

SHARING QUEER SPIRIT

A WEEKEND FOCUSING ON SEXUAL MINORITIES AND
THE CHURCH

ST. HILDA'S ANGLICAN CHURCH
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Introduction

Sharing Queer Spirit: Can the Church Be Saved? was an extraordinary and – so far – unique event, exploring the gifts gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender people can bring to the church. Sponsored by St. Hilda's Anglican Church in Sechelt – one of only eight parishes in the worldwide Anglican Communion authorised to perform the blessing of same-sex unions – the event brought together straight and gay, men and women, old and young, churched and unchurched.

At the centre of the two-day event was a forum on queer spirituality, held on Saturday, July 25, 2009. The speakers were Anita Fast and Jeffrey Preiss, both of the Vancouver School of Theology; and Rev. Neil Fernyhough, priest-in-charge of St. Hilda's. The panel discussion that followed was moderated by Rev. Markus Dünzkofer, rector of St. Paul's Anglican Church, located in the West End of Vancouver. Fr. Dünzkofer preached on the Sunday morning following the symposium, at a service of Holy Eucharist celebrating the gifts of our diversity.

After the forum, the speakers met to discuss their presentations. We all noted that the theme of our talks complemented one another. For each of us, the institutional aspects of sexual orientation, reflected in such things as same-sex marriage or the ordination of GLBT people was yesterday's news. Indeed, the concrete notion of "sexual orientation" itself was subsumed by a more comprehensive emphasis on gender and identity. In different ways, our talks explored how to integrate the diversity of our individual beings in order to transcend them; finding identity in a God in whose image all the possibilities of being human are created. This theme was taken up and continued in the sermon preached the following morning.

By popular request, we have included the three presentations and the sermon in this one booklet, in hope that both those who attended, and those who were unable to attend, will have an opportunity for further consideration and reflection. In some cases, the authors have revised and added to their remarks for greater clarity. Biographical and contact information is included at the end of each of the remarks.

Rev. Neil Fernyhough
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Called to Be Queer: (Dis)Locating the Church on the Edge *Anita Fast*

The title of my talk today is “Called to Be Queer: (Dis)Locating the Church on the Edge.” What I plan to do in the next 15 minutes or so is engage you all with the possibility that the Christian Bible, of all things, actually calls us to be “queer”, and that the Church, or communities of believers that emerge from gathered queer Christians is one which is most appropriately located ‘on the edge’ or on the margins of society. Furthermore, this marginally located church is always and forever dis-located from its own ‘mainstream’ which inevitably forms.

To do this, I will begin with a story of how my own understanding of my ‘queerness’ was Christianized. I will then explore a few biblical themes which have been foundational for me in understanding the Bible as a call towards queerness, and conclude with some of the implications of how being called to be queer affects how we live out the Christian path – both locating, and dis-locating the church on the edge.

Probably 15 years ago by now, I was going into downtown Vancouver to watch the “Pride Parade”. As I walked along the business-lined streets of the corporate corridor, I was amazed to see rainbow flags hanging from the rafters of The Bay – Canada’s major department store. My friend and I found a place in the crowd and watched the brightly coloured floats pass by – 7-Eleven.....Kentucky Fried Chicken...The Future Shop. I turned to my friend and asked, sarcastically, “Are you proud to be...normal?”

This sparked a lengthy talk during which my friend argued convincingly that there was no inherent reason why gays and lesbians shouldn’t enjoy the privileges of mainstream society and the support of big business. It was a sign of progress to have corporate floats in the Pride Parade. I found that my arguments to the contrary were only convincing if one wanted to be “queer” – outside the mainstream, peculiar in some way. And suddenly it struck me that the reasons why I was uncomfortable with this showing of support from the halls of power did not originate from my lesbianism, but from my discipleship of Jesus Christ. It was my Christianity, not my sexuality, that made me queer.

In its original sense, the term ‘queer’ describes a “positionality” vis a vis mainstream expectations. It is not simply a convenient term we can use to get around the growing list of acknowledged sexual diversities: bisexual, lesbian, transgendered, gay, transsexual, intersexed, asexual, the list can and does, go on.

The revelation that my commitment to queerness was rooted in my faith in Jesus as God incarnated in our world led me on a quest to explore just how it was that the Bible was 'queering' me – not in determining my sexual attraction to women (which, granted, has not yet lost all of its queerness in our society!), but in insisting that I find other ways of understanding and interpreting that sexual attraction than merely seeking a normalized place for it within mainstream society.

When I returned to my reading of the Bible, rather than trying to find texts that supported same-sex love and sexuality, thereby seeking to normalize my queerness, I began to see how scripture reveals a God who consistently ushers in her Reign through human relationships and situations which would be considered immoral, despicable, or 'queer', either in their original context or our own.

