he would have been recognizable to the mob sent to arrest him.³⁷ Two, in spite of the fact that Jesus knew all that would happen, including who among his disciples would betray him, he is shocked that he would be

betrayed by a kiss. So, what do we make of a kiss that occurs as a greeting which is not needed, a kiss that was not needed for any reason except to betray the trust of a friend. A betrayal committed with an act of affection is not the casual kiss many commentators make it out to be, perhaps it was the last kiss to pass between lovers. That Jesus was incredibly fond of Judas is scriptural fact, whether or not Jesus and Judas were intimate beyond their deep friendship we may never know, but that the possibility exists cannot be denied. In fact, the possibility that the lover betrayed the beloved is the focus of artist Becki Jayne Harrelson's 1993 painting "Judas Kiss" portraying Judas embracing Jesus from behind passionately kissing his neck.

What are we to make of these scriptural interpretations? How is Jesus, understood as an intimate or sexual entity, instructive to the believer and non-believer alike? St. Methodious used sexual metaphors because they represent the height of interconnectivity between two people. What is more intimate than sharing a kiss, an orgasm, the creation of a life? This is a theme that poet Maureen Seaton explores in her "Poems for an Ex-Prostitute". She writes,

I had my first orgasm at the same age
 Jesus hung on the cross, a virgin. We
 Both died our violent deaths that year: He'd
 Return as a transfigured body with
 Gorgeous auras; I'd go for nine more before
 My kids got off the school bus. Jesus
 Left the world in bliss; I was long overdue.
 * * *

When you talk to me of shame, I remember
 His anger entering me, how he
 Owned me before the end of childhood. Here
 Is your power, Hannah: that hidden place
 Deeper than the length of any sword. When
 You begin your orgasm here, the risk
 Ceases, the death gives you back yourself⁸

In the first verse the narrator confronts us as a person struggling to identify with Jesus, his traditional purity and chastity a sign of his divinity, but also of his lacking of something significant. He dies 'a virgin,' her orgasm is the death of an old self, the birth of a new self, the beginning of her life, she returns less gloriously but nonetheless transfigured, yet in spite of her newfound orgasmic fulfillment the narrator is still long overdue for happiness. Jesus returns, however, transfigured, gorgeous, and leaves the world in bliss, hinting, perhaps, at the danger of a Jesus that comes again.

In the second verse, the narrator returns to the theme of death and its orgasmic implications. The deep orgasm, deeper than any sword,

eliminates the risk of letting go, it represents a self-affirming love. So, what if Jesus loved as he was loved? What if Jesus did not see sex and gender in those he loved? If homosexuality is such a sin, such a god-damning affliction of the soul, does this mean that Jesus would not cure a gay blind man? That he would not heal a crippled lesbian woman? But what if he did lay his hands upon homosexuals? What if they laid their hands upon him, too, when he was scared, hurt, happy, playful, aren't these times precisely what a lover's hands are for? Are we supposed to believe that Jesus was only friendly with those he loved and that he never touched them intimately, that he never shared himself fully with them, man or woman? If Jesus was a homosexual would that change his message? Does a bi-sexual Jesus speak with more or less authority about love?³⁹ Art that challenges the traditional "ideal" of Jesus is important precisely because it requires viewers to ask and answer these questions, and somewhere along the way, one would hope, the answers will affirm the most valuable lesson to be learned from Jesus as one who loved his neighbor—that love is a type with many tokens.⁴⁰

Lessons of a Homosexual Jesus

There are numerous ways to interpret the gospels and their meanings, but what can these different usages of Christ teach us about how we communicate, how we understand the world, and how we ought to treat each other? There are certainly implications for our communications with one another but the most valuable lesson to take away is the need for engagement. In the blasé defenses of Chagoya's work many supporters claimed that if people do not like it they simply should not look at it. This misses the point in just the same way refusing to consider the art as anything but blasphemous smut misses the point. Avoiding the artworks of these artists stymies the opportunities for personal growth of protestor and supporter alike.⁴¹ While the confrontation need not be violent, the violence usually engendered by these works is often the product of misunderstandings and miscommunications. What led Kathleen Folden to destroy Chagoya's artwork is less important than the fact that what she needed was interaction with someone who could help her see the artist's point-of-view, or to put the artwork into a broader worldview. There were, sadly, few defenders of the artwork engaged with the protestors outside the gallery where Chagoya's work was being displayed. But if art is going to be used to generate spaces for progressive, social and political discourses both sides have to show up to the discussion.

