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Chapter 4

For Our Sins

Christianity, Complicity and the Racialized Construction of Innocence

Marika Rose

It is always dangerous to assert an essence of anything as sprawling, diverse and multiple as Christianity, which is an institution, or a tradition, or a body that has always been as much at war with itself as with any of the others against which it constitutes itself. But it is perhaps close enough to something like the truth to suggest that, somewhere near the heart of this monstrous body, this (un)holy city, is a problem that can be set out something like this: Jesus Christ died for our sins. Perhaps that sounds less like a problem than a solution; but the devil is, as always, in the details.

Jesus died for our sins. So to be a Christian is to hold two things simultaneously: first, that we are sinful, and second, that our sinfulness has somehow been addressed and accounted for by the work of Christ. This can lead in two directions which are nicely signified by the two central rites of Christianity, baptism and the eucharist.¹ Baptism is a symbol of death and new birth, and also of cleansing. We go down into the water and we come up changed, clean, new. What we leave behind in the waters of baptism, or so the symbol suggests, are all of our old ties, our old identities as determined by our citizenship, our sex, or our families.² Baptism cleanses us – according to the Western Christian tradition – of original sin. It cleanses us, that is, of *complicity*: of the guilt we incur simply by being born into this world, into relation with all those who have sinned before us.³ Jesus died for our sins so that we need die only in the symbolic death and resurrection of baptism. We are born again, as the scriptures say; we once were guilty and now we are innocent.⁴

But the second core rite of Christianity is the eucharist, which suggests that this new life into which Christians enter is perhaps less secure than the one-off rite of baptism suggests. Christian identity is maintained, in some way, by repeated participation in this rite by which we partake of, or symbolize, the body and blood of this Christ who died for our sins. The eucharist

is important at least in part because of the way it repeats or invokes the process by which our sins are dealt with. In the Anglican tradition the eucharistic service begins with the confession of sins (committed through negligence, weakness, or our own deliberate fault), which is followed by assurance of God's forgiveness for those sins; culminates with the congregation partaking of the bread and wine; and concludes with the sending of the congregation out into the world, taking with them that message: Jesus died for our sins.

I am suggesting, then, that what we see in baptism is *conversion*, a singular move 'from one identity to another', an old to a new;⁵ and what we see in the eucharist is *confession*, the process by which we repeatedly own up to our sins and are cleansed of them. I have hedged my words here because, while in some ways baptism and the eucharist are central to what Christians holds in common, they are also some of the key terms around which Christianity works out its internal battles over what it is, over what it means that Jesus died for our sins. Whose sins did Christ die for, exactly? How thoroughly have we been cleansed? Baptism and the eucharist are both key markers of the fault lines internal to Christianity. Which baptisms count, which eucharists count, how we think about what they do to us – all of these arguments have been going on as long as Christianity has existed, not despite but precisely because they are so fundamental to the constitution of Christian identity.

From the beginning, Christianity has constituted itself around the question of who is in and who is out. Daniel Boyarin argues that what was originally distinctive about Christianity was the way it delinked religion for the first time from cultural givenness, such that religion was no longer about membership of a tradition but, rather, about *right belief*: orthodoxy. What is new about Christianity as a religion is the notion that religious identity is 'achieved' rather than simply 'given by birth, history, language and geographical location'; Christian identity cuts across existing forms of identity, creating something new precisely by disentangling Christians from their relation to (and complicity with) the world around them.⁶ In Christ, says St Paul, there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female.⁷ What there is instead is a new distinction: between people who are Christians and people who are not.

A key debate within recent New Testament studies has been between the "traditional" reading of St Paul and the "New Perspective" on Paul.⁸ The classical reading of St Paul takes him to be saying that the purpose of the Jewish law was to make the Jewish people righteous: that is, to make them into good people, into innocent people. For Paul, the classical reading holds, what happens in Christianity is that we discover that it is simply not possible to be good by virtue of our own efforts. This is why we need Jesus: to deal with our sin. But the "New Perspective" on Paul holds that the issue is not so much

about innocence and who gets to count as a good person, but about identity, about who gets to count as part of God's chosen people. On this account, the law of the Hebrew Bible is not so much about creating good people as it is about marking a certain group of people out as belonging to God (this saves us, at least, from trying to explain why eating shellfish, wearing clothes of mixed fibres or picking the correct small animal to sacrifice after the birth of a child might be fundamental moral issues).⁹ What changes in Christianity, according to the New Perspective, is that suddenly the boundaries of God's people are marked out not by adherence to a particular set of rules about diet, religious observance and what to do when you find mildew in your house, but by one simple marker of identity: belief in Jesus.

