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## Advent Love: The Advent of #MeToo

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## Advent Love: The Advent of #MeToo

### **Abstract**

"It is the season of our soul's groaning for 'thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.'"

Posting about Christ's light overcoming our world of darkness from *In All Things* - an online journal for critical reflection on faith, culture, art, and every ordinary-yet-graced square inch of God's creation.

<https://inallthings.org/advent-love-the-advent-of-metoo/>

### **Keywords**

In All Things, Advent, love, sex crimes, healing, church

### **Disciplines**

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### **Comments**

*In All Things* is a publication of the [Andreas Center for Reformed Scholarship and Service](#) at Dordt College.

# in things

December 24, 2018

## Advent Love: The Advent of #MeToo

**Aaron Baart**

I am right in the middle of reading Bessel Van Der Kolk's *New York Times* bestseller, *The Body Keeps the Score*. A brilliant pioneer in the field of psychology, the book examines trauma's physiological effects on the human body and where healing can be found. Van Der Kolk masterfully explains a lifetime of work spent in the world's leading research centers. Essentially, he contends that when any one of us experiences trauma or abuse of any kind, the body "metabolizes" that experience. And when it does, the results wreak havoc on our limbic system, fracture our memories, and leave us profoundly affected physiologically. In other words, all that hurt has to go somewhere. It does not simply evaporate into the ether because "out of sight, out of mind" is a fool's wish when it comes to dealing with past trauma. Rather, his contention is that it becomes localized in distinct aspects of the human body and without proper treatment and healing, our traumatic experiences will cause long-term emotional, social, spiritual, and physical wounds.

But if Van Der Kolk is right—and it is quickly becoming almost universally accepted that he is—if our bodies digest and metabolize abuse and trauma, deeply affecting and altering us, would not the same principle also hold true within the body of Christ? That when abuse occurs, and if not dealt with properly and thoroughly, its long-term effects cripple the Church's ability to function effectively.

The #MeToo movement has rightly awakened us to the systemic prevalence of sexual abuse within our society. It has held a mirror to our culture and the reflection staring back at us is more misogynistic and abusive than we ever wanted to acknowledge. Celebrity and political abuse scandals brought to light have magnified the dangers that power imbalances inject into relationships. For far too long, shame and threats have

crippled victims, but now a painful dose of reality is confronting those of us who have refused to ask the questions we did not want to know the answers to.

More recently, the #ChurchToo movement has painfully revealed that adding the adjective “Christian” to anything does not inoculate it against the indiscriminate attacks of sin and sexual abuse. The Church has fared no better than any other institution as stark statistics of abuse have proved no respecter of stained glass or steeple. The thief still comes *only* to steal, kill, and destroy, and the Church remains forever in his cross-hairs. But it is all the more tragic when the institution that has preached countless messages on how “the truth will set you free” has demonstrated a consistently abysmal record applying this axiom of her Savior. The Church, the one place on earth designed to be the bastion of hospitality, the embodiment of self-effacing love, and safest place ever conceived for those who are hurting, has instead created environments of darkness and secrecy—the very climate in which sexual abuse thrives.

The Church has always stammered and stuttered when seeking to find a voice even to address healthy sexuality. Her silence on virtually all sexual issues is both notorious and incriminating. Sure, she speaks loudly and poignantly when pointing the finger beyond her walls regarding prohibitions of homosexuality and the perils of abortion, but the Gospel wasn’t given to us merely to address other people’s sins. And the enormous log in our own eye has rendered us incapable of speaking effectively to the speck in another’s. Furthermore, it has blinded us as to how broken we truly are. Rampant pornography usage, suppressed sexual dysfunction, and an overwhelming abdication of teaching on healthy sexuality in the Church has created the ideal ecosystem for sexual abuse. Well-known Bible teacher and abuse survivor herself, Beth Moore says it well, “Our inability to address sexual *immorality* in the church has crippled our ability to address sexual *criminality* in the church.”

As the Bride of Christ, we need to both own up to and repent of these failures. And we should not be surprised by them. The Great Accuser’s playbook has not changed all that much over millennia. In Genesis 3, when sin enters into creation, it is our sexuality that proves itself the most vulnerable part of our being, feeling sin’s effect first: “I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid” (Genesis 3:11). Shame and hiding. When it comes to our sexuality, we have persisted in our vain attempts to apply these same two failing coping mechanisms ever since. They are the only two ingredients needed in the Evil One’s cocktail of silence that the Church continues to greedily drink.

The liturgical season of Advent is the time of the year when we voice our anticipations, acknowledging and naming our deep longings for every ounce of healing that the Great Physician came to bring. It is the season of our soul’s groaning for “thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.” We give melodic voice to our longing in the

Christmas carols we sing, as we acknowledge our need for his coming again. But if the earth that our churches inhabit and minister to is ever to look more like heaven, perhaps we should take a page out of heaven's songbook. Jesus told us that "there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not repent." So, with that sort of revolution in mind, imagine a Church with a culture so healthy that she matched heaven's—a place where people genuinely felt invited to experience release from their sexual sins in an environment so attuned to heaven's that our times of liturgical confession and assurance were answered with loud cheers, applause, and shouts of rejoicing as the Church learned to mimic the heaven Jesus described. This is the invitation to come out of hiding and into the light, where freedom for the captive is found, and the broken-hearted move from shame to healing.

So, this Christmas, as we ceremoniously light the Advent candle of love, consider it a move of sheer insurrection against the kingdom of darkness, a declaration that we will strive to love like heaven does, renouncing a lust that only ever asks, "What's in it for *me*?" And trade it in for the way he taught us to love, which only ever asks, "What's in it for *them*?" For lust is only and always *selfish*; real love is only ever *selfless*. And so, as we light the Advent candle of love, we dare to imagine a world of "thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." And as we do this year, I am praying for a renewed culture of humility in the Church, one that learns how to repent and recognize that only in the truth will we ever be set free. Only in repentance can we ever begin to deal with the trauma that our Church body has endured. And only in the light will we ever see what needs to be healed. Our children will never receive a healthier church tomorrow if we do not pay the cost of purchasing that gift today. For no one can open what has not been gifted to them. And you can't take out of a grave on Sunday, what wasn't put in it on Friday.