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## Queer Church Construction: Dialoguing Ecclesiology and Queer Theory

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LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO

QUEER CHURCH CONSTRUCTION:  
DIALOGUING ECCLESIOLOGY AND QUEER THEORY

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO  
THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL  
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF  
MASTER OF ARTS

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BY

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Is God indeed to dwell on earth? If the heavens and the highest heavens cannot contain you, how much less this house which I have built!

– 1 Kings 8

Theology is basically an incoherent art. If we were going to use a metaphor inspired by the New Testament, we would say that theology is the art of going to bed with God while avoiding full sex.

– Marcella Althaus-Reid, *Indecent Theology*

I wish God were alive to see this.

– Homer Simpson

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## INTRODUCTION

Here at the onset of this Herculean task I am reminded of an old fable my parents would tell me often. It is a story of three small pigs, each attempting to build his own house. The first and oldest pig built his home out of straw, but upon completion a hungry wolf knocked at the door saying, "O pig, let me in or I'll huff and I'll puff and I'll blow your straw house down." The frightened pig saw how easily even the slightest morning breeze caused the house to move and so escaped to the second pig's house while his own was destroyed by the wolf. Now the second pig built his house near a forest and thus out of timber. Following the first pig, the wolf soon came to the wooden house and said, "O pigs, let me in or I'll huff and I'll puff and I'll blow your timber house down." The two pigs saw how the evening wind crept through the cracks in the walls and knew they would not hold against the wolf's attack. And so, they fled together while the timber house fell down. Deciding to take shelter with their third and wisest pig, they soon discovered that he prudently built his house out of bricks from a nearby quarry. Following not far behind, the wolf soon approached the door of the brick house and hollered, "O pigs, let me in or I'll huff and I'll puff and I'll blow your brick house down." The three pigs noticed how the cold night air could not get in from between the bricks and mortar and, so, felt secure in brick haven. The wolf huffed and puffed, and huffed and puffed, and, still more, huffed and puffed but to no avail. The walls were too strong to be blown down and the three pigs lived safely in the brick house, no longer fearing the wolf.

Like the parables of Jesus, stories like these are mirrors for us to see ourselves in, but I will be honest in that I do not know who I am in this story. On one hand, I might resemble the pigs: a Roman Catholic faithful who is attempting to build the Church from the materials around me, exercising prudence and discernment with sound doctrine so that the walls may not crumble.<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, I am a theologian that resembles the wolf whose disruptive actions force the pigs to be *more* prudent and use *new* materials in building Church. Just as the wolf grows older and finds new techniques in huffing and puffing, so too must the Church respond to the signs of the times and find new materials from which to build and reinforce its old foundations.<sup>2</sup> As living members of the Body of Christ, there are times in which we are called to fortify these foundations and times when we are to remodel them all-together.

This concept should not come as a surprise to the Church historian: the greatest cathedrals have been destroyed and rebuilt repeatedly throughout history. St. Peter's Basilica, the rock of the Church, is an apt example. The original structure constructed by Constantine was made of wood. When it burned to the ground, stone was used. Then when that weathered, they decided on marble. Today the marble façade has become grimy with sexual abuse, rampant clericalism, the romanticization of doctrine, and – most egregious – the neglect of the outcasts. It is not that we should find a new rock from which to construct a new Church, but rather, that we should use the gifts put forward by today's time to make the structure stronger than ever before. What new material might be used to reinforce the rock of the Church? In many ways the

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 7: 24-39.

<sup>2</sup> This call of the Church to grow and adapt is the main edict of Vatican II's *Gaudium et Spes* in which "the Church has always had the duty of scrutinizing the signs of the times and interpreting them in the light of the Gospels." *Gaudium et Spes* §4.

following work is an imagining of that journey to discover and an attempt to strengthen St. Peter's – casting it in chrome and neon, a way to usher modern forms of faith and love.

If Church can persist past the physical building, we must ask the question, “What is Church?” At its core, the field of ecclesiology encompasses the mystery that is the ontic/ontological reality of the Church. It is both the brick and mortar institution and the metaphysical “Body of Christ” by which we all are connected through the Incarnation's rupture into history. Because of this, a distinction need not always be made between *Church* and *church*. Sex abuse in the parish is as much a stain on the metaphysical *Church* as it is on the parish just as the clerical structures in the metaphysical Church feed the sins present in the local and greater institutions. This cyclical nature of ecclesiology's duality presents the theologian and faithful alike with a problem of permanence. Can the Church so easily change when it is corrupted? While the local *church* on the ground level must attend itself to matters of practicality (i.e. finances, staff, electric bills) the metaphysical *Church* must account for the formation of tradition. But does a community cease being *Church* when their parish is dissolved for failing to pay its bills? For clarity on this matter, I will use the language of church/ekklesia with the English referring to the local, small church and Greek *ekklesia* referencing the universal Church. The binary phrasing of *church/ekklesia* or simply *Church* will be used at times when the two cannot be so easily separated. However, the distinction should be sufficient in dispelling some confusion for our purposes here.

On this, I can offer an anecdote. My parish growing up saw a number of priests come and go through the years. The first priest of my childhood had been there many years and built a strong parish community of faithful. When he left the priesthood, the diocese brought in a series



of charismatic priests to correct the course of our community because we had affirmed our pastor's vocational struggles. These new priests would stay no longer than a year, bringing their reforms and never failing to impress upon the physical structure a memento of their stay. Our humble parish amassed quite the collection of statues and paintings from newfound donors, none of which our original community had any affinity or connection to. These priests did not leave these mementoes for our sake, but for the sake of their *groupies*, families who would follow a particular priest across towns and states. For these groupies, church/ekklesia was found in their idolization of their priest; while for us, the pastor did not make the Church, community did. This trend of charismatic clericalism, for indeed these priests thought themselves the pope of their church, fails to recognize the immense contextualization of church communities. This is to say, the way of living out the tradition of the ontological church and the cultural diversities of any given parish community can be expressed differently in different parts of the world. Church is just as dependent on cultural context as it is the tradition of Rome.

It is in this attention to context that we are able to envision a Queer Church, a community of LGBT(Q) faithful in full communion with the mystical Church and the local, institutional church with them. This does not imply a repression of queerness through the acceptance of harmful doctrines; Queer Church implies the fullness of lived Truth (be that gender or sexuality) in each member. The following work promises the seeds to the construction of that Church, but it is *not* the foundations to Queer Theology itself. I make this distinction because, for some, the idea of queering (that is, to apply queer theory to; to disrupt) theology solely means to justify the validity of homosexuality, transness, and gender theory in the Christian corpus. For example, one task of the queer theology is contextualizing the narrative of passages traditionally used against

queer communities such as Sodom and Gomorrah. Greater minds than I have shouldered this burden of justification to the church/ekklesia, and I will cite these voices where appropriate. Rather, what follows are arguments which build upon an *a priori* assumption of the validity of queerness in the Church and, importantly, that their existence and active witness in the Church *intrinsically orders* the main doctrines of Christianity, namely, the love of God and neighbor. In constructing this vision of Queer Church, it is not my intention to justify queer existence, but to show how the foundations of the Church are strengthened and reinforced by queer participation.

This begs the question, “What is meant by Queer?” I have already offered one definition: that “to queer” is to disrupt or apply Queer Theory to. However, it is a vast term that commands attention and nuance. “Queer” can be used as an umbrella term for those in the LGBT community including individuals not represented in Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Trans categories. These can include – but are not limited to – asexuality, non-binary, two spirit, pansexuality, trans-nonbinary, gender-queer, and more. Importantly, “Queer” also means “strange” or “foreign”. What is queer in this regard are those found on the fringes of society and, in this case, the ekklesia. In this way the Church’s original directives was to be *queer to the world*: “If you belonged to the world, the world would love you as its own. Because you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world – therefore the world hates you” (John 15:19). This passage is not a sentiment of Christian victimization but description of the ontic/ontological nature of the church/ekklesia. Paradoxically, it is an agent of the world but also something transcendent. As members of this *corpus*, we as individuals also share in this

paradox.<sup>3</sup> While the context and vocabulary of this word *queer* is in constant flux, I prefer the freedom of this umbrella term, hence my usage of “LGBTQ” or “queer peoples” instead of “LGBT+”, “LGBTQIA”, or other terms.

What is the purpose of constructing Queer Church? Following this theme of ontic/ontological, we might say that on the tangible level such construction is about creating a space for queer peoples in an area that has traditionally been enemy territory. It is no secret, and unfortunately of no shame to the Church, that the institution has gravely harmed queer communities. From the failure to address AIDS to conversion camps, the Church has done irreparable harm to queer bodies throughout the centuries, especially in the modern era. These bodies carry with them the trauma caused by religion as they walk into an ever-enclosing frame of immanence and secularization.<sup>4</sup> The encouraged sexual repression of those deemed “deviant” and “disordered” has led to a de-sexing of church space and spiritual life, further complicating for queer bodies the definition of “church/ekklesia.” In the struggle for self-acceptance, queer peoples eventually undo the repression caused by tapes of hegemonic propriety and embrace into their personhood that which once was buried. Because of this phenomenon, the queer body is able to find Church in the sex dungeon just as much as the pew, as will be explored.

Thus, what follows is not strictly about the creation of safe space for queer bodies. Because of the complexities of secular queer experience and queer experiences of Church, the following pages offers a new methodology for understanding the field of ecclesiology reading today’s signs of the times. It is not a method built on Tradition, though it certainly requires its

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<sup>3</sup> As Rahner puts it, we are hearers of the word, receivers of God’s transcendence in the world.

<sup>4</sup> c.f. Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age*.

presence for authority, but, rather, on the queer body's existence in space, time, and performance in salvation history (or perhaps, salvation future).

The first chapter, "En-sexed Flesh in De-Sexed Space; or, The Case of Jesus' Missing Penis," is an examination of the en-sexed body in the pew, looking at how Church space has become de-sexed in response to extreme sexual purity. Because of the Word's penetration into history, Jesus' virility is found in his preaching, not his semen, leading to Jesus' penis, what was once the ultimate symbol of the Incarnation, and Mary's vagina for that matter, to go missing. The result is that only the *effects* of one's sexuality are permitted in Church space, i.e. children and chapel veils. How are sexual bodies *repressed* and *expressed* in the Body of Christ? Utilizing Macella Altaus-Reid's methodology of indecency and a hermeneutic of sodomy, the layer of the de-sexed space will be peeled back to see the theo-sexuality present in the Body of Christ through the prototypical bodies of Jesus and Mary.

The second chapter, "Time as Sacrament, Body as Calendar," is an inquiry into the queer body's experience of time. The often-forgot aspect of ecclesiology, queer experiences of time have much to offer the field by reconfiguring our eschatological expectations of the future and hinting at the Church its queer apocalypse. In this chapter, I examine the Liturgical Calendar and how it has become an oppressive heterodoxy on the temporalities of queer people, of whom – both the open and the undisclosed – experience in some way closet time. What does Church look like taken out of its cyclical time and put into the time-before-time of the queer closet? With the help of Eve Sedgwick's analysis of the book of Esther in her *Epistemology of the Closet*, we see a new aspect of the closeted, temporal ecclesiology in the eschaton of outness expressed in the inbreaking of *kyros* into *kronos*.

The third chapter, “Church(es) that Matter: Performative Indwelling of the Holy Spirit,” concerns itself with the pneumological aspect of Queer Church, defining the Holy Spirit by queer theory’s concept of gender performativity. Judith Butler’s notion of performance prompts us to examine the heterodox ways in which Church is performed and the rebellious performances of Church by queer bodies outside the cathedral walls. These spaces are secular syntheses of queer space and time, and thus are able to function as affirming spaces. However, they are not explicitly Church communities. Looking at these sub-cultures, we can ask then how queer charisms of the Holy Spirit may shift our attention back to the Trinitarian drama and the altar-stage of the Queer Church.

As a final introductory note, no contextualizing of ecclesiology can be complete without a mention of Avery Dulles. His categorization of Church models has aided theologians and faithful alike in engaging with the ontic structures of Church hierarchy and the ontological mysteries of Church community. What follows is not a proposition of a new model. It is not a queer inclusive appendix chapter. It is not a model. Rather, what I am proposing here is a new methodology completely separate from the modalic conception of Dulles, but neither should this be seen in total opposition to his work and methods. The vision of Church I lay out is simply that: a vision, and artistic one at that. Dulles’ greatest contributions, in my opinion, are his varied paintings of Church that he gives us. Each is unique yet still clearly cohesive as a series. He composes a symphony of many sections, each with its own theme and mood, all still part of a greater story of salvation.

What follows, then, is not simply the thoughts and analysis of an academic theologian. It is also the vision of an artist *and one particular artist at that!* Although being presented in a

queer way, the imageries and methodologies I will employ, such as examining the penetration of the *logos* into history, are all too familiar within a patriarchal tradition such as Roman Catholicism. My personal experiences of consolation and desolations have led me to these pages, but they may be very different if written by a trans-lesbian-woman of color than by me, a white-cis-gay man. This thesis is not an all-encompassing vision of church for all queer people, but what I hope to be a jumping off point for other artistic visions of Queer Church Construction. In this vision, the Spirit invites us to rethink, reimagine, and continually re-queer Church through our experiences with Church space and Church time. Most importantly, that same queer Spirit challenges us to disrupt our existing heterodox notion of Church in ecclesiology all together. Reading, then, the signs of the times, a new dimension of Church must be examined in a secular world, one in which the Church lies in our transcendent experiences perceived by the subject. In many ways then, this work is an extrapolation and realization of Karl Rahner's mystic Christians of the future. That future has arrived, but Rahner's mystics are found among those queer Christians who are denied sacraments, denied marriage, denied dignity by the Church. What can this thing we call *Church* look like if built from the experiences of gay bashed Matthew Shepherds, lesbians of color lynched on the cross, drag queens of faith with bricks in their hands, *intrinsically disordered* peoples misdiagnosed by Church Doctors, AIDS victims killed by negligent pastors, trans people denied visibility by the Magisterium, and so many more burned at the stake of repression throughout history?<sup>5</sup> This is but one vision of that Church.

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<sup>5</sup> "All Democrats object to men being disqualified by the accident of birth; tradition objects to their being disqualified by the accident of death." G.K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1995), 53.

CHAPTER 1  
EN-SEXED FLESH IN A DE-SEXED SPACE;  
OR, THE CASE OF JESUS' MISSING PENIS

*Out damned spot!*

– Lady Macbeth

When I think of the field of ecclesiology, I immediately imagine the role of an architect who has been tasked with designing the floor plan of sacred space. Who may she permit to move around the space? Is there a sound-proof room so that young families and children feel welcome? How should people queue for the sacrament? Does a single cantor with a guitar lead the people in worship on a stage by the altar or do choirs of angels rain down from a loft above? Similarly, which bodies gain access to the altar of the Lord? Is it wheelchair accessible? Are passionate faithful with intellectual disabilities able to participate on the altar, or only behind the scenes or not at all? Are women permitted or solely the clerical bodies of sexually stunted men? Do black and brown bodies have access to the space or is there an iron curtain separating the masses from altar-area-paintings of white angels and European saints? What aspects of our bodies (race, citizen status, gender role, marital status, etc.) are we asked to hide in order to participate in church space.