What complicates this neat opposition between innocence and identity, however, is the content of this belief in Jesus. What do Christians believe about Jesus? That he died for our sins. And this is why, despite the insistence of the New Perspective scholars that Christianity is about identity *rather than* innocence, I will side with Gil Anidjar's recent claim that Christianity is precisely both: Christianity 'is the difference between innocence and guilt as the basis of human society, the difference *across* humanity, between the old and guilty (humans) and the new and innocent (Christians)'.¹⁰ Christianity is a mechanism for escaping complicity.

The assertion of an identity that divides the world up newly into Christian and non-Christian, guilty and innocent, was perhaps subversive when Christians were members of a marginal sect. It became rather less so after Constantine made Christianity the official religion of the Roman Empire (although it's worth noting that Constantine himself delayed baptism until he was literally on his deathbed: so that, we might infer, he could carry on being guilty for as long as he was able to enjoy it). So Christianity, this identity which is deeply bound up with innocence, eventually lost its imperial subversiveness and became an empire in its own right. This dangerous combination of innocence with imperial power came to a kind of fruition in medieval Europe, where Christian identity lost its original elective character and became instead an ontological attribute, as Christianity invented race. In 1054, an ironically named "peace council" took place, in which it was decided to replace an earlier prohibition on the shedding of any human blood with a very much more specific prohibition on the shedding of *Christian* blood.¹¹ It is no coincidence that only forty years later Pope Urban II proclaimed the first Crusade, in which the slaughter of Muslims was not merely permitted but actively encouraged.¹²

Roughly 200 years later, Humbert of Romans wrote a theological defence of the Crusades. He cited one of Jesus' parables, in which weeds are allowed to continue growing in a field of wheat until harvest time, because they cannot be removed without damaging the wheat.¹³ But the people of the

Muslim lands, Humbert argues, are all weeds and no wheat: none of them are Christians and so all of them are guilty; therefore there can be no harm in condemning them to death.¹⁴

Another two hundred years later, in 1449, the governing body of the city of Toledo, in Spain, issued the notorious Statutes on the Purity of Blood, which declared that so fundamental was the difference between Christian innocence and the guilt of Jews and Muslims that even conversion could not save those born into guilt: Christianity, the Statutes maintained, was in the blood. It was no longer enough simply to confess belief in the saving action of Jesus; rather, to be counted as a Christian, a person would need proof of pedigree. It is here, then, that numerous historians locate the birth of 'modern racism'.¹⁵ As Willie Jennings puts it, 'The very process of becoming Christian took on new ontic markers [which] were aesthetic and racial.'¹⁶ Those racialized others now ontologically outside the sphere of Christianity continued to be guilty, complicit, and vulnerable to the violent judgement of God; those within the sphere of Christianity and of whiteness were innocent, safe, and able to enact God's judgement upon others in the name of their salvation.¹⁷

Just as Christianity once defined itself against the pagan religions and heretical sects it conjured into being, so too the secular defines itself precisely in opposition to the category of religion, which it invents: not so much escaping the logic of Christianity as repeating it. To become secular, Daniel Colucciello Barber says, Europe must emancipate itself from its own religious heritage, conceiving itself not as the coming together of Athens and Jerusalem but as the triumph of Athens over Jerusalem: 'The secular West rejects religion for itself, but it does so, one might say, as the price that must be paid in order to reject the non-West by characterising this non-West as religious.'¹⁸ Where once the world was newly divided into Christian and non-Christian, the secular announces itself as the division of the world into secular – by which we might infer white, civilized and reasonable – and the religious – by which we might infer black, savage and fanatical.¹⁹ Among the many characteristically Christian elements which the secular West retains in its conversion from religious to secular is the relationship between identity and innocence. The secular is constitutively innocent; the religious constitutively guilty.