This discussion is of paramount importance today especially when considering the persistence of attempts to legislate non-conforming relationships into the margins underscored by the recent passage of Amendment One into law in North Carolina. Perhaps more troubling is the

surge in ‘pray the gay away’ camps and clinics across the country attempting to rejuvenate the archaic idea that homosexuality is a choice, an illness, or a sin brought on by an infection of the devil. While we might recognize the hurt and offence caused to believers by art of this nature, we also have to be able to use this art to challenge the beliefs that lead to the exclusion of people from basic human rights. Fisher and Ramsay argue that “fear of the tyranny of the laws limiting freedom of expression must be counterbalanced by the acknowledgement that democracies guarantee not only freedom of expression but also freedom of religion. Political philosophers have long noted that free speech is only one of a package of natural and positive rights which also includes freedom of religion and that such rights often come into conflict and must be appropriately balanced or prioritized.”⁴²

However, while this is true, their argument also misses an important point with respect to the representations of Christ in art, and particularly feminist or LGBTQ art. Their argument, and perhaps the whole tradition of political philosophy that seeks to appropriately balance and prioritize the various conflicting rights, assumes that the traditional, or, at least, historically accepted, view has the privilege of dictating the status of those considered secondary and, worse, deciding which are blasphemous attacks upon the dominant view. Rather than treat these artworks as concerns of freedom of speech, we ought to treat them as concerns of freedom of religion. After all, if democracies afford people the right to freedom of religion, then LGBTQ peoples ought to have the right to a homosexual Jesus. And, if this is true, when we ask ‘what would a homosexual Jesus do?’ about gay marriage I am certain he would support something stronger than civil unions.

Jesus was exceedingly tolerant and we can increase the value of his message of love and tolerance only by trying to broaden its scope rather than narrow it. As Cherry asserts, “For too long people have been in bondage to conservative interpretations of Christianity’s central figure. Without a broader vision, humanity is likely to continue down the destructive path of hatred, war, economic exploitation, and ecological destruction. Now it’s time to take back Jesus—not just for gays, but for the good of all.”⁴³ This sentiment echoes, in part, Proverbs (29:18) that “where there is no vision, the people will perish.” An increase in tolerance can only be gained by an increase in understanding and this is the burden of all involved parties. Of course, when some of those parties do not have a voice, or a platform from which they can engage as equals, it is time to reinvent the rules, if not the game. Gary Speziale, an openly gay Roman Catholic artist, argues along these same lines when describing his artwork as an attempt to fuse his life and beliefs into one holy, homoerotic whole, “We are living in a world where religion is being used in the most dangerous ways. Maybe we need a bunch of gay people who are very concerned with the flesh and blood of it.”⁴⁴

The many instantiations and reinterpretations of Christ in art perform a task few things are capable of by bridging the gap between interlocutors in the public debates about the status of those in the LGBTQ community. Andreas Serrano, like Chagoya, has had to defend his artwork on numerous occasions. In one such defense he acknowledged the ambiguous nature of his Cibachromes arguing that they are “informed by ‘unresolved feelings about [his] own catholic upbringing which made [him] redefine and personalize [his] relationship with God.’ He further notes that for him ‘art is a moral and spiritual obligation that cuts across all manner of pretense and speaks directly to the soul.’ This is especially important for Serrano because he claims that he “is drawn to subjects that border on the unacceptable because [he] lived an unacceptable life for so long.”⁴⁵ So, as I previously claimed, art can bridge the gap of discourse by getting at the heart of the matter and in so doing it helps raise consciousness about the Christian lifestyle today. That is, by marginalizing the feelings, faith, and sensibilities of Christians they are, in the aesthetic moment, brought into contact with the marginalization they inflict on others. If this forces them to consider the future of their religious involvement, principles, and beliefs in such a way that everyone can be allowed to engage with the sacred and divine in their own way, is this not a public good?⁴⁶