When one enters church space – the old vestiges of the Roman Temple – a sacrifice is required. To access these spaces, our sexuality (among other aspects of the body) must be offered up to be either slaughtered or repressed while in the space. The ghosts of the Vestal Virgins haunt the modern Catholic Church, which – devoid of any (legitimate) temple prostitution – throws into disorder the erectile (that is to say, transcendent) nature of our inner beings. In the case of sexuality, which we will focus primarily on in this chapter, sacred space has become *de-sexed*. The sacrifice/repression of the sexual self is not only required of those of us with “disordered” desires, but also for the heterosexual body in marital union or otherwise. Only the *effects* of sexuality are permitted: children are praised and even expected while statues of young virgin girls who killed themselves staving off their rapist are venerated for their purity. Thus, the *de-sexed* nature of sacred space affects all bodies.

I use this term “*de-sexed*” because it describes something that at one time held sexuality as core to its being, or simply a part of human nature, but has since been spayed and neutered by its human masters. Nowhere is this phenomenon clearer than the very body of Jesus on the cross. Contemporary theologian Mark D. Jordan recounts a story from his childhood:

On one antique Mexican crucifix that hung in my mother’s home, a corpus of this kind bore only a flimsy bit of parchment as its loincloth. When the paper fell away after one too many moves, it was revealed that there was nothing underneath. The corpus on the crucifix was shockingly detailed, except in the lower abdomen, which was as smooth and abstract as an old-fashioned manikin.<sup>1</sup>

Where does our aversion to Jesus’ genitals come from? What is the difference when Michelangelo has no problem celebrating the nude male-form in his David, but the adult Jesus in the *Pieta* has a marble cloth instead of nudity? Where has Jesus’ penis gone in our reflection of

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<sup>1</sup> Mark D. Jordan, “God’s Body,” in *Queer Theology: Rethinking the Western Body*, edited by Gerard Loughlin (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2007), 283.



his humanity and beauty? Jesus clearly shared the privileges of maleness in his society, moving about the gendered world freely in ways women and eunuchs could not. There is no doubt that Jesus *had* a penis in his lifetime and yet, in ours, he has not just been castrated but *de-sexed* altogether. The notion of Jesus' sexuality is abhorrent to modern heterodox faithful because the *de-sexed* crucifix has mandated similar recourse unto the bodies of penitents.

For the queer faithful body, the de-sexed crucifix is anomalous. Queer bodies outside the closet, having already undergone a de-sexing (repression), experience the opposite phenomenon: the *en-sexed* flesh, or the body which appreciates and lives in its sexuality. Importantly, this notion of *en-sexed* flesh is *not* a revolution for coitus in the pews, but simply the self-love and self-acceptance of living in the fullness of one's sexuality and, as will be argued, theo-sexuality. For bodies such as these, to trespass sacred space in defiance of its de-sexed idol, the crucifix, is the ultimate brave act. The question we must answer here is how queer, *en-sexed* bodies move about in church spaces constructed by ecclesiology which recognize their humanity. This notion of en-sexed flesh is not nearly as novel as one would think: put theologically, en-sexed flesh is the active performance of the Body of Christ. What this *performance* concretely looks like will be presented in a later chapter. The following discourse argues for this connection between the theology of the Body of Christ and the queer theory of en-sexed flesh, or as Marcella Althaus-Reid would call it, "the lemon vendor [who] sells you lemons in the streets without using underwear."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Marcella Althaus-Reid, *Indecent Theology: Theological Perversions in Sex, Gender and Politics*, (New York, NY: Routledge, 2000), 2.

As a path forward, I will utilize the scandalous methodology of *indecenty*, proposed by Althaus-Reid, to explore the source for the *de-sexing* of the Body of Christ on the cross which we encounter in church spaces today. This investigation of Jesus' missing penis is just one course of many that can reveal the hidden chains under which our sexualities are kept under lock and key in current, heterodox sacred space. Because of its theological nature, whatever we can say about the body of Jesus the Christ can equally be said about the Body of Christ as a metaphysical reality of our bodies in relation to the church/ekklesia. Special attention then can also be paid to Mary's vagina, which in the birthing of the Christ, was stretched and damaged only to be locked in a perpetual chastity belt by theological history. That same instance on purity is a unique weight still placed on women in the *de-sexed* space today because of this translation of the Body of Jesus of the Body of Christ. How did purity become an *effect* of Mary's forced sexuality after birthing Jesus? I will propose that both Jesus' penis and Mary's vagina have been usurped by the Word's *penetration* into history and, thus, buried away from the narrative. The resurrection of these holy genitalia are now necessary to the redemption of the de-sexed Body of Christ.

### **An Indecent Point of View and Sodomite Considerations**

The modern Catholic Church will do most anything to avoid a scandal. Marred with one sex abuse crisis after another, the Church's ecclesiological structures have been tainted with the stains of sin, hypocrisy, and clericalism. Many theologians, at least in Catholic institutions in the United States, have responded by constructing theologies (with its tome, the catechism) as having been immaculately conceived. These theologies, in theory, are taken as without fault: perfect in every way and always harmonious with salvation history. Such theological

presuppositions and clerical implementations in the past have permitted the Church's complicity in the burning of women in the Inquisition, the justification of slavery in the Indies, and the theft of already inhabited Turtle Island. Like the de-sexed Church space, theological constructions can be warped in sinful ways so as to oppress certain bodies. However, it is the task of today's theologians to deconstruct these theologies, not so that they may be thrown out with the bath water, but so that we might separate the notions of sinfulness with notions of *indecenty*.

Feminist and Liberation Theologian, Marcella Althaus-Reid (1952 – 2009), undertook this task in finding the indecency of God and humanity with her two major publications, *Indecent Theology* and *The Queer God*. Theology, especially if it is to be liberative, must always be perverse to our more privileged and complacent sensibilities. For her, this requires not just a preferential option of the poor, but a *sexual* option as well. This derives from the main task of *Indecent Theology*: to break down the colonization of liberation theology turning the poor into a nameless, asexual, and overall theoretical category instead of the contextualized reality and complexity of peoples. She notes the white-washing that occurred when visiting European and American theologians analyzed *the poor*:

Anybody who has been in Latin America during the yearly carnival celebrations knows that carnivals are the festivity of the poor and sexual indecency: 'the revolt of the Queers.'" Political and sexual transgressions are the agenda of carnivals, yet the subject of carnivals, the poor, have been obliterated in Liberation Theology. What happens then is that if the shanty townspeople go in procession carrying a statue of the Virgin Mary and demanding jobs, they seem to become God's option for the poor. However, when the same shanty townspeople mount a carnival centered on a transvestite Christ accompanied by a Drag Queen Mary Magdalene kissing his wounds, singing songs of political criticism, they are not anymore God's option for the poor.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Althaus-Reid, *Indecent Theology*, 25.

Althaus-Reid introduces the concept of *indecent* as a natural and contextual part of a human being, not the negative that Western theology has created it to be. There is an obsession in Western theology to create a duality between pure and impure, pure and sexual, pure and filthy. Even in English it is not difficult to come up with a list of antonyms each with subtle implications of what is natural (the pure) and what is *unnatural*. Althaus-Reid's methodology is to use the perverse language of sexuality (concretely founded in sexual experience, fetishism, and kink) to find the layer of natural indecency that has always been present in ekklesia theology and has been covered up in the de-sexed space. She notes that theological discourse in Feminist and Liberation theology talks about sex as gender while avoiding discussing it in context of 'having sex', and yet "sex as lust is an important conceptual category which is not new, but has dominated theology for centuries."<sup>4</sup> For our purposes here, *indecenting* doesn't involve actively perverting theology to en-sex the de-sexed space so much as it is peeling back the unnecessary layers of purity to reveal the indecency that has always been innate to the Body of Christ.

However, we cannot stop at unearthing this layer. Because this is an endeavor to reconstruct ecclesiology in a modern world and not merely an historical endeavor, queer interpretation must also play a role so that Queer Church can be tangibly built from out this analysis. As such, *indecenting* must also include an active *sodomizing hermeneutic*. Writing in her *The Queer God*, Althaus-Reid explains: "If (biological) reproduction is what distinguishes sodomy from the idealized sexual practices of the heterosexual (vaginal penetration) then God in the Hebrew Scriptures is a Sodomite. This can be said because God only metaphorically

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<sup>4</sup> Althaus-Reid, *Indecent Theology*, 87.

‘reproduces’ with Godself. Therefore, God’s love belongs to the Sodomite kind, for God’s love is not biologically procreative.”<sup>5</sup>

The hermeneutic of sodomy<sup>6</sup> contains two main subversions which I employ to analyze en-sexed flesh: 1) the body reproduces sexually but non-biologically, thereby existing outside heterodox institutions from which the body can be defined, and 2) the body contains both performances of the heterodox domination and queer submission separate from the societal gender role.<sup>7</sup> The latter will be seen in the dual notion of the *εχ* and *fiat* in the Christ/Mary prototype explored in en-sexed flesh and can be seen in all gender expressions (hence its characterization as being outside gender role). By using this radical hermeneutic from which to perceive the Christian God, Queer Church pays respect to the full theological complexity owed to Her, instead of the watered-down purity of the de-sexed Church space. This Sodomite God, the en-sexed Body of Christ, living within the Church space *still*, encourages us to “engage in multiple combinations and exchanges reflecting that face of the Queer God which can be seen amidst the Queer people of God at the margins of the church and [theology].”<sup>8</sup>

### **The Missing Penis of Christ**

As church architects we must ask ourselves, why can sexuality (even to an extent among heterosexuals) not be expressed in sacred space? However, as Queer Church architects it is also

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<sup>5</sup> Marcella Althaus-Reid, *The Queer God* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2003), 86.

<sup>6</sup> It is important to remember that the lens through which I employ this hermeneutic is through my vocabulary as a male-sodomite. As the Feminist scholar will (and very well should) critique, I cannot fully escape this reality of this interpretation. Therefore, while my analysis of theo-sexuality may contain more of the verbiage of this male-sodomite framing, it is not constrained by it due to its nature in the diversity of the Body of Christ.

<sup>7</sup> Althaus-Reid, *The Queer God*, 87.

<sup>8</sup> Althaus-Reid, *The Queer God*, 88.

to our benefit to disrupt these heterodox notions of space. By sleuthing the case of Jesus' lost penis and redeeming the *indecenty* of the Body of Christ, de-sexed bodies of all natures will be liberated from heterodox purity and its goal-oriented fecundity. A redefinition of the Body of Christ and the complexity of its *theo-sexualities* will also provide new lenses through which to view the church/ekklesia as a whole and our relationships within it.

It is only reasonable for anyone to object to my quest for the new Holy Grail and on the merits of common decency, they would be right to do so. I would feel just as violated in another obsessing over me in such a nonconsensual and personal way. Yet, we must ask ourselves if Jesus, being both Man and God, possesses this same natural right. It seems to me, as a preface, that Jesus the Man ought to be offered this privacy, but it is the very privacy of Jesus the Man that constitutes the mysteries of Jesus the Christ. Therefore, I will continue in this crusade weary of this dichotomy. Jesus is not the exception to this privacy of intimacy that is afforded to dignity. It could also be argued that by beginning the search with and fixating on Jesus' uniquely *male* appendage, I am propitiating the more harmful aspects of this patriarchal system and erasing Jesus' womxnhood. As a gay, male Christian, it seems natural for me to start at the penis of Jesus, if only because it has been uniquely taboo to the male homosexual. While Jesus' penis may be the touchstone for the queer, male-centered spirituality – I will proceed to queer even this male-centered notion, instead seeing in Jesus' penis a theological sexuality that embraces the feminine just as much as the masculine. The Godhead of Christ demand's this critical exploration so that we may come to know more intimately about our own complex creation. If we did not hold this distinction as it is, but instead afforded Jesus the Christ such privacy, the Eucharistic sacrament truly would be cannibalism. But precisely because we do not consider

ourselves cannibals when consuming the Body and Blood, so too can we search for the missing penis of Christ without indicting ourselves as perverts.

There is a difficulty in where to start this investigation; the historical record of Jesus' penis is as scarce, more so even, than the record for the historical Jesus. What *can* be truded up from the biblical narratives of Jesus is his male status in 1<sup>st</sup> century Palestinian society. The conclusion of Jesus' maleness shouldn't be *a priori*, as it so often is, but rather, deduced from working backwards from the early reception of Jesus. Tradition, per Mark Jordan, thought it "important that Jesus was male, both because he needed some sex/gender and because he had the sex/gender that claims particular privileges and powers."<sup>9</sup> Only then is it assumed that Jesus indeed possessed the genitalia to verify his social positioning. We can only imagine how different the Evangelists would have portrayed Jesus had this claim been contested or seemed in any way suspicious!

Interestingly, Luke is the only Evangelist that makes note of Jesus' circumcision in the birth narrative and functions as another way to characterize the holy family as being, per Lukian scholarly consensus, "devoted to observance of the law."<sup>10</sup> The passage of Luke 2:22-40 is a parallel to 1:5-25, 57-56 when John the Baptist is promised to Zechariah and soon born, having been "filled with the Holy Spirit" (Luke 1:41) while in Elizabeth's womb. The events of both boys' circumcisions are accompanied by prophecies in the form of canticles regarding the children's futures. The first thing to note of this narrative is that, stripped of any theological meaning, Jesus had male genitalia, was presumably circumcised under Mosaic law, and was

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<sup>9</sup> Jordan, 282.

<sup>10</sup> Marion L. Soards, "Luke 2:22-40," *Interpretation* (Richmond) 44, no. 4 (1990), 401.

afforded the privileges of maleness under that law and cultural norms. This is to say, Jesus did not perform his ministry under the pretext of womanhood (though femininity is not out of the question) or of being a eunuch.<sup>11</sup>

More remarkable is that this body of Jesus' was, as Elizabeth Stuart so aptly puts it, "male but from purely female matter."<sup>12</sup> There exists in the body of Jesus and in his genitalia, a certain omni-queerness in which all flesh, queer and heterodox, can see itself in. A question arises then on whether this specific flesh of Jesus was sexual. We have no accounts of Jesus having children or taking up a wife (outside of Dan Brown, that is): actions that would have been expected of an observant Jew of his time. While much debate exists as to the historicity of this kind of celibacy,<sup>13</sup> the silence on Jesus' sexuality in the historical corpus and Gospels may be a purposeful question mark, as it were, not unlike many of the pedagogical strategies employed by Jesus. John Meier claims in his first volume of *A Marginal Jew* that, "mirroring his parabolic speech, and like his easy fellowship with the socially and spiritually marginalized in Palestine, his celibacy was a parable in action, an embodiment of a riddle-like message meant to disturb and provoke [his contemporaries] to thought – both about Jesus and themselves."<sup>14</sup> This mystery of Jesus' celibate performance confronts Christians with the question, "What does it mean to

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<sup>11</sup> An exploration into Jesus' performances of femininity (transness) and eunuch-hood (asexuality) would require a greater biological reflection than can be afforded here. There must be a distinction between the biological and the will (i.e. asexuality and celibacy).