The rise of the secular state marks also the privatization and individualization of religion, and therefore also of innocence and guilt, even as it brings to birth an unprecedented global economic system in which each part is ever more constituted by the whole to which it belongs. The secular West castigates those it colonizes and enslaves for their refusal to let go of ties to family, land and religion for the freedom of rational individuality even as it binds them ever more tightly to its own universalizing system for ordering the world. For all its vaunted sociality, and in Everality, Complicity, Concepts, Cases and Critique, available online at https://www.rowmaninternational.com/book/exploring_complicity/3-156-ace69e5d-9256d4193-8b18-4cd6c5a123c

remains, as Marx argues, 'the special religion of capital'.²⁰ Where Christian salvation depends upon both the singular moment of baptism and the regular demonstration of faith by participation in the eucharist, under capitalism what matters is not so much whether one is welcomed into the world with the sprinkling of holy water but whether one is born 'with a silver spoon in [one's] mouth'; not so much the faith without which the eucharistic rite is ineffective but 'whether or not [a person] has credit'.²¹ Nor – as one might expect from a system whose emergence depended in large part on the classification of black people as property – does capitalism transcend Christianity's racialized logic of guilt, transposing instead the association of whiteness with innocence and blackness with guilt to the logic of 'whiteness as credibility' and 'Blackness as indebtedness'.²²

This inheritance and mutation of the Christian construction of guilt and innocence gives rise to a world in which white Westerners in particular are more profoundly complicit than ever before in the dominant structures of global power, and yet are constructed precisely as innocent subjects. From the White Man's Burden to the White Saviour Industrial Complex, what white people – and I include myself here – inherit from Christianity is not only the conviction that we are innocent, but also the notion that we hold the key to the salvation of the world, the cure for what ails it and a corresponding inability to conceive of the possibility that we might, in fact, be the problem.²³ Instead of the distinction between pure-blooded Christians with long ancestral lineages and those recent converts whose baptism can never really be trusted to have washed away the guilt that is in their blood, today the line between complicity and innocence functions through the distinction between white people and those citizens who will never be able to escape the perennial question, 'But where are you *really* from?'

To talk about complicity – to talk about innocence and guilt, clean hands and dirty hands – is always also to talk about white supremacy, to talk about the ways in which we are differently constructed as ontologically guilty or ontologically innocent.²⁴ 'There is an a priori association of Blackness with guilt (criminality).'²⁵ Conversely, to be white is to have been always already baptized into the field of innocence such that we can only ever be held responsible for our individual transgressions and never for our complicity in the social, economic and political structures to which we belong. With sustained effort we might, like Jimmy Saville, Anders Breivik or Andreas Lubitz, attain to the hard-won status of monsters. But we will always be innocent until proven guilty, lone figures of inexplicable evil rather than symptoms of a deeper malaise; and perhaps even then we will find that the police are willing to destroy or falsify incriminating evidence to save us, as many current members of British parliament and those responsible for the killing of Mark Duggan have no doubt noted with relief.

There are, for white people, few sins that cannot be washed away through the mere act of confession.²⁷ Sara Ahmed writes about a 'politics of declaration in which institutions and individuals "admit" to forms of bad practice and the "admission" itself becomes seen as good practice': the strange logic whereby a report about the institutional racism of an institution is seen as good practice, as though the mere confession of this sin is enough to expunge it. Ahmed describes such declarations of whiteness as 'unhappy performatives', structurally unable to effect what they purport to.²⁸ Yet if innocence is racialized as white, is modelled on the Christian progression from confession to forgiveness, then in some ways we might say that they achieve exactly what they are supposed to: absolution.

Of course the boundaries of innocence are never entirely fixed, any more than were the boundaries of Christendom. Access to innocence – escape from complicity – is always possible for those who are willing to struggle vigorously against the ontological evil of others. We see this conversion into innocence (into whiteness) at work, for example, in the treatment of George Zimmerman, the Hispanic man exonerated of the murder of Trayvon Martin, a black teenager; in the overwhelming Western support for the apartheid state of Israel; or in the generosity of the UK government's treatment of millionaire non-doms of colour, in contrast to its brutality towards those others who lack the credit to make the conversion from "immigrants" to "expats".²⁹ The cost of innocence, these days, is baptism into what Robin James calls 'Multi-Racial White Supremacist Patriarchy' or MRWaSP, a term which seeks to describe a new form of hegemony which includes *some* marginalized groups within the realm of innocence – and outside the realm of complicity – in order to maintain more efficiently its exclusion of others.³⁰

If MRWaSP is the problem, yet is also a system for making certain people innocent and other people guilty, then those of us for whom it exists find ourselves in a Chinese finger trap, which tightens around us the more we try to escape it. The harder we try to get free, to exonerate ourselves, the more deeply we invest ourselves in the very innocence which makes us guilty. So then, what is to be done? Can we talk about complicity without making this conversation itself a ruse for reaffirming our innocence? In his autobiography, Malcolm X recounts a meeting he had with a young white woman:

I never will forget one little blonde co-ed after I had spoken at her New England college. She must have caught the next plane behind that one I took to New York. She found the Muslim restaurant in Harlem. I just happened to be there when she came in. Her clothes, her carriage, her accent, all showed Deep South white breeding and money. At that college, I told how ... the guilt of American whites included their knowledge that in hating Negroes, they were hating they were rejecting, they were denying, their own blood.

