

**Jayme R. Reaves, David Tombs, and Rocío Figueroa, eds.,  
*When Did We See You Naked? Jesus as a Survivor of Sexual Abuse.***

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This volume represents an unparalleled collection of essays on Jesus's sexual abuse and its significance to communities of Christians both ancient and modern. The goal of the anthology is twofold. First, it names and acknowledges Jesus's experiences of torture and public execution as including sexual violence, with an eye to both ancient contexts and more contemporary analogues. Second, it explores what Jesus's trauma might mean for victims and survivors of sexual violence and for Church contexts. The authors identify sexual abuse in the crucifixion story in the exploitation of nakedness during Jesus' trial and interactions with Roman soldiers, as well as his exposure on the cross. The private setting of parts of Jesus' trial raises the possibility of other unnamed elements of sexual abuse in the narrative, as well. As a whole, the essays show that there is significant historical, literary, and cultural evidence for understanding Jesus as a victim of sexual violence, yet the significance of this event, especially to people who have experienced abuse themselves, is diffuse. To be survivor-centered in this analysis means to take seriously the multiplicities of contexts and lived realities that shape the differing responses to the sexually violent crucifixion event. The volume successfully both acknowledges the abuse and its significance through a diverse array of evidence, including survivors' voices themselves. Exciting future horizons emerge from this avenue of scholarship.

Two essays authored by David Tombs bookend the volume. First, "Crucifixion and Sexual Abuse" provides a historical and sociological grounding for the investigation of Jesus as a victim of sexualized violence. This is a shortened form of Tombs's 1999 article "Crucifixion, State Terror, and Sexual Abuse." The earlier essay sets the precedent for authors who cite this work within the volume, through its centering of survivors' lived experiences. Second, at the end of the volume, Rocío Figueroa and Tombs revisit Tombs's earlier work in "Seeing His Innocence, I See My Innocence," extending the pastoral implications of Jesus's experience of sexualized violence through further interviews with survivors.

The book's structure invites the consideration of Jesus's sexualized Passion through three main movements, with a poetic interlude by Pádraig Ó Tuama of lyrical Stations of the Cross about Jesus' sexualized suffering. First, readers are invited to encounter the crucifixion from historical and textual perspectives. Then, the focus shifts to understanding the crucifixion's relationship to sexual violence in culture, and, finally, to the lived experiences of survivors who struggle with the meaning of the cross in light of its abusive realities.

These structural divisions invite theoretical engagement with the subject matter of Jesus's sexualized crucifixion in multiple ways. The lens of trauma studies becomes particularly important in the last section of the book, "Sexual Abuse, Trauma, and the Personal," as scholars, drawing on their own and other survivors' experiences, process how trauma-informed theory and practice shape theological and biblical discourse. While the trauma lens used in the final section of the book is significant, it remains largely in the psychological/psychoanalytic sphere, without a significant foray into literary and sociological models of trauma. However, the subjects addressed in the essays invite expansion of these dimensions of trauma theory, as, for instance, Jeremy Punt makes the point that Paul's references to Jesus's "humiliation" can refer to the sexualized nature of his suffering and death. This mention of "humiliation" without explicit identification of sexual abuse could represent a "lacuna" of trauma that forms a crucial element of literary trauma studies. Monica C. Poole and Elisabet le Roux's essays deal with the community responses to sexual violence. The trauma represented in Jesus's crucifixion does not reside solely in his individual experience, but reverberates through his community (and subsequent communities) as well.

Feminist and womanist critical analysis span multiple sections of the book. When paired with cultural studies, these methods unveil previously unspoken aspects of Jesus's trauma. Contributing to the ongoing movement to push feminist criticism of the Bible beyond representations of women or even voices of women in texts, these critical angles shed light on the underlying patriarchal and other power-based structures that lead to Jesus' crucifixion. Jesus as a male who experiences sexual violence points to the harmful effects of hegemonic patriarchy on people of all genders. Crucially, feminist and womanist theories also call into question the theological assumptions about the virtues of the manner of Jesus' death—as a silent, obedient atonement.