<sup>12</sup> Elizabeth Stuart, "Sacramental Flesh," in *Queer Theology: Rethinking the Western Body*, edited by Gerard Loughlin (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2007), 65.

<sup>13</sup> See John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus*, vol. 1 (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1991), 332-345.

<sup>14</sup> Meier, 342.



reproduce?” The story of Jesus implicates him with only one sexual act, that being his own conception, and just as Jesus was conceived by the Spirit, so too did he reproduce through that same method in which he was conceived: *impregnation by wind*.

Across the Ancient Near East (Egypt, Palestine, Persia, etc), Mediterranean, and even in the earliest records of Japan, there exists ancient myths and stories detailing certain animals being impregnated by the wind. This has been noted by classicist Conway Zirkle in horses (*Iliad*, Book XX), vultures (Pliny, Book X, Ch. 6), hens (Aristophanes, *The Birds*), as well as some accounts of human women (Ovid, *Fasti V*; Hui-shen; and Ma Tuan-Lin, among others).<sup>15</sup> On one hand, conception by wind is typically a way for naturalists to logically reason through how certain animals conceive when they cannot be observed by the human eye, like vultures high up in their nests or mythical tribes of women living without men. On the other hand, our view of this ancient understanding changes when we delve into the language they use to describe it: πνεύμα (pneuma), רוּחַ (ruach), and *spiritus* all have a dual meaning of spirit/wind.<sup>16</sup>

Scholar Troy W. Martin writes that, Matthew’s unusual usage of the word εχ in the phrase “from the holy wind” (Matthew 1:18, 20), conveys a familiarity with pre-Christian Greek authors writing on this topic.<sup>17</sup> While the ancients used the εχ as a reference to the masculine (i.e. penetrative, active) nature of semen, “Matthew’s similar use of this preposition in his account...

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<sup>15</sup> Conway Zirkle, “Animals Impregnated by Wind.” *Isis* 25, no.1 (1936): 95-130.

<sup>16</sup> Meier, 221.

<sup>17</sup> Troy W. Martin, “Animals Impregnated by the Wind and Mary’s Pregnancy by the Holy Spirit,” in *Annalise di Storia dell’ Essergesi* 31, no. 2 (2014), 11-24.

emphasizes that the holy wind is the source of Mary's pregnancy. This wind provides the potency necessary to cause a fetation in her womb and to generate her offspring, Jesus."<sup>18</sup> The patristics were also aware of this connection and used it as a way to explain the conception of Jesus as a natural phenomenon. Among them were Augustine (*De civitate Dei* 21.5), Ambrose (*Hexaemenron* 5.20), Origen (*Contra Celsum* 1.37), Basil (*Hexaemenron* 8.6), Eusebius (*Praeparatio evangelica* 3.12), and Lactantius (*Divinae institutiones* 4.12). In his refutation against Celsus, Origen uses the concept to argue for the virgin birth:

But as a further answer to the Greeks, who do not believe in the birth of Jesus from a virgin, we have to say that the creator has shown, by the generation of several kinds of animals, that what He has done in the instance of one animal, He could do, if it pleased Him, in that of others, and also of man himself. For it is ascertained that there is a certain female animal that has no intercourse with the male (as writers on animals say is the case with vultures), and that this animal, without sexual intercourse, preserves the succession of race. What incredibility, therefore is there in supporting that, if God wished to send a divine teacher to the human race, He cause Him to be born in some manner different from the common! Nay, according to the Greeks themselves, all men were not born of a man and woman.<sup>19</sup>

Though there are no accounts of Jesus impregnating anyone with his semen, there are accounts of Jesus sending out (“εχ”) the Holy Spirit upon others, birthing them into new life. One of the first can be seen in Luke's visitation of the pregnant Mary, having already conceived via the Holy Spirit, to Elizabeth:

In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and exclaimed with a loud cry, 'Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And why has this happened to me,

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<sup>18</sup> Martin, 22.

<sup>19</sup> Origen (*Contra Celsum* 1.37) in Zirkle, 106.

that the mother of my Lord comes to me? For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy. (Luke 1:39-44)

For Lukian scholars attempting to understand John the Baptist, this is the moment in which Luke's John gets the authority to preach and baptize. The presence of the Spirit in Jesus flows forth from Mary's body and seeds itself *in utero* with John the Baptist, making him in Luke's unique portrayal, the first Christian. It is in this theological account that Jesus, before he is even born, demonstrates his virility, not in the sense that he must have intercourse in order to birth new Christians into the world, but rather, that the Word, penetrating human history, *replaces his semen with the Spirit and his penis with the Gospel*. Jesus embodies and progenerates this newly found fecundity in the Word throughout the Gospels – “[Jesus] breathed on [the disciples] and said, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit’” – and charging his disciples to do likewise: “And he said to them, ‘Follow me, and I will make you fish for people.’” (Matthew 4:19).<sup>20</sup>

In the Biblical narrative, the potency of Jesus' spiritual virility is revealed at Pentecost, the delayed orgasm from the death and resurrection. Or, put another way, the crucifixion is the orgasmic finale (*le petite mort*) to the indecent Passion play, the Resurrection the afterglow, and Pentecost the positive pregnancy test. In this end, we are able to see the penis of Christ as not *de-sexed* flesh nor missing manhood, but the totality of Jesus' *en-sexed* flesh and living in the fullness of Jesus' sexuality. While modern Church space has taken the absence of Jesus' penis as a sign of celibacy and propaganda for the de-sexed Church space, Queer Church may instead see

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<sup>20</sup> See David Matzko McCarthy, “Fecundity,” in *Queer Theology: Rethinking the Western Body*, edited by Gerard Loughlin (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2007), 86-95.

the rediscovered penis of Christ as the *en-sexed* flesh of the Gospel and the Word made Man: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (John 1:1).<sup>21</sup>

This investigation into Jesus’ penis then arrives at a certain particular twist, which presents itself not so much a reclamation of male sexuality, but a redefinition of it. Apologists of the de-sexed Church space stop short at Jesus’ celibacy as a message for us to do likewise instead of pondering the queerness of his spiritual virility. To be the *en-sexed flesh* in the *de-sexed space* is to recognize this dichotomy. This particular flesh recognizes that the demise of the de-sexed sacred space is not a call for temple prostitution nor is it the nymphomaniacal desire to orgasm in the pews. Rather, en-sexed flesh encompasses the theo-sexuality of Christ, whose auto-asphyxiate desire is shown on the cross: biologically sterile, but spiritually virile.

### **Destroying the Vessel: Mary’s Active Fertility**

We have seen up to this point how conception via wind acts as a new theo-sexuality for the Body of Christ, but as Paul reminds us in 1 Corinthians, the concept of the “Body of Christ” is not so easily pinned down to the body of Jesus. As I mentioned before, the privacy of Jesus constitutes the mystery of Christ. So too do these mysteries flow out from the person of the Christ and into each one of us who in turn fertilize the Word into our beings: “For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ. For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; *and have been all made to drink into one Spirit*. For the body is not one member, but many.” (1 Corinthians 12:12-14). The sexual happenstance of the

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<sup>21</sup> Although this begs the question, “What might this look like in lesbian spirituality of the Queer Church? Asexual? Non-binary? Trans-femme?”

Word penetrating history would not have produced this Body of Christ had it not been for the prototype of that very Body in the Virgin Mary.<sup>22</sup> The active  $\epsilon\chi$  of en-sexed flesh is the sending forth of the Spirit (Mark 5: 21-34) and the *fiat* of Mary constitutes the compliment in its active consenting (not passive nonconsent) of the Body of Christ's fertility.

Sacred history is a constant retelling of the mutual (and sexual!) desire between the divine and human. If, as Marcella Althaus-Reid writes, theology is the "art of going to bed with God while avoiding full sex," then the Incarnation event was the attempt at the couple "going to bed with God for the first (unique) time, and without a condom."<sup>23</sup> No other event in Sacred History (or even the profane) has had as much an impact on sexuality in the sacred space than the Incarnation, particularly for women, who theologically bear the onus of Augustine's sexually charged original sin.

We have already examined the masculine virility of Jesus' en-sexed flesh penetrating into history, but the true crime of the de-sexed church space is its censorship of the en-sexed flesh's feminine fertility of the Word. This censorship shows itself in a number of ways, the chapel veil – and the purity it enforces – but one of them. If a primary usage of a condom is to prevent the sperm from travelling to the woman's egg and fertilizing it, then the veiling of women represents a contraceptive too; the veil keeps Word from fertilizing the soul by perpetuating a purity standard upon women. If Jesus' penis is to be the ultimate example of the logos, then the Word is anything but pure in its reality (especially not to today's standards). Neither should Mary and her

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<sup>22</sup> Much like our investigation of the penis of Christ, the hymen of Mary occupied minds of many early Christian figures and medieval faithful, and many entertaining theories were concocted as to how her hymen was healed after the birth of Jesus. This highlights the bodily reality which our theological abstractions are inherently based upon.

<sup>23</sup> Althaus-Reid, *Indecent Theology*, 23.

vagina be seen as so strictly pure then too, for she happily consented to the wind's penetration.

Althaus-Reid, seeing from her feminist perspective the importance of the *logos'* indecent virility, reflects on this unjustified female purity through Biblical characterizations:

We all know how the biblical characters are cited through the lives of Christian people. For instance, young boys in the church may be expected to grow faithful as Abraham or repentant as King David. They could be stubborn fiery characters like Peter, but as 'Peters' they will be understood and corrected in their congregations. Yet, no woman is supposed to get pregnant by God or at least to have that historical possibility as a second coming of God in history. No young girl thinks 'perhaps if I am humble enough God will have sex with me'. The second coming has been spiritualized and dematerialized, but there is no reason to do so since we have grown into that understanding of God in history.<sup>24</sup>

The veiling of women and the insistence on their sexual purity have existed long before Christianity, but it is undeniable that Christian spaces are one of the most prominent areas that both passively and actively uphold this purity today. The most prolific writings on women's dress in the Christian corpus seems to come from none other than Tertullian in the third century. In his *On the Apparel of Women I & II* and *On the Veiling of Virgins*, Tertullian – and many of the patristics as Robert Covolo argues in his book *Fashion Theology* – characterizes clothing as an identity marker separating the wearer from the greater society. Fashion is something to be perceived socially by the other and theologically by the self.<sup>25</sup> Explaining Tertullian's 3<sup>rd</sup> Century Carthage Fashion Week lineup (consisting of the humble *pallium* and a *au naturale* lack of make-up, jewelry, and hair dye) Covolo describes this *double entendre* culture of the Christian antiquity fashion world: "Such a pretext [of double meanings] meant the complex signification

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<sup>24</sup> Althaus-Reid, *Indecent Theology*, 54.

<sup>25</sup> Robert Covolo, *Fashion Theology* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2020), 3-20.

of fashion had become manifest within the church – the veil serving as both a signifier of chastity in this age (wearing the veil) and an eschatological herald of transformation of humanity in the age to come (removing the veil) at the same time.”<sup>26</sup>

The insistence on purity in this life also implies the hopeful (sexual) liberation in the next, a particular polemic against the fertility of ex-sexed flesh. My question here is regarding the cognitive dissonance around the theology of women’s sexuality. We have seen already a certain “male privilege” within en-sexed flesh. We are all encouraged to express the masculinity of Christ’s theo-sexuality by spreading the seed in the active sense via the *conception by wind*: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 29:19). But we are scandalized when asked to imitate the theo-sexuality of Mary’s fertility in receiving the Word and *en-sexing* our flesh. As Christians, it is not enough to evangelize but not allow ourselves to be transformed by the Gospel message. Therefore, theo-sexuality must also encompass a certain fertility.

In a parable to Jewish leadership, Jesus says:

“Listen to another parable: There was a landowner who planted a vineyard. He put a wall around it, dug a winepress in it and built a watchtower. Then he rented the vineyard to some farmers and moved to another place. When the harvest time approached, he sent his servants to the tenants to collect his fruit. The tenants seized his servants; they beat one, killed another, and stoned a third. Then he sent other servants to them, more than the first time, and the tenants treated them the same way. Last of all he sent his son to them. “They will respect my son,” he said. But when the tenants saw the son, they said to each other, “This is the heir. Come, let’s kill him and take his inheritance.” So they took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him.

Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?” “He will bring those wretches to a wretched end,” they replied, “and he

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<sup>26</sup> Covolo, *Fashion Theology*, 8.

will rent the vineyard to other tenants, who will give him his share of the crop at harvest time.”

Jesus said to them, “Have you never read in the Scriptures:

‘The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; the Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes’?

*Therefore I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit. Anyone who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; anyone on whom it falls will be crushed.*” (Matthew 21: 33-44)

One of the vaguest of Jesus’ parables, my queer reflection revolves around the *en-sexed* flesh being characterized not as the owner, the tenants, the servants, nor the son – but as the land. God, the owner of the vineyard, has tasked the tenants, the church/ekklesia, with sowing the seeds of the Word to fertilize the ground with the goal of producing fruit, fully alive Christians. Fruit itself is an ovum which has been fertilized; as it matures it grows its fleshy exterior protecting the seeds which will one day be sewn to make more fruit trees (communities of Christians).

But in a fantasy of power over the fruit and its trees, the tenants refuse to let the fruit out of the vineyard, in a way stalling the fruit from going out to the owner and to the world. Because the fruit is not being harvested and shipped out, the vineyard is kept celibate from new fruit trees being planted for next season. Perhaps in the minds of the tenants, the fruit might be more exclusive, more *pure*, if it is only curated from that land like the Nebbiolo grape that makes Barolo wine. But because the tenants are attempting to restrict the Word of God to the vineyard in Piedmont and not to the vineyards in California, the land becomes *de-sexed*, unable to express itself in any real way. Instead, it is the rejected peoples who will be given this land to tend to the fruit and see that it is produced freely. The *en-sexed* flesh of the queer Christian living freely in



their sexuality (and/or gender expression) are these new tenants, because they themselves have been fertilized by the Word in the way Christ fertilized, not by childbirth but through Spirit.

En-sexed flesh in the Church pew is still prohibited because of the insistence on this aspect of childbirth. Those bodies that are not actively seeking permissible, Church-sanctioned child production are relegated to the demands of virginity and celibacy. For this, the ekklesia upholds Mary as the ultimate virginal figure whether or not if scholars can agree on if she remained a virgin in her life.<sup>27</sup> Tina Beattie points out the irony that in the de-sexed space of Catholic theology, Mary is theologized with a “tendency to endow the virgin birth with [supra]sexual connotations”<sup>28</sup> by both liberals and conservatives alike.