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Anyway, I'd never seen anyone I ever spoke to before more affected than this little white college girl. She demanded, right up in my face, 'Don't you believe there are any *good* white people?' I didn't want to hurt her feelings. I told her, 'People's deeds I believe in, Miss – not their words.' 'What can I do?' she exclaimed. I told her, 'Nothing.' She burst out crying, and ran out and up Lenox Avenue and caught a taxi.³¹

Towards the end of her discussion of the non-performativity of anti-racism, Sara Ahmed says:

A white response to this paper has asked the question, 'but what are white people to do.' [This question] can work to *block* hearing; in moving on from the present towards the future, it can also move away from the object of critique, or place the white subject 'outside' that critique in the present of the hearing.³²

Perhaps here we might return, at last, to the figure of Jesus Christ, who died for our sins, and in doing so made possible the fraught relationship between innocence and complicity that so characterizes the contemporary Western world. The Gospel of Matthew tells the story, curiously evocative of Malcolm X's tale, of the rich young ruler, who came to Jesus to ask him:

'Teacher, what good deed must I do to have eternal life?' ... Jesus said to him, 'If you wish to be perfect, go, sell your possessions, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.' When the young man heard this word, he went away grieving, for he had many possessions.³³

Matthew's Gospel repeatedly invokes two themes which circle around the same metaphor. The first is the theme of Jesus as a stumbling stone, a rock in the path over which people trip, a scandal and an offence. The second is the theme of a solid rock upon which the community which forms around Christ is to be built, with Christ as its cornerstone. The Gospel of Matthew presents its readers with a choice, then: to be offended by Christ, to stumble over the message of Christianity; or to take Christ as the firm foundation, the cornerstone of the edifice it builds upon his message. Perhaps for those of us admitted into the sphere of innocence, of white supremacy, the problem is the reverse: Can we learn how to stop building this edifice of self-satisfaction, to cease from walling ourselves off from responsibility, and learn instead to be scandalized by the problem of our own reliance on the logic of absolution? Can we recognize and confront our own complicity even if to do so might also mean to let go of the desire to be counted as a good person? If it comes at the cost of everything we own? Can we learn to treat the question of complicity in the way by which Marcella Althaus-Reid suggests that a queer

materialist theology might treat the Jesus who died for our sins: 'a stone in the road to force [us] to stop, fall down, while pausing in [our] pain and thinking during the pause?'³⁴

NOTES

1. Capitalizing "baptism" and "eucharist" imposed a particular theological understanding of what they signify, which I wanted to avoid: hence the lower case.
2. As Slavoj Žižek argues, "The Christian "Good News (Gospel)" is that it is possible to suspend the burden of the past, to cut the ropes which tie us to our past deeds, to wipe the slate and begin again from zero." Slavoj Žižek, *Did Somebody Say Totalitarianism?: Five Interventions in the (Mis)use of a Notion* (London: Verso, 2001), 53.
3. This link between baptism and original sin was first made by Cyprian in 253 CE and cemented by Augustine who argued, largely from a need to justify the practice of infant baptism, that baptism was necessary for the remission of original sin, though his Eastern Orthodox contemporaries rejected this notion. See John E. Toews, *The Story of Original Sin* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2013), 65, 89, and 98.
4. The community into which the new Christian is born is the community figured as the 'body of Christ' (1 Corinthians 12:7); that is, the body of the Christ who is repeatedly described in the Christian scriptures in the language of purity and innocence – faithful Christians are those who 'have been cleansed from their past sins' (2 Peter 1:9), who have been 'cleansed with blood' (Hebrews 9:22), who 'have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb' (Revelation 7:14), that is, Christ, the 'lamb without blemish or defect', who is offered up to purify the people of God (1 Peter 1:19).
5. Daniel Colucciello Barber, "The Immanent Refusal of Conversion," *Journal for Cultural and Religious Theory* 13 (2014): 142.
6. Daniel Boyarin, *Border Lines: The Partition of Judaeo-Christianity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 17.
7. Galatians 3:28.
8. For an overview of the debate and its history, see James D. G. Dunn, *The New Perspective on Paul* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B Eerdmans, 2008).
9. See, for example, Leviticus 11:9–12, 19:19, and 12:6–8.
10. Gil Anidjar, *Blood: A Critique of Christianity* (New York, Columbia University Press, 2014), 254.
11. *Ibid.*, 132. Anidjar draws on the argument of Tomas Mastnak, *Crusading Peace: Christendom, the Muslim World, and Western Political Order* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2002).
12. Anidjar, *Blood*, 133.
13. Matthew 13:24–30.
14. Humbert of Romans, "Opus Tripartitum," in *The Crusades: Idea and Reality, 1095-1274*, ed. Louise Riley-Smith and Jonathan Riley-Smith (London: Edward Arnold, 1981), 103–17.
15. Anidjar, *Blood*, 61–2. The chapter in which Anidjar's discussion of the Statutes occurs argues that, while in some respects exceptional, they are nonetheless