Conclusions

Bringing this essay to a close, I would like to emphasize two conclusions that seem to follow directly from the arguments I have made and one that is lurking in-between the lines. Perhaps the most important conclusion I want to draw out is the idea that not only is there an important place in our culture for art that reinterprets the life and message of Christ, but that there are good reasons for its existence. It is often said that art acts like a well, that is, what you see when you look down a well is a reflection of yourself, and many claim looking into art provides a similar experience. It is my hope that this essay might begin to shift that metaphor. I want people to see what could be in those reflections.

Secondly, by defending art which transgresses the boundary of religious belief I believe we can help to move the LGBTQ agenda for equal rights forward so that, together, we may achieve the goals of equality, tolerance, and love which all people so richly deserve. Kittridge Cherry persuasively argues that of all the different interpretations of Christ to emerge from groups seeking to reclaim the message of Jesus the most needed image of all is the gay Jesus. “The queer Christ is necessary because conservatives are using Christian rhetoric to justify discrimination against [LGBTQ] people. Christ was killed for teaching radical love, and now his image is being twisted to promote hate. The

Jesus of the scripture broke gender rules and gender roles. He befriended prostitutes, lepers, and other outcasts.”⁴⁷ Of course, it is necessary here to temper the claim that conservatives alone are guilty of such rhetoric. Mary-Margaret Goggin, comparing the suppression of art in Nazi Germany with the United States today, claims, “leaders in both societies have utilized rhetoric to politicize art and to exploit deep-rooted concerns shared by large segments of their populations, namely, that an erosion of traditional values threatens a familiar way of life. This rhetoric appeals to the passions and prejudices of a significant number of people who view offensive or ‘degenerate’ art as a factor contributing to society’s moral decline.”⁴⁸ There is no reason to assume that liberals are neither immune to such rhetorical uses nor that only certain groups can find offence in such works.

Finally, I would like to draw your attention to the theme which runs, necessarily, through a work like this. I did not notice this myself until I was giving the paper a final proofreading making sure that all the loose ends were tied up. There was a loose end I had not noticed, or planned on addressing, but which I felt compelled to address in this last minute addendum, and that is the theme of legitimacy. From the first page to the last there is a question of the legitimacy of work like Chagoya’s, or Serrano’s, or Ohlson’s, there is a question of legitimacy about inquiring into Christ’s sexual life and orientation, there is a concern about the legitimacy of the lessons we draw from such transgressions, and there is a question of legitimacy about the LGBTQ community implicit in the need to write a paper like this one. So, in closing, I hope this essay helps shed some light on the fact that these concerns are legitimate because there is a legitimate need for solidarity and understanding that crosses boundaries; there is legitimacy in questioning a value rich, value laden culture that chooses to oppress rather than uplift its citizens. For a long time, traditional, contemporary culture, through its mores, norms, and power structures, has been questioning the legitimacy of unwanted people making unauthorized art creating an undesirable message of hope and love. As a response to that trend I hope this essay is a legitimate response, inspiring others to take up the challenge not only of defending those who choose to explore Christ, but of doing so themselves, because there is nothing illegitimate about making a better future for all.

Notes

¹ All three of these quotations were reported by Monte Whaley in “Arguing Over Art Protestors Call Lithograph at Loveland Museum Pornographic.” *The Denver Post*, October 02, 2010, Denver and West, B-04.

² For an in-depth look at the use of sexual language in the work of St. Methodious see Ralph Norman, “Methodious and Methodologies: Ways of Reading Third-Century Christian Sexual Symbolism,” *Theology and Sexuality*, vol. 13(1): 79-100.

Norman's focus is on the language used by the celibate sects of the Christian faith, but is nonetheless helpful for understanding the tradition of sexual metaphor, especially the male orgasm, for explaining the spiritual relationship members of the church often claim to have with Christ.

³ Quoted in and Translated by John Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 226.