What then is the nature of Mary’s theo-sexuality in the church/ekklesia if it is permitted in the de-sexed space? The most important aspect of Mary in the theo-drama of salvation was not her motherhood or being a passive vessel (*theotokos*) as these theologies often conclude with, but rather, her active and enthusiastic *fiat*. This admission of active consent of the *conception by wind* is the most crucial aspect of feminine *en-sexed* flesh. Resulting children or vows of virginity are the *effects* of sexuality which are permitted in de-sexed spaces. The desire itself, though, which seeks no ends but completion in itself, is the resulting transcendence in the en-sexed flesh. Ultimately, Jesus is not the most important part of the story of the Incarnation, but that Mary, as Karl Rahner so aptly puts it, was an active “hearer of the Word.” En-sexed flesh in the Church pew is not necessarily the heterosexual Irish-Italian couple with eight children, a minivan, and another bun in the oven. Queer bodies in full freedom and acceptance of

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<sup>27</sup> See Meier, 317-332.

<sup>28</sup> Tina Beattie, “Queen of Heaven,” in *Queer Theology: Rethinking the Western Body*, edited by Gerard Loughlin (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2007), 297.

themselves actively participate in the sexual nature of Mary's *fiat* and its revelation of preternatural transcendence in humanity. It is with this *en-sexed* flesh, containing the virility of the  $\epsilon\chi$  and the consent of the *fiat*, that we can then begin to see the Body of Christ, the Church, as itself *en-sexed*.

### **Conclusion: The Two-Spirit(ed) Flesh of Queer Church**

Members of the Church are called to be the Body of Christ, flesh *en-sexed* by the Spirit and made fruitful by the Word. Though the Body of Christ represents a profound shift in social understanding, it is not a *tabula rasa* for which newly discovered queer theories to write themselves upon, but to be discovered from the Body of Christ in the other. We must be careful of this particular overreach and refrain from making our bodies into idols. No body – be it queer/heterodox, abled/disabled, pure/impure, *en-sexed*/*de-sexed*, black/white, etc – should be held as superior over another.

It may seem that in my analysis of the *en-sexed* Body of Christ that I recognize and uphold a heteronormative, yet necessary binary: masculinity and femininity, virility and fertility. But, such is the nature of reproduction, be it the creation of a child or the birthing of a new spirit. I instead see these two qualities of nature as a dance in all bodies, heterodox and queer: this is how it may be constituted as the Body of Christ. A queer child is born of the fertilization of an ovum, but this does not cheapen the child's queerness. They, too, have the same ability to be inspired and to inspire, to breathe in and to breath out, to change the world radically and to be radically changed by the Word.

The theo-sexuality of the Body of Christ dances within the soul of each Christian, and indeed each person! A person becomes truly *en-sexed* when they have reached inside themselves to see

the Imago Dei and defiantly refuses to de-sex it. This is why the en-sexed flesh in the Church pew sits in defiance of de-sexed Church space; they do not shy away to gaze upon the penis of Christ, or imagine semen on the blouse of Mary. They do not actively seek to repopulate the world Christian population through restrictive marriages and de-sexing their bodies, but recognize their bodies as a part of the Body of Christ, fertilizing the *fiat* of the hard-hearted with the Word and birthing them to life through Baptism. What an old understanding of Church this is!

If Eve was the first to give birth out of necessity for God's plan of salvation, Mary is the last... we are the Body of Christ, called to live not in denial of ourselves, but to sit in the world as *en-sexed* so as to set the world on fire with our queer love.

## CHAPTER 2

### TIME AS SACRAMENT, BODY AS CALENDAR

*A thousand years in your eyes are merely a day gone by.*

– Psalm 90:4

Having reflected upon a notion of ecclesiology as the embodiment and sexuality in the church space, I now wish to shift perspectives to the often forgot about realm of temporal ecclesiology. There is often talk about “creating space” for people within the walls of the ekklesia, but queer existence does not exist in space the same way gender and race perhaps do.<sup>1</sup> I will argue in this chapter that queer existence is a temporal one surviving within the spatial normativity of a heteronormative realm (i.e., “the closet”). Therefore, carving out a space for queer bodies from within this realm does us no good; it is still that same heterodox space on loan to us and constantly skeptical of us. Queer Church construction, then, cannot take its first steps in the creation of space, for unlike our creator, we cannot build *ex nihilo*. Instead, we should turn our focus to the less recognized – yet fundamental – aspect of the field of ecclesiology in the liturgical calendar.

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<sup>1</sup> As Eve Sedgwick offers in her *Epistemology of the Closet*, the legal defense of *homosexual panic* in gay bashing cases shows “that hatred of homosexuals is even more public, more typical, hence harder to find any leverage against than hatred of other disadvantaged groups. ‘Race panic’ or ‘gender panic,’ for instance, is not accepted as a defense for violence against people of color or against women; as for “heterosexual panic,” David Wertheimer, executive director of the New York City Gay and Lesbian Anti-Violence Project, remarks, ‘If every heterosexual woman who had a sexual advance made to her by a male had the right to murder the man, the streets of this city would be littered with the bodies of heterosexual men.’” Eve Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2008), 19.

The primacy of space as prevailed within ecclesiological reflections in the past two millennia. But notions of church/ekklesia can be constructed around time just as much as they can be based on space. Liberative ecclesiologies have discussed the creation of church space for unwelcomed bodies, but space cannot be conceived of at all when marginalized bodies have only experienced a liminal temporal existence. I am specifically speaking to the queer body within the closet. Furthermore, general experiences of queer temporality lack a definitive vision of space. For queer persons space is constructed and is dependent on *times* of outness that can be safely expressed in the scheduled meetings of certain subcultures – i.e., Leathermen and the BDSM dungeon, drag bars, online witchcraft covens. How then can we go about creating a “space” for queer bodies from the experience of their time, just as the cathedral is built around the ekklesia’s understanding of time? The Church’s heterodox time is ceaselessly cyclical having nearly forgotten the eschatological promise of the Parousia. Readings and sermons on the apocalypse and end-times have been condensed into the four weeks of Advent, and even then they are shaded by the subsequent arrival of Christmas. Rather, as Eve Sedgwick tells us, “There are risks in making salient the continuity and centrality of the closet, in a historical narrative that does not have as a fulcrum a saving vision – whether located in past or future – of its apocalyptic rupture. A meditation that lacks that particular utopian organization will risk glamorizing the closet itself, if only by default; will risk presenting as inevitable or somehow valuable its exactions, its deformations, its disempowerment and sheer pain.”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Sedgwick, 68.

These questions lay at the heart of my inquiry and concern for ecclesiology. To answer these questions in their full context, a methodology of time must first be argued for and constructed out of the Christian corpus. I will do just that in the first section of this chapter, showing how Augustine's brief analysis of three-fold time in his *Confessions* offers a disruptive queering of the modern Church's cyclical temporality. By arguing for time's relativity in the *distentio animi* and the distinct relationship of space-time, time will be shown to have always existed in the spatial ecclesiologies that have defined the Church in a normative, heterodox way.

The second section undertakes the subversive queering of ecclesiology by examining the experience of queer temporality and how it exists as a vision of Augustine's *distentio*. As I will argue, the liminality of queer being is fully expressed in the eschaton of "outness," an intangible hope of freedom that exists only in the present's expectation of the future. Only with these in mind can we begin imagining a Church space for queer people. What will it look like? How might its Liturgical calendar, if at all, be different than the heterodox one? A possible vision may be expressed in the Church's existing season of Advent, one that expresses the full experience of liminality and hope for the eschaton of Christmas, or the "coming out" of Christ.

The attempt to queer the very study of the Church is no simple task. However, for queer persons in particular, it would be increasingly difficult to continue to do so without turning the temporal aspects of church/ekklesia. How can we talk about creating a space for communities who have only ever existed without it? For a space to be made for marginalized LGBTQ bodies, we must be willing to accept that they cannot nor should not be created *ex nihilo* out of existing church structures. Rather, new church/ekklesia spaces ought to be built out from this group's experiences of temporal liminality, what is commonly known as "the closet," from which hope

can arise for the emergence of future spaces of queer acceptance. What I will call the eschaton of “outness” has the ability to radically transform how queer, faithful bodies move about and exist in Church spaces and structures. I believe this can only be done reliably by approaching the field of Ecclesiology through a hermeneutic of time.

### **Distentio and Space-Time BDSM**

Indeed, time is not foreign to ecclesiology or the church/ekklesia. It has been baked into the fabric of our liturgical experience. On one hand, as our bodies enter the sanctuary of a church, tradition dictates the presence of certain artifacts to remind us of past and future: holy water fonts remind us of our Baptism, the crucifix draws our attention towards our death as Christians; the stained glass windows take us back to biblical memory and/or the specific community’s memories, and at the altar is the table at which that community (past, present, and future) will gather as one family in the Mass. In this way, temporality is present in the considerations for a church architect through the dimension of church space.

But there is one aspect in which no architect – be they pastor, laity, or bishop for that matter – can manipulate: the liturgical calendar. The liturgical calendar is the primary temporality that affects the body’s experience of worship. In our examination of temporal ecclesiology, it is important to start first with the experience of the body.<sup>3</sup> Liturgist Frank C. Senn, in his *Embodied Liturgy: Lessons in Christian Ritual*, reminds us that “the ‘body of Christ’ is more than a metaphor for the church; it has a physical reality in the physical bodies of its members who constitute the assembly.”<sup>4</sup> Thus, liturgy and worship are experienced in the body,

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<sup>3</sup> Though this begs the question, “Which body?”

<sup>4</sup> Frank C. Senn, *Embodied Liturgy: Lessons in Christian Ritual* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2016), 5.

though no other aspect of church life affects the body's experience more than the liturgical calendar. The cycle of seasons dictates what songs we sing, what themes we hear from the pulpit, what colors we wear, what incense we smell, and what emotions we express.<sup>5</sup> The body experiences the anticipation of feast in certain seasons, celebration of the present in some, and still remembrance and repentance in others. Importantly, the liturgical calendar is cyclical. It is meant to be repeated each year beginning at Advent *while our lives progress linearly*. The cycle renews and replays while the body is born, lives, struggles, and dies. This is the point where the liturgical calendar breaks with the experience of the body and attaches itself to the experience of the ekklesia, which outlives generations. Which is correct: the cyclical time of the church/ekklesia or the linear time of the body?

What, then, is time? No inquiry into temporality can avoid this simple question. For Augustine, time is measurement: an ever fleeing hermeneutic of the present from which we determine the distance of the past and the prediction of the future. Augustine's discussion of three-fold time<sup>6</sup> is a novel one for his era. The popular conception of time in the 4th Century was a cyclical one; specifically, time is doomed to repeat itself. Augustine, however, argues time from a linguistic approach, noting our tendencies to measure past and future ("short time" and "long time"). From his reflections on time in Chapter XI of his *Confessions*:

But how can something be long or short which does not exist? For the past now has no existence and the future is not yet. So we ought not to say of the past 'It is long', but 'it was long', and of the future 'it will be long'. My Lord, my light, does not your truth mock humanity at this point? This time past which was long, was it long

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<sup>5</sup> For Europeans this had an added meaning: "It is helpful that in Europe the Christian fasts of Advent and Lent occurred during the times of harvest and culling of the herds before the winter and the births of new livestock in early spring. This provided meats for the Christmas and Easter celebrations." Senn, 160.

<sup>6</sup> Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, translated by Henry Chadwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 11.20.26.



when it was past or when it was still present? It could be long only when it existed to be long. Once past, it no longer was. Therefore it could not be long if it had entirely ceased to exist.<sup>7</sup>

Time for Augustine is a constant stream of linear progression using our experience of the *present* as a measuring stick for the past and future.<sup>8</sup> But do bodies measure the present in the same ways? Augustine struggles with this relativism of temporal phenomenology because of how “time flies so quickly from future into past that it is an interval with no duration. If it has duration, it is divisible in to past and future. But the present occupies no space.”<sup>9</sup> Thus, time in the present is a liminal “stretching-out [*distentio*],<sup>10</sup> or as Tennessee Williams poetically puts it: *the longest distance between two places*. It is not time itself that is being stretched though, but the soul of the observer, creating what Augustine refers to as the *distentio animi* (stretching-out of the soul).<sup>11</sup> Importantly, it is not the soul which has the power to stretch itself, rather, *distentio* is the outside force of time pulling at the transcendence of the soul.<sup>12</sup>

An important distinction must now be made here regarding the two categories of time and space. Until this point, I have purposefully created a duality between time and space so that I could stress the importance of time in ecclesiology. However, now that I have established the prior existence of temporal ecclesiology and muddied the waters of that temporality, it would be

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<sup>7</sup> Augustine, 11.15.18.

<sup>8</sup> Augustine, 11.16.21. See Hugh M. Lacey, “Empiricism and Augustine’s Problems About Time,” *The Review of metaphysics* 22, no. 2 (1968): 219-245.

<sup>9</sup> Augustine, 11.15.20.

<sup>10</sup> Augustine, 11.23.30.

<sup>11</sup> Augustine, 11.26.33.

<sup>12</sup> Sean Hannan, *On Time, Change, History and Conversion*, first edition (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020), 14.

impossible for me to continue in my case without first correcting this error. Time and space are not dualities but interlocutors, a dyad. In a discussion between two established philosophers of time, Graham Harman and Manuel DeLanda, both argue if there exists a division between the practicality of time and reality of space.<sup>13</sup> For DeLanda, time is simply sand in the hour-glass; it can be either measured by clocks or experienced by the subject. This has traditionally been referred to by theology as *kronos*. But Harman complicates the issue by dividing the word “time” between that which can be measured and the *distentio* of the present. In this conception, clock-time and sensual experiences of time upon the body belong to the category of space because they deal with changes to the ontological body. True “time” for him is a “living present”<sup>14</sup> much like Augustine. For Harman, the *living present* is the ontological *othering* of time so that it can be separated from our experiences of the temporal dimension, a way of surpassing idolization and anthropocentrism. This conception of living present in the *distention* allows for the inbreaking of *kyros*, God’s time, into *kronos*. As Sean Hannan reports on the discussion in his *On Time, Change, History and Conversion*, “The living present is not just for subjects perceiving phenomena; the living present is the key to the structure of time itself.”<sup>15</sup>

I have also said earlier that inquiries such as these ought to begin with the body. This too was a purposeful misdirection. According to Harman’s analysis of the (big T) Time, it is the existence of the living presence that could be said to *stretch the soul* so that it can experience the present as a measuring stick. Because, then, the present is something with which to measure,

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<sup>13</sup> Hannan, 1-9.

<sup>14</sup> Hannan, 7.

<sup>15</sup> Hannan, 8.