continuous with broader cultural shifts around the notion of blood, lineage and race occurring in Christian Europe at the time.

16. Willie Jennings, *The Christian Imagination: Theology and the Origins of Race* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 33.
17. The 1452 papal bull *Dum diversas* gave Christian kings permission 'to invade, search out, capture, vanquish, and subdue all Saracens and pagans whatsoever ... and to reduce their persons to perpetual slavery'. Cited in Jennings, *Christian Imagination*, 29. This association of sinfulness – complicity – and vulnerability to racialized violence lurks in the background of Rowan Williams's discussion of the Christian rite of baptism. 'We may find it odd', Williams says, 'that sixteenth-century Spanish theologians had to argue about whether the native peoples of the Americas were human ... but ... there was an immediate political linkage between being capable of receiving baptism and the capacity to be a "citizen".' Yet if, as Williams himself argues, to be unbaptized is to be in a condition of 'danger or unfreedom, liability to divine "wrath"', and to be baptized is to be part of a community so beloved of God that its state of grace, of innocence, cannot be undone even by 'betrayal' or violence on the part of its members, then it is not odd at all that those in possession of the power to legitimize violence should seek to do so by ontologizing the difference between Christian and non-Christian, removing the 'very ambiguous element' which inheres in the potential access of non-Christian subjects to conversion. Rowan Williams, *On Christian Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), 212, 210, and 212.
18. Daniel Colucciello Barber, *On Diaspora: Christianity, Religion and Secularity* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2011), 110.
19. While William T. Cavanaugh's work itself seems often to be driven by the desire to assert and defend Christian innocence, he is nonetheless right to point out that 'the myth of religious violence helps us to construct and marginalise a religious Other, prone to fanaticism, to contrast with the rational, peace-making secular subject. ... Our violence, being secular, is rational, peace making and sometimes necessary to contain their violence. We find ourselves obliged to bomb them into liberal democracy.' William T. Cavanaugh, *The Myth of Religious Violence: Secular Ideology and the Roots of Modern Conflict* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 4. Likewise, as Arun Kundnani points out, 'The term "terrorism" is never used to refer to the military violence of Western states, or to the daily reality of gender-based violence, for example, both of which ought also to be labelled terrorism according to the term's usual definition: violence against innocent civilians designed to advance a political cause.' Arun Kundnani, *The Muslims Are Coming! Islamophobia, Extremism, and the Domestic War on Terror* (London: Verso, 2015), 21.
20. Karl Marx, *Theories of Surplus-Value*, 1863, accessed June 29, 2016, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1863/theories-surplus-value>, ch. 24.
21. *Ibid.*
22. Amaryah Armstrong, "Blackness and Value; Part 1: The Economics of Criminalization," *Women in Theology*, January 28, 2015, accessed June 29, 2016, <https://womenintheology.org/2015/01/28/blackness-and-value-part-1-the-economics-of-criminalization/>.
23. Teju Cole's article "The White Savior Industrial Complex" is an expert discussion of the ways this white innocence plays out in the field of philanthropy

and activism. See Teju Cole, "The White Savior Industrial Complex," *The Atlantic*, March 21, 2012, accessed June 29, 2016, <http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2012/03/the-white-savior-industrial-complex/254843/>.