⁴ As Amy Adler has so eloquently argued, "Race, gender, and sexual orientation have become the subjects of art, and art has become a central medium to activists concerned with achieving equality in these realms. This turn toward the political in art has been intricately bound up with the 'culture wars' of the past...provoking an escalating series of right-wing attacks on artistic expression." "What's left?: Hate Speech, Pornography, and the Problem for Artistic Expression" *California Law Review*, vol. 84 no. 6 (Dec. 1996): 1502.

⁵ Jerry Meyer, "Profane and Sacred: Religious Imagery and Prophetic Expression in Postmodern Art." *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, vol. 65 no. 1 (Spring, 1997): 19.

⁶ Anthony Fisher and Hayden Ramsay. "Of Art and Blasphemy", *Ethical Theory and Moral Practices*, vol. 3 (2000): 160.

⁷ Meyer, "Profane," 20.

⁸ See Fisher, "Of Art," 137 fn. 1

⁹ See Fisher, "Of Art," 156.

¹⁰ Meyer, "Profane," 30.

¹¹ Meyer, "Profane," 35.

¹² This idea is explored further by Cüneyt Çakırlar's work on queer aesthetics and the sexual aspects of the artistic work of Gilbert & George. While the author does not reference this piece specifically the argumentation for the thematic import of the artists is applicable nonetheless to this piece. The importance of the argument for a flesh and blood reinterpretation of Christ cannot be understated.

¹³ For a substantive and informative study of the relationship between Jesus and Mary Magdalene which takes into full account not only the Gospel accounts of Jesus and Mary but also the Gnostic accounts, including the Gospel of Mary and, especially, the Gospel of Philip which speaks of "the Savior's companion" whom he "often kissed," see Robin Griffith-Jones, *Beloved Disciple: The Misunderstood Legacy of Mary Magdalene, the Woman Closest to Jesus*, (New York: HarperOne, 2008), xi.

¹⁴ For more on Scorsese's film as a depiction of Christ as it relates to my arguments here see Kevin Fauteux, "The Final Portrait of Christ," *Journal of Religion and Health*, vol. 28 no. 3 (Fall, 1989): 195-206.

¹⁵ For instance, in Mark (14:35-36) Jesus prays that, if possible, the hour might pass from him and he asks God to "take this cup from me" that he won't have to suffer. See Matthew (26:36-42), Mark (14:35-36), (Luke 22:39-44) Luke's account also includes a reference to the sweating of blood, but those passages are omitted in some early accounts, the gospel of John does not record a plea for mercy from Jesus to God, but does (18:11) include a reference to drinking from the cup the father has given him. For this and all subsequent biblical citations the reference is the Holy Bible: New International Version.

¹⁶ Eschrich provides an excellent analysis of this phenomenon in five films about the life of Jesus Christ. For more see, "Behold the Man!": Constructing the

Masculinity of Jesus of Nazareth in Mainstream American Film, 1961-2004.” *Men and Masculinities*, vol. 14 no. 5 (Dec. 2011): 520-541.

¹⁷ For an interesting investigation of the link between race, sexuality, and ‘Christology,’ see Robert Beckford, “Does Jesus Have a Penis: Black Male Sexual Representation and Christology”, *Theology and Sexuality*, vol. 3 no. 5 (September 1996): 10-21.

¹⁸ Kittredge Cherry, *Art That Dares: Gay Jesus, Woman Christ, and More*, (Berkeley, CA: Androgyne Press), 71.

¹⁹ Cherry, *Art That Dares*, 36-37. The exhibit was located at the Galeria de la Raza in San Francisco’s Mission District. Only one other piece was destroyed, that of Che Guevara kissing Cesar Chavez.

²⁰ As reported by Monte Whaley in “Woman Attacks Disputed Artwork”, *The Denver Post*, October 07, 2010, Section 1A, A-01. Chagoya’s response to the destruction is also reported in the same article, “It’s sad and upsetting, I’ve never had this kind of violent reaction to my art. Violence doesn’t resolve anything.”

²¹ Fisher, “Of Art,” 164.