*Time has begotten space* through the act of *distentio*: “So it is in you, my mind, that I measure periods of time.”<sup>16</sup> It is the spatial aspect of measuring for Harman which brings about Augustine’s argument of anti-history.<sup>17</sup> The stretched-out present is used to bring our memories of the past (experiences lost to the construct of time) into the relevance of the present and expectations of the future, thereby tempering the experiences of our bodies:

Suppose someone wished to utter a sound lasting a long time, and decided in advance how long that was going to be. He would have planned that space of time in silence. Entrusting that to his memory he would begin to utter the sound which continues until it has reached the intended end. It would be more accurate to say the utterance has sounded and will sound. For the part of it which is complete has sounded, but what remains will sound, and so the action is being accomplished as present attention transfers the future into the past. The future diminishes as the past grows, until the future has completely gone and everything is in the past.<sup>18</sup>

Because our interpretations of space stem from the temporal realm, space always points back to Time’s self. In this way it is self-referencing. But space does not beget Time. If it did then Church seasons would be marked by renovations, new artwork, and deterioration. But because our personal conception of time outside the church is linear, we mark our relationship with the church/ekklesia in linear ways. The church space enters into our interpretations of memory and thus in relationship with our temporality and personal narratives that we write. Our personal time creates the meaning of the church’s space for us. While *inside* the church space however, the liturgical calendar dominates the substance of that space *at that time* and how our bodies participate in that space. In this sense, the inbreaking of *kyros* into *kronos* at the point of

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<sup>16</sup> Augustine. 11.27.36.

<sup>17</sup> Anti-history presents itself as a new methodology for the epistemic historian. By admit the subjective construction of time by the human experience, the “past” is only ever relevant for our immediate present and possible future. It, in effect, removes the History department from the Natural Sciences building with its strict methodologies and plants it in the Philosophy building with its eye ever on the turn to the subject.

<sup>18</sup> Augustine. 11.27.36.

*distentio* bridges together salvation past and the historical present, allowing us to make a space sacramental.<sup>19</sup> This domination of time over the subordinate space allows us to see the reality of the queer closet, existing only in time and holding no space.

### **Considerations for Closeted Martians Who Would Like to Hold Mass**

In this way, we have worked backwards from body to Time so that we can see Time's effects on the body. And yet one large problem remains for Augustine, one that he does not have the tools to address: the relativity of time's stretching on the soul. If Time begets space through a series of interpretations, i.e. the measuring of memories into the present, then space too (including the clock-time of the liturgical calendar) begins to resemble more of an artistic impression than a purely infallible structure. Take for example, the problem we might face when asked to say the Sunday Mass on Mars. The liturgical calendar we use is entirely dependent on the 365-day rotation of the Earth around the sun and the cycle of the moon around the Earth. But for Mars to orbit around the same sun it takes 687 Earth days. How would we know what color to dress the altar or what Gospel reading should be proclaimed? Here we see an acute issue with the relativity of time. One could argue that they should use the Earth's liturgical calendar, but that is not the experience of time to the Martian, and thus we would be committing the grave sin of imperialism unto the red planet. I use this to show that just as Mars can be colonized by the shadow of Earth's normative liturgical calendar (a function of space), so too can queer bodies be suppressed by the patriarchal and normative interpretations of cyclical time implemented in the Church's seasons.

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<sup>19</sup> Sacraments are the suspending of time so as to allow Christ and his *times* to become present to us now and in our visions of future.

In this example and in my introduction, I have asserted a fundamental difference in the experience of time in the heterodox body than in the queer body. This is due to the experience of the closet. The closet as a queer phenomenon is fundamentally a temporal liminality in which the body is in stasis due to secrecy: it is born but unable to express its nature in any real way. The clock has been created, in a way, but has yet to start. In her *Epistemology of the Closet*, Eve Sedgwick rightly notes that the “deadly elasticity of heterosexist presumption means that, like Wendy in *Peter Pan*, people find new walls spring up around them even as they drowse: every new encounter ... erects new closets whose fraught and characteristic laws of optics and physics exact from - at least gay people - new surveys, new calculations, new draughts and requisitions of secrecy or disclosure.”<sup>20</sup> Because of the vast interiorization and self-policing within the closet, there is an extreme intimacy with the body and interiorization, even if this means self-denial of sexual/gender difference. Of this Sedgwick notes that for gay people (and other queer individuals who experience the struggles of secrecy and disclosure), even those who are out, the closet remains a shaping and looming presence over their lives. While Time is other and outside of ourselves for Augustine, the *distentio animi* is a very personal force on our souls. It is impossible for one soul to be stretched but not another. Intimacy with one’s self and self-knowledge (even if while denying it) is intimacy with Time.<sup>21</sup> This is why the closet sets queer bodies apart from heterodoxy.

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<sup>20</sup> Sedgwick, 68.

<sup>21</sup> David van Dusen, *The Space of Time: A Sensualist Interpretation of Time in Augustine, Confessions X to XII* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 225-233.

Queer flesh also embodies a certain *expectatio* (expectation)<sup>22</sup> fundamental to Augustine's Time. There is an issue for Augustine of how much the soul can be stretched. We begin to forget memories as we age, but this changes with our current present and is fluid; we also cannot see into the future, nor can our expectations capture everything. Rather than lamenting on this, he inquires as to what are our souls are stretching towards [*intentio*]: "Again, surely you would not deny what He speaks to me in my inner ear, that the expectation of future events becomes direct [awareness] when they are happening, and this same [awareness] becomes memory when they have passed."<sup>23</sup> Though mutable still, the *intentio* allows for the transcendent interjection of God's grace into human free will. There becomes a goal, a "working towards" in which all interpretation of one's life leads up to. The closet implies the hope of coming out, and thus all past experiences within the closet are oriented towards interpreting the expectation of outness in the future. When a queer body comes out of the closet, their present (now colored by the experience of outness) interprets their past experience of the closet as a *time before time* (i.e. before creation),<sup>24</sup> as if there were no time while in the closet.<sup>25</sup>

But the category of "outness" is not a clean one. One cannot remain queer and live in complete safety. "Coming out" is the practical matter of revealing to the world one's queerness, but one remains in the closet because it is not safe to be queer in the world. Outness does not eschew those harmful realities but courageously defies them in hope of creating the *eschaton of*

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<sup>22</sup> Augustine, 12.15.18.

<sup>23</sup> Augustine 12.14.18.

<sup>24</sup> Augustine 11.13.15.

<sup>25</sup> *It is the time you have wasted for your rose that makes your rose so important.* – Antoine de Saint-Exupery, *The Little Prince*.

*outness*, or, the disruptive inbreaking of grace into Time.<sup>26</sup> It is this *eschaton of outness* that is the goal of the queer *intentio*.<sup>27</sup> Because this hope of freedom exists in an eschaton, queer existence even after the closet is one of liminality, stalled in the *distentio animi*. To complicate the matter, the specific categories within the LGBTQ community are becoming more normalized in certain parts of the world. This “outness” may not mean the same for a gay white man living in New York as it does to a gay black man in South Africa. Neither is closeted/outness a clear binary; one can live in both worlds. Yet the *eschaton of outness* is not something specific to queer bodies.<sup>28</sup> It is a hope of freedom for the other just as much as it is a hope of complete freedom for myself, a greater realization of the Kingdom of God as opposed to a normalization of an ostracized congregation.

How, then, can the ekklesia come to share in this vision of eschaton in order to construct Queer Church? Thankfully, we need not search far in the heterodox space for a similarity. Only spanning four weeks, the Church’s most forgotten season of Advent might pose a pathway into creating space out of queer temporality. In a modern world of theo-capitalism surrounding the Christmas season, Advent often gets assumed into the festivities. And while, on one hand, it is a time of waiting and expecting the birth of Christ into the world, it is also a time of apocalyptic

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<sup>26</sup> By framing the *eschaton of outness* as a queer apocalypse, we engage closer to the field of ecclesiology and see how this approach disrupts (queers) Church just as much as it creates space for queer folk. Thus, Queer Church Construction is a dual meaning.

<sup>27</sup> Karl Rahner’s entry on eschatology in his *Sacramentum Mundi* further queers the eschatological expectations of Christians: “Eschatology is not an advance report of events taking place ‘later’. That is the basic intention of false apocalyptic as opposed to genuine prophecy. Eschatology is a forward look which is necessary to someone for their spiritual decision in freedom.”

<sup>28</sup> Steven Seidman, “Are We All in the Closet? Notes Towards a Sociological and Cultural Turn in Queer Theory,” *European journal of cultural studies* 1, no.2 (1998): 177-192.

and eschatological hopes. The queerness of the latter often gets sidelined in favor of the liturgical calendar's cyclical nature: better to remember Christmas again than to hope for the apocalypse! But the apocalypse and Christian eschaton are the escape routes out of cyclical time and into queer liminality. It is this waiting and hoping for (and perhaps even the queer failure of) the more tangible Parousia over and against the continual remembrance of the Incarnation at Christmas that deflates the liturgical calendar and points it at the *eschaton of outness* in Christ for all bodies.<sup>29</sup> For Augustine too "the only route from *distentio animi* to redeemed time is through Jesus Christ."<sup>30</sup> As we have seen in the previous chapter, mysteries held within the body of Jesus are given to the members of the Church in the Body of Christ. Temporally speaking, Jesus' body is the frame of the liturgical calendar: we are born at Christmas with him and we die and resurrect in Lent and Easter. This calendar has become separated from the body of normative faithful who are able to passively witness the events of Christ without themselves facing crucifixion. Queer bodies facing disclosure must be born, crucified, and resurrected many times even in one day. Thus, it can be said that the liturgical calendar is written upon queer bodies just by Christ Himself repeating the play alongside us.

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<sup>29</sup> "The circle returns upon itself and is bound. The cross opens its arms to the four winds; it is a signpost for free travelers." G.K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*.

<sup>30</sup> Matthew A. Wilcoxon, "Augustine's Theology of Time: A Trinitarian Reassessment of Confessions 11," *Hythrop journal* 57, no. 4 (2016), 675.



### Conclusion: Esther as the Queer Liturgical Calendar

Sedgwick offers a poignant reflection of the Biblical story of Esther<sup>31</sup> as the prototype of the body socially conditioned *within* the closet and the “transformative potential”<sup>32</sup> of the *eschaton of outness*. Importantly, her perspective into the story stems from her lived experience and the milieu surrounding the 1986 Supreme Court decision *Bowers v. Hardwick* in which the courts ruled that sodomy was not protected by the constitution and could be outlawed if local and federal legislatures wished. Conversations among queer and ally groups turned to those at all levels of the bureaucratic court – assistants, clerks, even justices themselves – which most surely had closeted queer members among their ranks. What would it have been like for a closeted gay clerk to refine the language of a legal opinion that would reinforce his own discrimination? If he spoke out, he would have been fired and likely blacklisted from political work, erasing any potential career he had been building. Somehow, actively supporting his own discrimination ensures his safety for the time being. Making a concrete comparison to the survival of Queen Esther, Sedgwick emphasizes the great risk of ending closet-time(s), which theory today often romanticizes.

Queen Esther spends an unknown time as a closeted Jew, forbidden to disclose her identity by her uncle Mordecai so that she could win the king’s favor (Esther 2:10), but thinks that by revealing her status, the king will call off Haman’s genocide. Mordecai, a Jew with a clear sense of a messianic hope in mind, impresses on Esther the extent of the queer failure of

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<sup>31</sup> While Sedgwick uses Jean Racine’s play *Esther* as her source because of her reliance on literary texts, I will utilize the original narrative since this is a theological endeavor.

<sup>32</sup> Eve Sedgwick, 75.

coming out: “Do not think that because you are in the king’s house you alone of all the Jews will escape. For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father’s family will perish” (Esther 4:13-14). For Mordecai, who has already outed himself to the royal court in Esther 3:4, escape from the closet did not mean freedom but a sure death. Even if he might escape the gallows, the potential for death will always follow. Heterodox bodies do not fear the threat of the gallows barring false prosecution, death comes at the end of their ‘allotted time.’ Queer bodies face this death too but only if they manage to escape death at the ever-present hands of prejudice first: the queer reward for escaping death is... death. Just as Mordecai emphasizes that death is assured for the Jew, *so too is death assured for the queer body, closeted or not*. “And if I perish, I perish” (Esther 4:16).

Death (and all its many forms) – because it is nothing more than an ever-present, subjective frame from which we measure our joys, desires, expectations, hopes, and loves<sup>33</sup> – can present itself as the ultimate *eschaton of outness*: what Sedgwick refers to as the “powerful unknowing *as* unknowing, not as the vacuum or as the blank it can pretend to be but as weighty and occupied and consequential epistemological space.”<sup>34</sup> Coming out constitutes itself as a phenomenological death; the one to whom such information is being revealed must refigure their knowledge of the other and in some cases kill the social markers of the formerly-known in the public sphere (i.e. pronouns).<sup>35</sup> But so is there real danger of tangible, not metaphorical, death.

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<sup>33</sup> See Todd May, *Death*.

<sup>34</sup> Eve Sedgwick, 77.

<sup>35</sup> As Racine’s stages, “un roi insensé qui a passé six mois avec sa femme sans savoir, sans s’informer même qui e elle est”/ *A foolish king who spent six months with his wife without knowing, without even knowing who she is*.

When queer bodies reveal themselves, it is always with an intense risk of real harm, not just to the queer person but to other as well. “The pathogenic secret itself, even, can circulate contagiously *as a secret*”<sup>36</sup> when a heterodox body must enter into the closet with the queer body for assured protection. Coming out presents itself as a destabilizing, “double-edged weapon”<sup>37</sup> poetically killing both party’s perceptions of each other: the formerly straight child and the formerly homophobic (or in the more common, unfortunate cases, accepting) parents. If not this scenario, then there is a likelihood of the queer body facing real death at the hands of parents who cannot handle this reality.

And so, we arrive at the question of how death as a function in the *eschaton of outness* plays into this queer, temporal notions of Church. If, indeed, coming out to ourselves, our mothers and fathers, friends, priests, wives and husbands, and our God constitutes little deaths (*le petite mort*), then by disclosing these secrets we die and rise with Christ because His own timeline of disclosure is written upon us. There is a certain failure for the queer body to *stay dead*, especially for the queer Christian: “I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die” (John 11: 25-26). While heterodox the Christian dies and rises each year at Lent and Easter, Queer Church is not beholden to the cyclicity of events because of the constant fluctuation of disclosure. The straight body must wait a whole year to see if Christ will rise again at Easter. For the queer Christian who discloses their identity many time over in a single day, the experience of death and resurrection is anything but annual and so must hope for an eschaton of true outness.

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<sup>36</sup> Eve Sedgwick, 80.

<sup>37</sup> Eve Sedgwick, 80.

It is this fundamental understanding of hope that is core to this vision of this temporal perspective of ecclesiology.<sup>38</sup> Though it will take greater visionaries and architects than I to construct Queer Church, I believe it can only be done through the listening of the temporal experiences of the queer body. As we have seen, the relativity of time is expressed through the *distentio animi* in indescribably different ways and these differing interpretations have a vast impact to how bodies interact with Church space. To ignore these shared temporal experiences in queer communities is to ignore the otherness of Time and God's creation of Time.

Like Queen Esther, LGBTQ Christians must struggle with instances of brave disclosure and the threats of crucifixion that accompany. It is worth remembering that Jesus, a Jew, was persecuted by Jews, not Romans. Queer Christians suffer the failure of the crucifixion with Jesus every time there are queer bashings, every time HIV/AIDS is spread, every time trans people are denied communion, and every time a gay teacher is fired from a Catholic school. Our Advent continues even after leaving the closet because we can never truly escape it. We wait, pray, and work towards that *eschaton of outness* together alongside fellow parishioners of the Queer Church.