24. For example, George Yancy describes his experience of being in a lift with a white woman: inasmuch as 'she only "sees" a criminal, a predator, a phantasm' she also "sees," but she does not necessarily reflect upon, herself as normative, innocent, and pure'; moreover, in this interaction, 'not only does the white woman in the elevator ontologically freeze my "dark" embodied identity but she also becomes ontologically frozen in her own embodied (white) identity'. Georgie Yancy, *Black Bodies, White Gazes: The Continuing Significance of Race* (Plymouth: Rowman & Littlefield, 2008), 19. To this theological construction of ontological guilt and innocence is added, of course, another theological support – as Karen E. Fields and Barbara J. Fields point out, 'The pop statement of the theodicy problem – Why do bad things happen to good people? – has a pop answer of ancient pedigree: People to whom bad things happen cannot be all good.' Karen E. Fields and Barbara J. Fields, *Racecraft: The Soul of Inequality in American Life* (London: Verso, 2012), 215.

25. Jackie Wang, "Against Innocence: Race, Gender, and the Politics of Safety," *Lies: A Journal of Materialist Feminism 1* (2012): 168.

26. See, for example, Tom Dale, "London Police Face 14 New Investigations into Corruption to Cover up Child Sex Abuse," *Vice News*, March 16, 2015, accessed June 29, 2016, <https://news.vice.com/article/london-police-face-14-new-investigations-into-corruption-to-cover-up-child-sex-abuse>; and Harry Stopes, "Five Thoughts on the Killing of Mark Duggan," *London Review of Books*, January 9, 2014, accessed June 29, 2016, <http://www.lrb.co.uk/blog/2014/01/09/harry-stopos-five-thoughts-on-the-killing-of-markduggan>.

27. Robyn Westcott describes confession as a central genre of whiteness studies, suggesting that the danger of the act of confession is 'that the white subject will achieve not only spiritual restitution after a fashion, but then appoint herself to enact the pleasurable closure of narrative resolution. ... What if confessing merely reorganised the white body, reconstituted it, consolidated its power, sanctioned and sanctified it?' Robyn Westcott, "Witnessing Whiteness: Articulating Race and the 'Politics of Style'," *Borderlands 2* (2004), accessed June 29, 2016, http://www.borderlands.net.au/vol3no2_2004/westcott_witnessing.htm.

28. Sara Ahmed, "Declarations of Whiteness: The Non-Performativity of Anti-Racism," *Borderlands 3* (2004), accessed June 29, 2016, http://www.borderlands.net.au/vol3no2_2004/ahmed_declarations.htm.

29. See, for example, Ashitha Nagesh, "From April People will be Deported for Earning Less than £35,000," *Metro*, March 12, 2016, <http://metro.co.uk/2016/03/12/from-april-people-will-be-deported-for-earning-less-than-35000-5748436>.

30. Robin James, *Resilience and Melancholy: Pop Music, Feminism, Neoliberalism* (Alresford: Zero Books, 2014), 12–13.

31. Alex Haley and Malcolm X, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1992), 329–30.

32. Ahmed, "Declarations of Whiteness."

33. Matthew 19: 16 and 21–22 (NRSV).

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34. Marcella Althaus-Reid, *The Queer God* (London: Routledge, 2003).

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Chapter 5

Complicity

What Is It, and How Can It Be Avoided?

Pam Laidman

Read about healthcare and it is not long before you come across the term "complicity" or the suggestion that some individuals or groups of practitioners were or are being complicit in something wrong to the detriment of the health of those using health services.¹ Even a brief review of the bookshelves and newspaper articles on healthcare will indicate as much: doctors are complicit with pharmaceutical companies, professional organizations with politicians, researchers with funders, managers with private providers, directors acting together in a complicit manner to secure and implement political cost cutting and "evidence based rationing". I make no comment on the accuracy (or not) of these accusations. Instead, the aim of this chapter is to problematize the way in which the term "complicity" is used in such healthcare discourse.

Perhaps the most conventional understanding of complicity is that of individuals who, while not directly engaging in acts of wrongdoing, act in a way that nonetheless implicates them in such wrongdoing; and such individuals are considered to be blameworthy. So, if my acts constitute entering a conspiracy, colluding in cooperation with others, conniving to act in consort with them, or if I am responsible for actively encouraging others to become involved in acts of wrongdoing, then I am complicit and thus, in some way, responsible for the outcomes and consequences resulting from what the wrongdoer has done.² In this sense, complicity clearly has negative connotations: since it is a case of one's actions (or inactions) in some way contributing to wrongdoing, being complicit is a wrong or bad thing to do.³ For the sake of brevity, from this point onwards I will be referring to this conventional framing of complicity as the *traditional view of complicity*.

In this chapter I wish to do two things. First, I wish to raise some concerns about this traditional view of complicity. In particular, I want to point out