²² A similar argument was made by Lionel Trilling in defense of Vladimir Nabokov’s *Lolita*. For an analysis of the offensive and obscene in art, including the reference to Trilling, see Carol Iannone, “From *Lolita* to *Piss Christ*.” *Commentary*, vol. 89 no. 1 (Jan. 1990), 53. Iannone argues, “offensive and obscene elements have always existed in art, but modern criticism especially has had to deal with the insistent and progressive artistic exploration of the forbidden frontiers of the human experience. In their efforts to justify such explorations, however, critics have not always carefully and systematically thought out the full implications of the aesthetic claims they were making” (52). I think this insight is applicable not only to art critics that denounce artworks outside the norms, but also to the average Joe that condemns an artwork as pornographic or ‘smut’ before attempting to truly understand the implications of the artwork in question.

²³ In the wake of the Serrano affair in Australia priest-historian Paul Collins commented on the Serrano controversy saying “I’m not certain what blasphemy is and in fact I don’t think anyone is.” See Fisher, “Of Art,” 139. The comment was made in an ABC radio interview October 14, 1997. For an extended look at the history of blasphemy see Richard Webster, *A Brief History of Blasphemy*, (Southwold: Orwell Press, 1990) and, for a more recent examination of the future of blasphemy, see Austin Dacey, *The Future of Blasphemy* (New York: Continuum Press, 2012).

²⁴ The term ‘abomination’ is used throughout the bible in a variety of different settings. It is an abomination for Egyptians to eat with Hebrews (Gen. 43:32), for Jews to enter the palace of Pilate before the Passover feast (John 18:28), for Jews to consort with Gentiles (Acts 10:28), and for Jews to eat with uncircumcised men (Acts 11:3). The Egyptians consider it an abomination to slaughter an animal sacred to them (Exodus 8:26). The term is used to proclaim the desolation of Jerusalem by Roman occupiers (Daniel 11:31) and is recounted in Jesus’ story of the end times (Matt. 24:15). Idols and other gods are considered detestable (Isaiah 44:19) and sacrificial transgressions are lumped together under the general period usage of the term (Isaiah 66:2). In Revelation (17:4-5) the blasphemies and abominations of the earth are embodied in one figure which represents all the lifestyles considered wrong. There are many instances of the use of this word

biblically and each reference is used to demarcate a lifestyle that does not correspond to the privileged way of life chosen by the user of the term.

²⁵ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *The Relevance of the Beautiful and Other Essays*, (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1987) 93.

²⁶ Fauteux, "The Final Portrait", 199.

²⁷ Fauteux, "The Final Portrait", 200.

²⁸ Kittridge Cherry, "Take Back Jesus: The Queer Christ Arises for the Good of All", *Tikkun*, vol. 23 no. 2 (Mar/Apr 2008): 48.

²⁹ Jack Clark Robinson, "Jesus, the Centurion, and His Lover", *The Gay and Lesbian Review*, vol. 14 no. 6 (November-December 2007): 22.

³⁰ Robinson, "Jesus, the Centurion, and His Lover", 23.

³¹ For an excellent explication of Jesus's non-condemnation of homosexuality see Claude Summers, "The (Homo)Sexual Temptation in Milton's *Paradise Regained*", *Journal of Homosexuality*, 33:3-4, 45-69. Though Summers situates his argument in the context of Milton's *Paradise Regained* his analysis of homosexuality and its relationship to Christ is both thoughtful and compelling.

³² For a compelling argument that the Beloved Disciple was Lazarus see Floyd Filson, "Who Was the Beloved Disciple?", *Journal of Biblical Literature*, vol. 68 no. 2 (June, 1949): 83-88.

³³ Filson, "Beloved Disciple", 85.

³⁴ Filson, "Beloved Disciple", 85 fn 4.

³⁵ John (13:23)

³⁶ John (19:26-27)

³⁷ In the gospel of John there is no mention of the kiss. Instead Jesus identifies himself to the mob. This does not necessarily mean that Judas did not kiss Jesus before or after Jesus self-identifies to the mob, only that John chose not to report it in his account of the arrest.

³⁸ Maureen Seaton, "Poems for an Ex-Prostitute", *New England Review*, vol. 13 no. 3/4 (Spring-Summer, 1991): 146-47. The Hannah the narrator speaks to is a friend that was gang-raped as a young girl.