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<sup>38</sup> Moreover, it is this core of hope which makes this, perhaps, a uniquely Christian vision.

CHAPTER 3  
CHURCH(ES) THAT MATTER  
PERFORMATIVE INDWELLING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

*You know, I don't at all hesitate to be a bit utopian about all this because I think hope is itself an act, a very big leap, which in a sense defies the grim facts always about us and opens up new ways of thinking about things.*

— Daniel Berrigan

When St. Joan of Arc, entering the city of Orléan in 1429, donned the armor of a man and said to the English army, “Begone, or I will make you go!” – her divinely sanctioned presence could not have been more transgressive. The Church remembers Joan as the unlikely warrior-saint of the Seize of Orléan, a decisive victory for the French in the Hundred Years War and, thus, for the Vatican. For queer Christians (particularly lesbians and trans-men), she is celebrated fondly for her divinely ordained, gender-bending drag performance in the siege. She is also remembered for her courageous death at the hands of the Church for her refusal to conform to heterodoxy. Joan is a good example of the themes discussed in the prior two chapters. The focus on her ex-sexed flesh was not one of repression or fecundity but one that expressed the Spirit and the will of God. Her continual coming out and brave rejection of norms led to the *times of Christ* being imprinted on her body many times over. Surely each rejection from Church officials despite her secular fame was just as painful as her execution by fire.

Though I have described my notion of ex-sexed flesh as an immutable quality, it would

only be so in a perfect world devoid of dangerous and imperialistic normoactivities. Indeed, many queer faithful people adhere ardently to the teachings of the Catholic Church in regards to their *disordered affections*: they do not seek spouses, do not pursue religious life while they are out, and, more often than not, seek to atone by building careers within the parish community. Likewise, it is easy to give in to the dangers of being out. The closet's safety is all too alluring, tempting us with sweet promises of a simpler life. However, when these two concepts – en-sexed flesh and outness – are held positively at the same time, queer bodies express a certain category of performances that are unique to the realms of sexuality and gender. These performances are beautiful combinations of en-sexed flesh, outness, and the Holy Spirit, prompting me to call this category *Queer Church*. In this way, Church is not only seen as an ecclesiological structure in which to house God's people, but the very performance by which we seek to define that structure. Like our concepts of sexuality and gender, categories are not always self-contained identities, though this may not always seem the case. Actions must be done to inform and reinforce the nomenclature, else they are empty categories. Performing Church is the primary way in which Cristian faithful interact with the pneumatological aspect of ecclesiology. In short, this chapter is dedicated to the elaboration of that performance and the consequences it holds for Queer Church and Heterodox Church alike.

It is no accident that I stress a certain pneumatology as part of this endeavor to disrupt Church. Normative Western theology has largely failed to integrate the personal movement of the Spirit into systematic endeavors. Thus, it follows that queer theology, in its drive to disrupt those systems, has likewise failed to critique this absence and combat it with a concrete pneumology of Queer Church. In its attempt to define the poor, queer theology has separated out

the necessary anthropology in favor of the narrow focus on systems. If Queer Church is ever to be constructed, then it must be done with a vast understanding of the Holy Spirit: “The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone” (Psalm 118:22).

Queer Christians are not unfamiliar with works of the Holy Spirit. As I argue, rejection from the institutional Church has allowed the Holy Spirit to manifest in experiences that seem indecent and even heretical to the normative Church. After lifetimes of sexual and gender repression, queer peoples in various subcultures have created spiritual rituals out of trauma to celebrate and discover the transcendence which the Church denies them. While many cultural traditions have developed side-by-side Church Tradition (secular celebrations of Christmas or Halloween, for example), the same cannot be totally said for queer cultures that have been denied their place in these cultural celebrations. Queer Church must reckon with holding two seemingly opposite (big T) Traditions together: the subversive but largely normative, Catholic Tradition and Queer History. In this way, Queer Church can hold Harvey Milk and the Stonewall rioters as saints without sacrificing their place in Catholic Tradition.

This examination of pneumatology in queer theory will turn to Judith Butler’s notion of performativity as the criteria through which we can explore the movements of the Holy Spirit outside the institutional Church. In discussions of performativity in relation to theology and religion, performance often connotes a negative phenomenon that deals with inauthenticity, especially when an audience is involved: “And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others” (Matthew 6:5). It is not my intention to discuss performativity in this context. Instead, queer theory understands the concept as a neutral phenomenon that is foundational to how we move

about the world and understand our identities in relation to others. In accordance with Judith Butler, I understand performance as the actions of matter which are informed by and inform the matter.

This approach to performance as understood by Judith Butler is the vehicle for the Holy Spirit's indwelling in our lives, not the hypocritical performance Jesus decries. Yves Congar's concept of indwelling, the Spirit's interaction and influence on our daily lives, is the theological lynch pin for us to see the varied ways in which Christians may perform through the Spirit. Thinking normally, performativity and indwelling will seem commonplace to the regular Church go-er. From the way the priest says the Eucharistic prayer (solemnly, melodramatically, quickly, joyfully, etc) to how we receive the Sacrament (on the hands or on the tongue, kneeling or standing), the Mass is full of small decisions which we make at the prompting of the Holy Spirit. These decisions, such as the volume we choose to speak or sing at that moment, are performed and witnessed by other congregants around us who either join in or reject. In this way, we can see that these performances of indwelling are contingent on an audience and community. The term that I use to describe the confluence of these two concepts is *performative indwelling*, because it situates Butler's theory in a theological context of the Holy Spirit and how They perform the Trinitarian drama through us.

In what follows, I will first explore the issue of matter and performance through Butler's thought. Second, I will use the work of Yves Congar to define the Holy Spirit through the lens of performance. This redefinition allows me to consider two case studies of gay subcultures, drag bars and leathermen sex dungeons, to see how the Holy Spirit is performed in Queer Church. Using relevant contextualizations of gender performativity and BDSM theory, we can see how



queer bodies perform Queer Church in non-normative ways, still guided by the Holy Spirit. These spaces have served as Church for many queer Christians denied a community of faithful. Through acts such as becoming a drag queen and even being whipped in a BDSM scene, queer Christians have enacted in their own way the rituals that constitute Church in respect to the queer historical tradition. In this respect, Queer Church performances can be found in a local gay bar, though they are presented in mostly secular terms. It is my intention to reveal the layer of theology present in these case studies and the performances of the Holy Spirit which orient the actors towards transcendence. In this way, we as Queer Church architects may discover the non-normative and queer ways in which the Spirit might be calling us to find God.

### **Fashionable Performances of Church**

As I said, performative indwelling will seem familiar to the members of Heterodox Church. Considering that the groundwork of ecclesiology is based on Scripture and Tradition, we must ask as modern faithful how these two pillars are not stuck in some nostalgic past but are instead relevant to our lives today. The traditional ecclesiological answer would be that we interact with these pillars during the liturgy, bringing the past into the present and the future into perspective. The sacramentality of liturgy attempts to bridge the *logos* of the Gospel and our present situations. However, this occurrence of liturgy would only be exterior to us without our active performance in it. Performances of the liturgical calendar in queer epistemologies of the closet are what synergizes the past and present. The phenomenon is also experienced by clerics who, by their active participation in the sacrament, also synergize the *logos* with the present. The liturgy is the touchstone for a performative encounter with the Holy Spirit. Without performative indwelling we would have no liturgy!

The Church in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century recognized that this performance was restricted to clerics and, thus, a series of liturgical reforms focusing on the participation of the laity were enacted throughout the century. The two greatest contributions in this regard were Pope Pius X's *On frequent and even daily Communion* decree in 1905 and Vatican II's shift to vernacular Mass in 1965. For much of Christendom, the laity's focus of the Eucharist was on the adoration of the sacrament instead of consumption.<sup>1</sup> Pius' decree created a dynamic shift in which an aspect of liturgy had a direct and tactile connection with the laity in the pew. The integration with receiving Eucharist during the Mass, not before or after as was the previous custom, shaped the liturgy as an entire drama in which the active participation of the Eucharist *by the laity* was the climax. Liturgist Joseph Jungmann, SJ., noted that as the Eucharist integrated into liturgical movements brought back the original communal participation of the community in the early Church, saying, "The ancient and more complete symbolism gradually creeps back into Christian consciousness; the simple cult of adoration already shaken by the decree on Communion loses its dominance...*Communion once more stands in its natural liturgical relationship as a conscious participation in the Holy Sacrifice.*"<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Describing trends in the medieval Mass that would inform the Roman Rite, Joseph Jungmann, SJ depicts the divide in participation between the clerics and the laity: "The priest alone is active. The faithful, viewing what he is performing, are like spectators looking on at a mystery-filled drama of our Lord's Way of the Cross. It is no accident, then, that Calderón in his *autos sacramentales* should employ the traditional medieval allegory to present a drama in which the whole economy of salvation, from Paradise to world's end, is hinged to the Mass; and yet never a word, either at the offertory or at the Communion, of the active participation of the laity. The *eucharistia* has become an *epiphania*, an advent of God who appears amongst men and dispenses His graces. To gain a share in these graces, we are gathered before the altar, in an attitude of wondering contemplation that bespeaks our longing to take part in the Mass as often as possible." Joseph A. Jungmann, *The Mass of the Roman Rite: Its Origins and Development*, translated by Francis A. Brunner (United States of America: Benzinger Brothers, Inc., 1961), 88.

<sup>2</sup> Jungmann, 121.

Now having a stake, the laity would also find greater participation by moving away from the domination of Latin as the main language of the Mass. Writing long before the change of Vatican II, Jungmann recognized Latin in the Roman Rite as something inhibiting synergistic participation of the laity: “The Latin tongue has nowadays become more and more unfamiliar even to cultured people...[Latin] is only one of the peculiarities of the Roman liturgy that, due to its venerable age, has to some extent become a problem.”<sup>3</sup> Latin was retained as the liturgical language during the fall of Rome so as to protect the purity of Christianity from the *barbarians* (despite Germanic tribes being mostly being Christian themselves at this time). Despite Protestant Reformers citing Latin as one of the main issues with the Roman Rite, the Church continued the divide between clergy and laity through the defense of Latin. As a result, faithful Catholics could not actively participate or engage in Scripture or liturgy in any real way. The Second Vatican Council’s permission and encouragement of the vernacular turned the Roman Rite on its head. For the first time since the Roman Empire, liturgy was oriented towards the active performance and participation of the laity.

I have outlined these two issues here because they are the best examples through which to show the theological side of Butler’s performativity. At the core of performance is the matter doing the performing. In *Gender Trouble*, they (Butler) define gender performances by saying that “gender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame.”<sup>4</sup> Over time, these performances inform what it means to be a ‘woman,’ to be a ‘man.’ But are these categories simply differing nuances in performances or is there something

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<sup>3</sup> Jungmann, 124-5.

<sup>4</sup> Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* (London and New York: Routledge, 1990), 45.

about the actor that should be considered? In their book *Bodies that Matter* – further detailing her idea of performativity introduced in *Gender Trouble* – Butler links issues of matter, origin, and significance back to the classical Greek understanding:

In both the Latin and the Greek, matter (*materia* and *hyle*) is neither a simple, brute positivity or referent nor a blank surface or slate awaiting an external signification, but is always in some sense temporalized...The matrix is an originating and formative principle which inaugurates and informs a development of some organism or object. Hence for Aristotle, ‘matter is potentiality [dynamis], form actuality.’ In reproduction, women are said to contribute the matter; men, the form. The Greek *hyle* is wood that already has been cut from trees, instrumentalized and instrumentalizable, artifactual, on the way to being put to use. *Materia* in Latin denotes the stuff out of which things are made, not only the timber for houses and ships but whatever serves as nourishment for infants: nutrients that act as extensions of the mother’s body. Insofar as matter appears in these cases to be invested with a certain capacity to originate and to compose that for which it also supplies the principle of intelligibility, then matter is clearly defined by a certain power of creation and rationality that is for the most part divested from the more modern empirical deployments of the term.<sup>5</sup>

As Butler continues, their title *Bodies that Matter* isn’t just a pun in the classical context but an understanding that when matter does some act, the essence of the doer must be intelligible both epistemologically and ontologically. It is the action, whatever that may be, which reinforces (means) or changes (materializes) the understanding of the matter. The priest, acting *in persona Christi*, consecrates the Eucharist; it is Christ-matter and ordained-priest-matter doing the consecration. This action of consecration reinforces the understanding of clerical matter. The laity receives Communion and engages with Scripture through the matter of baptized Christians who are called to the offices of priest, prophet, and king.<sup>6</sup> By merit of *not* consecrating but participating in other ways, lay-

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<sup>5</sup> Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), 7.

<sup>6</sup> Eusebius: “And we have been told also that certain of the prophets themselves became, by the act of anointing, Christs in type, so that all these have reference to the true Christ, the divinely inspired and heavenly Word, who is the only high priest of all, and the only King of every creature, and the Father’s only supreme prophet of prophets.”

matter is reinforced. New actions and roles performed by lay people or certain *kinds* of lay people may change that understanding. For example, women or elderly, lay altar servers change the role of how lay matter functions on the altar, it need not be only young boys or seminarians.

Members of Queer Church perform Christ's discursive otherness and temporal sacramentality through their embracing of en-sexed-flesh-matter. Embracing the queerness of *rejected matter* over and against oppressive teachings of sexuality and gender touted by the Church, both reinforces the identity of queerness and calls into question what categories separate matter among humans. It is on this latter consideration where queer theorists branch off from Butler's performativity, arguing different sides of identity politics, socialization, intersectionality, and phenomenology. At the core of Butler's performativity, however, is the constant cycle in which matter informs its actions (performance) and actions inform the matter.<sup>7</sup> The constant constructions, deconstructions, and recreations of the intended *form*, in turn, *inform* our actions *per-form*.

If body-matter can perform gender, sexuality, and other categories, then how might our understanding of church/ekklesia shift if we see ecclesiology through a lens of performativity? How does Church-matter *perform* and *inform* itself, matter and materialize? Here we return to the Church as two-fold ontological/ontic duality. Church has two matters which may perform

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Eusebius, "The Church History of Eusebius," in., *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series*, edited by Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (Grand Rapids, MI: WM. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1890), 1.3.8.

<sup>7</sup> Butler asks, "If 'identity' is an *effect* of discursive practices, to what extent is gender identity, construed as a relationship among sex, gender, sexual practice, and desire, the effect of a regulatory practice that can be identified as compulsory heterosexuality?" Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 24.

separately or in unison, the on the ground church and the greater worldwide community ekklesia, making the distinction between identities particularly difficult to discern. In some cases, local church serves the purpose to perform local cultures and engage the community of faith; yet, if this were to be the only performance, then the ekklesia would be pluralistic. The ekklesia serves to perform a more universal and unified aspect of Christianity through doctrines, theological systems, and liturgical regulations. Adhering only to this performance, however, runs the risk of imperializing other cultures and promoting the Western canon through which ekklesia has been traditionally understood. What about the times when performances of the parish church sully the good name of the universal ekklesia, as in the various sex abuse scandals? Similarly, what should happen when ekklesia declares an unpopular prohibition such as in *Humana Vitae* and its condemnation of birth control? How do both aspects of ecclesiology perform with and around each other? How then can Church-matter perform at all?