The volume contributes to current scholarship on sexualized violence in several important ways. Essays such as Mitzi J. Smith's "'He Never Said a Mumbalin' Word'" and Mmapula Diana Kebaneilwe's "Jesus as a Victim of Sexual Abuse" emphasize that an intersectional perspective is necessary to understand fully the power dynamics inherent in the sexual violence of the cross and its interpretation. Also keenly insightful is Jeremy Punt's argument in "Knowing Christ Crucified (1 Corinthians 2.2)" that the presence of Jesus' sexual abuse represents the scandal of the cross of which Paul speaks. Next, exploration of the communal trauma and communal cover-up of the cross's sexual violence, as in Michael Trainor's "Covering Up Sexual Abuse" and Monica C. Poole's "Family Resemblance," expand the scope of crucifixion's violence from the individual to the collective. Finally, and perhaps most crucially, *When Did We See You Naked* convincingly demonstrates that survivor voices are central to the academic project of understanding sexual violence. Multiple authors self-identify as survivors of sexual violence, and their witness shapes the volume as a whole. Additionally,

survivors' consent to act as interview subjects gives needed feedback on the theoretical concept of Jesus' abuse. Rather than distracting from the textual, historical, or social-scientific study of these texts, survivors' experiences illuminate the torture and death of Jesus, as well as the community's response to these events, and offer new insights into their meaning.

It is survivors' voices that challenge some of the most fundamental theological assumptions about the significance of sexual violence in Jesus's death. Several essays within the book press readers to ask, *why* would it matter that Jesus was sexually abused? To whom does it matter? The volume expertly holds in tension survivors' nuanced and divergent answers to this question. As Figueroa and Tombs's concluding essay demonstrates, for some survivors, learning about Jesus' experiences of sexual violence is liberating and comforting, while for others, it is appalling that *anyone* else has suffered this type of abuse, let alone God's purported son. Some survivors within their interviews even fear that the Church, should the teaching about Jesus's victimization become popular, might appropriate the narrative to suppress survivors' voices further. Figueroa and Tombs, receiving this broad range of responses, conclude that more study is needed to assess the pastoral importance of this teaching.

For those who already accept the reality of his sexual abuse, one of the challenges that the volume poses is to the commonly cited explanation of Jesus's suffering as "solidarity" with those who experience sexual violence in the world outside the text. Working from a survivor-centered perspective, Karen O'Donnell's "Surviving Trauma at the Foot of the Cross" calls into question the "solidarity" explanation. O'Donnell encourages readers to move beyond the assumption of Jesus' solidarity in victimization as a positive for survivors, while also pressing for an investigation of what could lie beyond solidarity, namely, love, witness, and survival.

While I celebrate the immense value that the volume contributes to scholarship, it also raises further questions. First, I would like to develop further some of the potential interpretive relationships between Jesus and Hebrew Bible characters. While the potential for this type of analysis appears in Gerald O. West's "Jesus, Joseph, and Tamar Stripped: Trans-textual and Intertextual Resources for Engaging Sexual Violence," no other essays in the collection consider Jesus in conversation with Hebrew Bible texts. Among other examples, Jesus can be read, from a Christian perspective, in connection with the prophecies of the Suffering Servant who is abused (*'innah*) in Isaiah 53:4 or Daughter Zion who is raped in Lamentations. This is a possible avenue to strengthen the argument that there is biblical precedent for understanding Jesus as a victim of sexual violence, since he emerges from a literary tradition that takes seriously the abuse of women and men.

Second, there is an unexplored possibility to consider Jesus' sexualized torture in dialogue with people identifying as trans, nonbinary, or queer, who experience sexualized violence at disproportionate rates. At certain points, authors

within the volume refer to the abusive feminization of Jesus through his porous bleeding and penetration with nails. However, the next move, to consider what this transgression of gender binaries means for those who themselves identify as queer, remains relatively uncharted.

*When Did We See You Naked* represents an exciting step forward in the exploration of sexual violence in the Bible. Inviting in new conversation partners across disciplines and social locations, the volume challenges what even those already conversant in trauma theology and traumatic lenses of biblical studies understand about Jesus' place in rape culture of the biblical worlds and our own. Asking, "When did we see you naked?" readers may find Jesus exposed far more than previously thought.

## Reference List

Tombs, David. 1999. "Crucifixion, State Terror, and Sexual Abuse." *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 53.1-2: 89-109.



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