³⁹ The idea that Jesus was potentially susceptible to the charms of both men and women is given a noteworthy treatment in Claude Summer's analysis of *Paradise Regained* wherein Milton has Satan reject the idea of using only nubile women in his attempt to tempt Christ opting instead for beautiful boys and girls to attend Jesus at the feast.

⁴⁰ There are many examples of poetry that explore the possibility of a homosexual Christ figure. However, poetry often tends to remain on the fringe of social engagement with art in a way that works like Chagoya's do not. Some poems that explore the relationship of homosexuality and Christ have, however, been at the center of equally heated controversies such as James Kirkup's "The Love That Dares Speak Its Name" which was published in 1976 by the British newsmagazine *Gay News* and promptly resulted in a private blasphemy lawsuit against the editor (Whitehouse v. Lemon). The poem is written from the perspective of a Roman Centurion who makes love to the crucified body of Christ and alleges that Jesus was intimate with Herod's guard, Pontius Pilate, John the Baptist and others. The successful prosecution of *Gay News* was the last of its kind in England in spite of the continued attempts to prosecute various cases in the name of blasphemy. In 2002, on the 25th anniversary of Lemon's conviction, the poem was part of a carefully timed and staged protest against blasphemy laws in England by the

National Secular Society that, unfortunately, did not have the desired effect (*The Telegraph*, July 11, 2002). The inability of the protest to raise public ire against blasphemy laws was likely due to the fact that the public and legal attitude toward blasphemy had already shifted significantly away from concerns with blasphemous libel. For more on the demise of blasphemy laws especially as they pertain to Kirkup's poem see Russell Sandberg and Norman Doe, "The Strange Death of Blasphemy," *The Modern Law Review*, vol. 71 no. 6 (Nov. 2008): 971-986, but especially section 1.

⁴¹ One of the most direct ways that LGBTQ artists bring audiences into contact with alternative interpretations of Christ is through the medium of theater. This is particularly important because plays—more so even than film—allow for an interactive experience not afforded by painting, sculpture, or photography and, arguably, theater has a wider social appeal than poetry. Several plays exist that explore the intimate inner life of Jesus, but none as controversial as Terrence McNally's *Corpus Christi* written in 1998. McNally's play resulted in the same death threats (including a Muslim fatwa), physical harm threats, property damage threats (bomb threats were called in to the Manhattan Theater Club), etc. that other artists have had to deal with including the closure and blacklisting of his play at some theaters. However, the play is a call to combat the "forces of ignorance and prejudice" (vi) that resulted in the death of University of Wyoming student Matthew Shepherd because, as McNally notes in the preface to his play, "we must love one another or die. Christ died for all of our sins because He loved each and every one of us. When we do not remember His great sacrifice, we condemn ourselves to repeating its terrible consequences" (vii). For an excellent argument on the importance of plays for audience conversion see Martha Greene Eads, "Conversion Tactics in Terrence McNally's and Paul Rudnick's Gay Gospels," which turned me on to the importance, and important differences between, theater audiences and audiences that view works like Chagoya's in a gallery.

⁴² Fisher, "Of Art", 163.

⁴³ Cherry, "Take Back Jesus", 50.

⁴⁴ Cherry, *Art That Dares*, 83.

⁴⁵ Meyer, "Profane", 29. Both Serrano quotations are found in the reference where Serrano is quoted directly by Meyer.

⁴⁶ For a careful examination of Christian re-interpretations of the Christian lifestyle see Krista McQueeney's work focusing on how two southern congregations managed to effectively challenge the "homosexuality as sin" motif of traditional Christian beliefs. She advances a rational and well-reasoned argument favoring minimizing, normalizing, and moralizing sexuality in new ways that both respect and relate to the core set of Christian beliefs. I believe that artistic representations of LGBTQ interpretations of Jesus can help to motivate the discussions and changes necessary to accommodate the LGBTQ community's relationship with Jesus.

⁴⁷ Cherry, "Take Back Jesus", 49.

⁴⁸ Goggin, Mary-Margaret, "'Decent' vs. 'Degenerate' Art: The National Socialist Case", *Art Journal*, vol. 50 no. 4 Censorship II (Winter, 1991): 90.

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