### **Veni Sancte Spiritus**

We have spoken already of *kyros*' discursive in-breaking of *kronos* and the vision of the *eschaton of outness*. It is here, concerning the tension of church/ekklesia matters, that I wish to further reflect upon the pneumatological aspect of performativity. On the outset, I will make a bold claim. The Holy Spirit, indwelling within each of us by nature of our being created, prompts us to perform the Kingdom of God, as we can know it through the *eschaton of outness*, from within the church/ekklesia-matters. The Holy Spirit *informs* the church/ekklesia by performing in its members, the Body of Christ, actions that help to bring about that more perfect image of Church in the world, the one need live in fear of rejection or hatred.

Congar's method of defining the Third Person<sup>8</sup> is important. If we are to see how the Holy Spirit performs through its indwelling within us then we must endeavor to see the matter of the actor Themselves. Using the works of Augustine, Congar's Trinitarian understanding of the Spirit is one of ecstatic communication between the Father and the Son:

God is Spirit, the Father is Spirit and the Son is Spirit. Just as both are called and each one is called 'Spirit', the same word can also be applied, Augustine believes, to the one who is not one of them, ut in whom is manifested *communitas amborum*, the 'community of both' (*In Inoan. Ev. XCIX, 7*). Being common to both, the Spirit receives as his own the names that are common to them: 'Spirit' and 'Holy' (*De Trin. XV, 19, 37*). The Spirit, then, is Spirit and Love of the first two Persons. He must therefore be said to proceed from those Persons.<sup>9</sup>

By nature of the Holy Spirit being the active Love between the Father and the Son (Creator and *logos*), the Third Person is the only subject whose totality of matter *is a performance*. This performance, that of kenotic love, is the self-generation of the *logos* from the Father and the Second Person's (*logos*) love of his Father. It is a performance of the two Persons that over-flows, creating the Third. Because of the formation of the Third and by its merit being formless, we are able to share in the performance between First and Second not as idle witnesses but active participants in the church/*ekklesia* dynamic. The establishment of the church/*ekklesia* by the Second Person is continually oriented towards the First Person through the Holy Spirit. At the end of Luke's Gospel, Jesus establishes the mission of the *ekklesia* to twelve, who can be taken as symbols of local church: "He told them, 'This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be

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<sup>8</sup> Because this is a project in queer theology, I will avoid the gendered names of the Trinity only using the traditional 'Father' and 'Son' for the sake of clarity.

<sup>9</sup> Yves Congar, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*, vol. 1, translated by David Smith (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2006), 78-9.

preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. I am going to send you what my Father has promised” (Luke 24:46-49). The outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost is a tangible example of this dynamic which invites us into communion with the First and Second Persons. The Trinity relationship, as it interacts with the apostles at Pentecost, also serves to unify the church/ekklesia divide.

Congar’s portrayal of the Holy Spirit is as ineffable as our experiences of Them. However, what can be said of his definition of the Third Person is that They are Gift.<sup>10</sup> Our interaction of the Holy Spirit is through the charisms which They share with us, through us. The performance-matter of the Holy Spirit indwells in us, prompting our matter to perform these charisms. Congar sought to separate this term ‘charism’ from the growing charismatic movement of his day (which has only grown since), focusing instead on the spiritual gifts to us from the Holy Spirit.<sup>11</sup> These *graces* in-break into our monotony, orienting us back to the loving performance between the First and Second and prompt us to act accordingly to replicate this dynamic in the world around us. This process of performance is what constitutes the indwelling in an individual: the Holy Spirit (the performance-matter of divine self-love) performs in our matter as Gift, informing our matter and setting it to perform.

It is the easier pneumatological statement to say that indwelling starts and ends with the individual. Thus, the performative indwelling of the Holy Spirit upon our personal matters would be perceived solely as an individual phenomenon. For Congar, this personal indwelling is not

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<sup>10</sup> Yves Congar, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*, vol. 3, translated by David Smith (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2006), 144.

<sup>11</sup> Yves Congar, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*, vol. 2, translated by David Smith (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2006), 26.



sufficient in the grand scheme of ekklesia. In his *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*, the Dominican expands his definition of pneumatology from just the personal experience:

By pneumatology, I mean something other than a simple dogmatic theology of the third Person. I also mean something more than, and in this sense different from, a profound analysis of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in individual souls and his sanctifying activity there. Pneumatology should, I believe, describe the impact, in the context of a vision of the Church, of the fact that the Spirit distributes his gifts as he wills and in this way builds up the Church. A study of this kind involves not simply a consideration of those gifts of charisms, but a theology of the Church.<sup>12</sup>  
The charisms traditionally taught – wisdom, understanding, council, fortitude,

knowledge, piety, and fear of the Lord – are not all encompassing. Congar notes that charism are contingent upon cultural and societal contexts and are thus a communal reality: “They are gifts made to persons, but those persons are not monads with individual autonomy. They belong to a people, a tradition, a culture and a sociological group, to which their gifts are in a sense appropriated.”<sup>13</sup> These charisms, the performances of local churches, inform our understanding of the ekklesia, which then responds with its own charisms towards the smaller church. In this way, church/ekklesia mimics the Trinity in performance. Because we err in our intentions, prudence, and abilities, however, it is an imperfect imitation. The Church has a constant need of re-evaluating our interpretation of the Holy Spirit (that performance of love) so that we, as a church/ekklesia of believers, may more closely participate with God’s love and perform it here on earth. Congar highlights this essential unity and re-orientation, when he says that the “Church’s catholicity calls for these gifts to be gathered together and exchanged, and for the different parties contributing them to be aware of the whole and of its unity.”<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Congar, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*, vol. 1, 156-7.

<sup>13</sup> Congar, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*, vol. 2, 26.

<sup>14</sup> Congar, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*, vol. 2, 26.

It is this catholicity Congar calls for that allows Queer Church to have legitimacy against the imposition of Heterodox Church. In a series of fascinating interviews, Michael Bernard Kelly (*Christian Mysticism's Queer Flame: Spirituality in the Lives of Contemporary Gay Men*) details the spiritual-sexual awakenings of a number of gay men, portraying the unique charisms, prayers, and spiritual practices performed by the men in their early years.<sup>15</sup> David, for example, a pious young man describes his sexual awakening as something firstly integrated with spirituality:

When I first encountered my sexuality and discovered masturbation, I masturbated to the notion of Jesus...always, initially. My intense love of Jesus would be what was most present for me at the moment of ejaculation. And I didn't regard masturbation as taboo early on...<sup>16</sup>

Other men would similarly discover the kenotic presence of God in the performance of intimacy with another. Joe, another interviewee, describes his first sexual experience with a man as a sacrament:

I was just so alive in that moment... It was just so profoundly right... That was God. The beauty, the paint on the walls, the candles, the body and the smells and the everything – that was God... the whole room was part of the experience... it felt like our bodies just didn't end... there was such gratitude I was feeling about having this experience, this moment, every sense was taking it in... I was like a dry sponge soaking in water... it was profoundly sacramental...<sup>17</sup>

Still others, like Chris, an ordained priest with a love of BDSM and the Tridentine Mass, found a 'kinkier' vocation and ministry:

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<sup>15</sup> Michael Bernard Kelly: "It is fairly common for spiritual writers, church leaders, and even theologians to recognize that divine grace may well be present in the early spiritual awakenings young people often have, and countless religious vocations have been built upon these youthful experiences of devotion. In considering sexual awakening alongside these religious awakenings, I am suggesting that they must also be recognized as holy, as the movement of grace, as the work of the divine love that was awakening desire and erotic energy, drawing these young men towards fullness of life, towards graced, embodied maturity in Christ." Michael Bernard Kelly, *Christian Mysticism's Queer Flame: Spirituality in the Lives of Contemporary Gay Men* (New York: Routledge, 2019), 174.

<sup>16</sup> Kelly, 173.

<sup>17</sup> Kelly, 182.

Chris recognized that giving up control had been very difficult for him in life generally, and that these experiences were of great value because they allowed him to learn how to surrender and trust in concrete, utterly incarnate ways. Just as importantly, he discovered that in both areas his complete, embodied surrender allowed him to open himself to overwhelming experiences of ‘oneness’ and ‘otherness’ that transcended anything he had ever tasted. Almost stammering, and searching for words, he described such moments as ‘when it all comes together and the choirs of angels sing...’<sup>18</sup>

The experiences of these gay men demonstrate a few of the queer charisms performed through sexually queer-matter. Importantly, these specific performances of charisms – kenosis, intimacy, and submission – are a result of sexual repression in each of these men’s lives. Therefore, these charisms are not universal, but contingent on the contextualization of pre-conditioned matter (in this case, sexual repression). For Queer Church, the performances of queerness (be that gay-ness, non-binarism, trans-ness, asexuality, etc.) are synonymous with charisms. Performative indwelling, then, is the active performance of charisms, be they conventional or queer. Having come out, the in-breaking of grace and stepping into a greater orientation towards God’s love, the Spirit guides its members to perform the eschaton of outness through participation in the Trinitarian drama. Charisms must be shared kinotically or the queer-matter must be denied, closeted. This creates a dynamic in which queer charisms are not so much essentialist qualities of our matter, but instead, are gifts performed by matter for the benefit of the other. The Holy Spirit must be allowed to dance freely within each of us a waltz that leads us towards the vision of the Kingdom in the final cadences.

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<sup>18</sup> Kelly, 198-199.

### Leather and Lace: Queer Charisms in Drag Bars and Leather Dungeons

At this point in our examination of performance and charisms, I would like to introduce two brief case studies detailing how the Holy Spirit actively performs indwelling in gay subcultures. Like we saw in Michael Bernard Kelly's interviews, the Holy Spirit has the potential to transform repression into the touchstone of our spiritual experiences. Queer theory examines and deconstructs the two areas of gender and sexuality and how they interact. Because I highlight Yves Congar's diverse *catholicity* of the Holy Spirit's charisms, one case study will be dedicated to gender, the other sexuality.

The first portrait will be that of drag queens. Drag has been a focal point for discussion among feminist theorists for its explicit performativity of femininity through the gay-male gaze.<sup>19</sup> Instead, abstracting the experiences of drag into theory, I will explore the spirituality of drag using performative pneumatology. I have already outlined as it pertains to gender performance. The charism uniquely performed in drag is something akin to camp-aesthetics: failed seriousness. The second portrait is that of the Leathermen subculture and their immense mystical theology in BDSM pedagogy. Explicitly using mystical language from the medieval mystics), the Leathermen have structured their culture and values around surrender in a completely transcendental way. The charisms expressed by each subculture are Gifts that are fundamental to Queer Church as they exhibit both the qualities of en-sexed flesh and temporal sacramentality.

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<sup>19</sup> Of course, the concept of drag has greatly expanded past its origins of men performing women. Drag has expanded into an artform not easily defined, but characteristically unique. A drag bar today may feature many different types of drag such as drag kings (typically lesbians performing 'maleness'), conceptual drag, club kid drag, horror drag, hyper feminine drag (cis-women performing hyper-femininity), pageant drag, and campy drag among others. Certain bars, cities, or scenes may specialize in one or two particular categories. Rusty Barrett, *From Drag Queens to Leathermen: Language, Gender, and Gay Male Subcultures* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017).

## Drag Queens

When RuPaul's Drag Race aired in 2009, few thought it would become the resounding success it has become today. Drag Race did not invent drag, far from it. However, it has definitively introduced the concept of drag to the heterodox consciousness (and entertainment industry). Its popularity has created a memorandum as to what drag looks like, what kind of person does drag, and the skills a "good" drag queen ought to have. Contemporary seasons of Drag Race rarely feature queens whose careers preceded the show. Their understanding of drag is rooted solely on the successes, failures, artistries, and careers of its competitors. The host and namesake of the show RuPaul Charles, herself a club-kid of the early '90s who found fame in drag through club music hits and big-box acting cameos, is one of the few figures from the old era of drag. Drag Race single handedly revived drag bar communities, still reeling from the aftermath of the AIDS epidemic, helping provide gay men a sense of community and 'church' as bars hosted weekly viewing parties to root for their local queen.

I start this case study here, in 2009 with RuPaul's Drag Race, not because I am concerned with contextualizing drag's history, but because themes of development, transformation, and ontogenesis are crucial to the spiritual charisms of drag. Watching the show today, it seems normal that we as spectators should see the 'boy' versions of the queens. Tom Fitzgerald and Lorenzo Marquez describe a sense of magicianry around the queens' true faces in their book on the history of drag (focusing on the cultural shift that was Drag Race): "There was a time when the idea of drag queens appearing on camera out of drag was considered akin to a magician giving away his secrets...But stripping away the drag is very much a piece with the show's

commitment to showing its full art, which you truly can't appreciate fully without seeing the transformation in process."<sup>20</sup>

As I previously qualified, feminist and gender theories have made much of the queer art of drag. Often, drag is relegated to a 'thing gay men do to entertain themselves.' While it is indeed meant as a source of entertainment – drag is a temporary transition, unlike that of a trans person – queens and their audiences do not discount the spiritual gravitas of the process. Judith Butler speaks of matter as being both influenced by pre-existing social categories and that same matter's performance of them, that "gay is to straight *not* as copy is to original, but, rather, as copy is to copy."<sup>21</sup> However, the matter of a drag artist performs something which does not inherently meant to inform the matter's understanding of the category. Rusty Barrett distinguishes drag performance from identity performance in his linguistic exploration of queer subcultures saying, "Although gender performance often corresponds directly with gender identity, cases such as drag require an understanding that performed identity may differ from self-categorized gender identity."<sup>22</sup> A gay man in female drag is a performance of the cultural form of a woman in the particular of the spectacle. Because he takes off the drag when he is not at work, the performance of that woman character does not necessarily inform the matter of the performer in theory. Likewise, drag performance is as much for the consideration of the audience as it is the drag queen. On this phenomenology of drag, Barrett says, "The 'meaning' of drag is often created by audience members in their individual attempts to reconcile their physical

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<sup>20</sup> Tom Fitzgerald and Lorenzo Marquez, *Legendary Children: The First Decade of RuPaul's Drag Race and the Last Century of Queer Life* (New York: Penguin Books, 2020), 3.

<sup>21</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 43.

<sup>22</sup> Barrett, 41.

perceptions of the performance with their personal assumptions concerning social identity and gender categories.”<sup>23</sup>

And yet, for the modern drag queen it is not so easy to transition smoothly from male to female and vice versa. One of the main quirks of Drag Race is that it is not only about the evolution of the competitor’s artistry of drag but the growth and maturation of the artist underneath the makeup. The show holds a tradition where the surviving four finalists give a monologue to one of their childhood photos. The often-emotional speeches, delivered in full drag, encourages competitors and viewers alike to reflect upon the hardships of growing up queer and the transformative, salvific joy felt upon surviving queer childhood. Such extreme vulnerability, often encouraged by RuPaul herself, is ultimately ironic. A show about drag actively encourages its views to *de-drag*, to break down the walls that we build up as we perform our lives so we can return to the matter.<sup>24</sup>

Thus, the Gift that influences drag is one of transformative irony, failed seriousness.<sup>25</sup> Drag teaches us not to take life too seriously. As RuPaul says often, we are born naked and the rest is drag. The charism of drag encourages us as individuals to try new things on so that they can ultimately be shed off and the person underneath revealed. But as Yves Congar reminds us, charisms are communal as well. Socially, they break our conception of the cultural gendered categories we have taken so serious for so long.

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<sup>23</sup> Barrett, 39.

<sup>24</sup> See Johann Metz, *Poverty of Spirit*.

<sup>25</sup> Susan Sontag, “Notes on Camp,” *Against Interpretation, and other essays* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1966), 284.

For theological relevance, we need not look far. The Incarnation is perhaps the most important drag show for the Christian in Queer Church. The *logos* ruptures into humanity as both Human and Divine so that we can come to know deeper the meaning of both categories. There are moments where Jesus performs his divinity in unorthodox ways (the Transfiguration, the calming of the storm, and passages of miracles) and times of extreme humanity (the temptation in the desert, the crucifixion). There's been much debate surrounding if Jesus' godhead *performs* his humanity. This Christological drag is not meant to reignite Apollonarianism or even Monophysitism, but simply show how the *logos* performs a revelatory drama concerning his matter. Precisely because the matter of the *logos* is so paradoxical, our own performance of gender becomes much less essential. The charism of the Holy Spirit accompanies us as we drag up our matter, discover who we are, our roles in God's plan, and our relationship to the Trinity. Thus, the act of putting on drag in a gay bar and performing is a sacred ritual for Queer Church. Drag queens are the deaconesses of queer ecclesiology, imitating in human forms the drag of the Word Incarnate and sharing it with the people as performance. Dragging and de-dragging continually reinforce and challenge our self-conception of community, making visible other charisms to be encouraged over time and revealing the ills of a community to be routed out.

### Leathermen

Much could be said of this unique gay subculture. What remains of the leathermen in the bars and backrooms of Chicago, New York City, and San Francisco can be traced back to the American biker gangs of the late '40s. Veterans who had discovered homosexuality from within the military rejected the 'fairy'-like culture characterized by the more effeminate expressions of



American queer communities.<sup>26</sup> Thus, the leathermen perform a hyper-masculine side of queerness. This can be seen in the most prominent activity that characterizes leather culture from other subcultures: BDSM.

Within leatherman BDSM, the ‘traditional’ queer verbiage of sexual role – ‘top’ and ‘bottom’ – is fitted to the matrix of dominance and submission. The military origins of the leathermen are seen through a grave respect for nationalism, militarism, and a seemingly misplaced concept of natural law. While the leathermen – through the growth of their hell-raising biker gangs through the 50s – were seen as a rebellious group because of their refusal to conform to social and sexual norms, Barrett expresses that “those men who were attracted to the outlaw image associated with the 1950s biker culture and the rebellious image indexed by BDSM sex were less involved in the highly regulated social behavior of those men who understood leather culture as a quasi-military institution.”<sup>27</sup>

It may seem strange that a queer subculture may adhere to a sense of ‘natural law’ but extreme tendency of the leathermen to cast dom and sub roles fits neatly with their conception of that order. One may have a calling towards the dom role, another a vocation towards a sub role; a sub has one dom, but an experienced and mature dom may have multiple submissives under his care. Spirituality and the spiritual language is a feature of this order. Having been rejected by Church structures for their abnormal sexual tendencies, the leathermen have made that very sexuality the ritual of spiritual praxis and understanding. In his guide to leatherman BDSM, Joseph W. Bean connects leather BDSM directly to the mystical saints of the Heterodox Church:

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<sup>26</sup> Barrett, 185.

<sup>27</sup> Barrett, 186.

Many of the saints of the Catholic Church, for example, largely excluding those beatified by the earliest traditions and those recently canonized for doing good deeds, achieved their sainthood by recording ecstatic experiences. A lot of these saints – usually living under vows of chastity – expressed their vision in sexual terms, none more heatedly perhaps than Saint Theresa of Avila. That same *type* of experience, no to deprecate the visions of the saints, is what leathersex players sometimes encounter.<sup>28</sup>

If one were to remove any sexual language from a leatherman description of the dungeon, then it would certainly pass as a permissible, though still perhaps queer, mystical experience of Heterodox Church. Anxieties regarding death and fatalism seem to constitute most heterodox reflection in one way or another; Leather Church couples this with the repressed aspect of sex. These together, sex and death, are expressed however through a mystical charism of surrender. BDSM theorist and leatherman Jack Rinella defines surrender in the context of BDSM as “not a mindless abandon, neither a sense of not caring nor giving up. Rather it is a state of mind that is open to possibility, believing and expecting to experience that which is good... even in the face of that which we fear and loathe.”<sup>29</sup> It is far too easy for those who have been rejected to erect walls and harden their hearts to transcendence. This skepticism is perhaps even a feature of Queer Church, that is, we should be weary of heterodox faith at all costs.

And yet, the Spirit, whose performance orients towards the love of the Trinity, softens our hearts of stone in the performance of surrender. This too may seem like an overly individualistic charism, but it not. Surrender is most often discussed in BDSM as ‘subspace’ but the charism is not exclusive to the bottom. The top must also surrender himself in a kenotic self-giving, while also minding the bottom’s limits. Rinella defines “topspace” in a rather strange

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<sup>28</sup> Joseph W. Bean, *Leathersex: A Guide for the Curious Outsider and the Serious Player*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Los Angeles: Daedalus Publishing Company, 2003), 183.

<sup>29</sup> Jack Rinella, *Philosophy in the Dungeon: The Magic of Sex and Spirit* (Chicago: Rinella Editorial Service, 2006), 75-6.

manner: worship of the top-god to the bottom-god and vice versa.<sup>30</sup> It is to be noted that he qualifies his language of ‘top-god’ and ‘bottom-god,’ not seriously permitting the player’s egos to rise to godhood, but rather, to describe more accurately the kenotic self-giving that occurs. It is a human replication of the First Person’s love for the Second and the Second’s love for the First.<sup>31</sup> This surrender to be a part of the Trinitarian dynamic is prayed for constantly in Heterodox Church. Bean examines this theme from within the Our Father:

Even the Lord’s Prayer involves the promise of some level of personal ‘dying’ in the wish to have a higher will than one’s own take over – “*Thy* will be done.” In intense enough leathersex scenes involving dominance and submission, the effects prayed and meditated for are acted out and realized. “Your will,” the bottom is saying, “not mine. I am nothing, you are all.”<sup>32</sup>

### **Conclusion: Warm Breasts and Ah! Bright Wings**

It may not seem entirely clear on the outset how or why these extraordinary charisms of surrender and failed seriousness are performed by the Holy Spirit. But it is also at this same point in which words fail to explain the experience of the Holy Spirit at all. What can be said in this endeavor of pneumatology is that the Spirit, whose matter is the performance of Father and Son’s kenotic love for each other, overflows into our human experiences. This performative indwelling, a performance of that Divine Love that breathes in each one of us, turns our attention towards the transcendent otherness of the Trinitarian drama.

This shifting, manifesting as Gift through tangible charisms, are our performances which re-enforce this knowledge of transcendent otherness. Traditional charisms such as Knowledge,

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<sup>30</sup> Rinella, 163.

<sup>31</sup> Some scenes feature flogging and forms of crucifixion as if recreated the Trinitarian dynamic from within the Passion Play.

<sup>32</sup> Bean, 185.

Fortitude, and Fear of the Lord recognize the ‘other’ that is God and our role in light of that revelation. The queer charisms of failed seriousness and surrender do likewise, and thus can be seen as charisms of the Holy Spirit.

Construction of Queer Church will not come without its challenges. For Heterodox Church, the greatest argument against us is that we are not led by the Spirit. This is said as if queer peoples are not transcendent beings also. Should Queer Church stand any chance in such harsh realities, then pneumatology must be embraced by its theologians and the charisms expressed by the vast diversity of its members translated, celebrated, and recognized as performances of the Spirit.

It is truly to all of our detriment should the Spirit be restricted, cajoled, and puppeteered. It cannot be said that we perform the Spirit – our matter is not divine – but, rather, that the Spirit is something to be performed *in*, a grand theo-drama of the Trinitarian opera. This is why we say we are *in* love, *of* love, and *for* love, because, as Gerard Manley Hopkins penned:

Because the Holy Ghost over the bent

World broods with warm breast and with ah! bright wings.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Gerard Manley Hopkins, “God’s Grandeur,” in *“God’s Grandeur” and Other Poems* (New York: Dover Publications, 1995).

## CONCLUSION

Using queer theory, I have presented three new methods, based in queer theory, with which to approach ecclesiology. The first chapter explored the concept of *en-sexed flesh* and theo-sexuality in a Christological context, recovering and reclaiming the penis of Christ. The second chapter highlights the importance of temporality in ecclesiological studies and disrupts the traditional Liturgical Calendar. Finally, the last chapter integrates pneumatology into queer theology through the charisms given in the performative indwelling of the Holy Spirit. After pages and pages droning on about this *Queer Church*, I realize that I have yet to offer any clear definition. I feel that now would be an imprecise time. So, I will refrain for now. This project of Queer Church cannot be finalized in these first few pages as the true construction will continue past these words. It is then when our mettle will be so tested. In the Spirit of discovery, the category of Queer Church should be left open-ended. I can, however, qualify it and propose that this parting section be a reflection, in sum of the previous chapters, as to the humility of *my* vision of Queer Church. In doing so, I wish to ignite a certain praxis addressed to several archetypes of potential readers. These post-scripts are meant to inspire the varied pluralities of Queer Church which my vision so craves. Such ambiguities of contexts, cultures, and charisms are what construct a Queer Church that is truly queer and constitute the multiplicity of the *imago Dei* within each of us.

*To the closeted altar boy:* It was told to me once that the only acceptance that will give us peace is that from the child we once were. As a boy, I wanted to be an architect. Enthralled by the art-deco style buildings of my hometown, I attempted to draw up a new cathedral in the fantastical style of Frank Lloyd Wright. The first draft resembled a Neo-Gothic American cathedral with a hard exterior: elaborate spires and ornamentations, flying buttresses with gargoyles to protect the city. The inside, however, was like a parish. Soft-colored carpets lined the nave. The main altar was small, intimate even, like one could join the priest up there for the Eucharistic prayer, looking over his shoulder. No one would bat an eye. Side chapels lined the sides dedicated to hometown devotions (stations of the cross, rosary, adoration, etc), paintings, native American saint figures. This schematic burned when I first told a priest whom I adored my sexuality.

As I grew older and decisively more futurist, the ornamented spires were replaced with a single tower made of chrome which reached so far up to the sky that clouds made the tip invisible. The exterior, too, became shiny metal. If the Church should exist in the modern world, it should exist as a modern Church. Burn the museum. Let the rest of Notre Dame burn down! Build a new Notre Dame on the ash pile! The pews were airplane seats, and the side chapels were replaced with mirrors. Nowhere would there be a depiction of Jesus. He was already in each one of us. Worst of all, the altar had lost its place, instead being placed up-side down upon the ceiling, inaccessible to the cleric and laity alike. A frame of immanence indeed. However, this burned down at the funeral of a dear Jesuit friend upon smelling the incense that blessed his ashes.

And now in this work, I have drawn up a new cathedral. If it seems deconstructionist, then it is necessarily so. How can we go about constructing Church if we ourselves have forgotten its meaning throughout the ages? For two millennia, generations have been tasked with defining and constructing Church and too many have failed out of complacency or gropes for power. It is deconstructionist because it aims to build something novel: a combination of new and old! Neither democracy (equality from birth) nor tradition (equality from death) need be ceded. With these definitions of democracy and tradition in mind, I must humbly hand off the blueprint to new expressions of tradition that I cannot fathom.

This work is testament: there is nostalgia in looking towards Tradition, there is wildfire escapism behind Futurism. Outness in Queer Church means reconciling both, facing the traumas experienced on the altar for the salvation of victim and perpetrator alike. Such is the martyrdom of queer Christians.

*To the non-binary nun:* I cannot conceive of your life. Yours is the next chapter.

*To the priest who told me I was going to hell in the confessional after absolution:* I forgive you. I have learned to embrace the great irony of God's will: "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts" (Isaiah 55:9). If the authoritarian god you sold to me is truly the Divine, then like Ivan Karamazof, I would sooner return the ticket to heaven than to remain in his good graces. It is better to burn with queers than to suffer the indignation of the self-righteous.

As much as it pains me to say, you also have a part to play in building Queer Church. I'm sure many queer Christians who have been similarly harmed by such men will feel the same. And yet, it is testament to the charisma of irony that your name should also be welcome on the

cornerstone of our cathedral. You are the stone we often reject and rightfully so, having suffered your abuse. If Queer Church is to be as discursive as its name implies, then forgiveness must be central. This is your penance and absolution. You will be welcomed, though you do not welcome us.

*To the old woman who does not recognize the world: me neither.*

*To the unknown trans woman who died of AIDS: thank you. You are the St. Stephen of our Church, the first martyr. Like Perpetua transforming into a gladiator and confronting Satan, you pray for us at the moment of our deaths from gay bashings, POC trans-lynchings, and Harvey-Milk assassinations. Throwing the brick is not an easy decision. There is no form of coming out as final as at Stonewall.*

*To the academic theologian: Your precious theology will never be found in your ivory tower library. You are Pygmalion constructing your beloved out of clay only to find that she does not love you. This is not to say that your work is not important. We find new insights and inspiration through your tireless toil. As academics dealing with philosophy and theology we must be humble and cognizant of when we overstep the bounds of reason. Though we may come to understand God more fully through our work, we must realize that our words are not the facilitators of divine encounter, only the *logos*.*

*Finally, to the Afro-Caribbean-Asian, lesbian Martian who does not see herself in Christianity: you are the future of the Church. This endeavor of Queer Church is meant to add another step on the staircase of theology. You have been engaging with theology just as much as any of us, and yet you seem to lie beyond the Western canon which so define systematics. I am excited that the recognition of your ecclesiology will transform and change the Church in such*



beautiful ways. Today our world wrestles with picking up the pieces of the deconstruction era.

Do we have the capacity to be self-critical? We must allow the looking outside of church and be prudent about those who will be considered *queer* once Queer Church assumes into heterodoxy, as I have hope it one day will. This project may one day cease to be about LGBTQ bodies and may instead shift to *alien theology*. I hope the methodologies present aid in the construction of *your* Church.

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## VITA

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