For example, the first patriarch and matriarch, Abraham and Sarah, engage in the common cultural practice of giving one of their servants, Hagar, to the husband so that a son might be born into the family. The same sort of scenario takes place between Jacob and his two wives – Rachel and Leah, and two concubines. Although relationships our modern western culture would not seek to emulate, God uses them to further God's work in the world.

In the New Testament we also find reference to ways God works through relationships that society deems illegitimate. In Matthew's genealogy – which most people skip over when they read the gospel – you'll notice that in the list noting male ancestry (typical of a patriarchal culture), four women are nonetheless named – Tamar, a woman who seduced her father-in-law in order to get pregnant; Rahab, the prostitute; Ruth the foreigner, and Bathsheba – the wife of Uriah, who was caught in a web of adultery and murder with King David.

Already of interest is the fact that women are mentioned at all, even more profound is the fact that what is common to all these women is that they were each involved in extraordinary or irregular sexual unions, which were scandalous to outsiders. Could the point of Matthew be to point out to readers that in spite of Jesus' own scandalous birth to an unwed mother, God has worked before, and is working still, within relationships which society deems illegitimate? All of these families are a far cry from what conservative Christianity wants to call the 'traditional family', yet the concern of God is never to streamline such 'queerness' into some irreducible norm, but rather to work within all of the many fallible human attempts to live relationally in our world.

When we remove a fixation on proof-texting, we find a vast array of situations in which God was present and active in places that a human, variable, and perishable morality found unacceptable; we see a family which is mutable, which changes over time and place, and which, ultimately is at risk of becoming an idol should it usurp the place of Christ in our lives. We must be careful, however, not to end with the rather innocuous truth that there is no 'traditional family' that should forever and always provide the template for human relationships. While this is true and may, for some, be as earth-shattering a revelation as they can take in one lifetime, it merely scratches the surface.

What is more important is that it points to the reality that the Apostle Paul tries to make clear in his First letter to the Corinthians, that ALL claims that human wisdom likes to make about 'truth' and 'knowledge' are put into constant crises by the Biblical witness to God's embodiment in Jesus the crucified Christ. 1 Cor, 1: 20 - 26 reads:

Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, God decided, through the foolishness of our proclamation, to save those who believe. For Jews demand signs and Greeks desire wisdom, but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but for those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength.

In the gospels, we read time and time again about demons who are the first ones to recognize Jesus as the Christ while the disciples walk around confused. We listen to the teachings of a Rabbi who preaches about an upside-down kingdom where the first will be last and the last, first; who eats with outcasts and casts out the powerful; who redefines the transcendence of God by embodying God's immanence; and who ultimately questions humanity's addiction to violence through a commitment to love and non-violence even unto a brutal death on a Roman cross.

All of these themes in scripture manifest this God whose power is manifest in weakness, and whose wisdom truly hidden in the foolish. Not only does this re-frame the whole Biblical discussion about sexuality, but it also demonstrates to me that the appropriate stance to take vis-à-vis a fearful and homophobic church, is not to beg for acceptance by arguing that I am just as

good of a Christian as the next person in the pew, or that God loves me just as I am, or even that God is a God of justice, and prejudice and exclusion have no place among God's people. No, as true as those things may be, they are also just as true in reference to the homophobic bigot whom I would love to condemn, curse, and throw out of the Church. He is just as good of a Christian as I; God loves her just as she is; and prejudice and exclusion have no place among God's people.

So often the question is framed the wrong way. So often it is the church asking "how can we minister to the broken homosexual" (with the answer ranging from 'help them become heterosexual', to 'help them become full members of the Church'). But a better question would be "how do those who cause us discomfort, or disgust us, or seem to embody all that we know is wrong – how do these people bear the face of Christ?"

For if we really do mean what we say, if we really do believe that God is revealed through Jesus the crucified Christ, then we must not forget that brokenness is the site of new life, and scandal is the way that God chooses to tear that curtain away from in front our Holiest of Holies – whatever that may be for us – and usher in God's Kingdom. ***And so, the queer ones among us have a very unique and profound ministry to the Church and to this world.*** For as long as we remain queer, and resist the temptation to worldly power, we are part of the body of Christ as an embodiment of queer identity.

Drawing from the insights of the field of queer theory, the parallels between a 'queer' identity, and a biblically 'Christian' one are remarkable. Both intentionally situate oneself outside the status quo, as someone who is difficult to place and define. Both ultimately refer to a cultural 'space' which one occupies, rather than a 'thing' that one is. For example, the Apostle Paul in his letter to the Corinthians exuberantly writes, "if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away: see everything has become new!" (2 Cor.5:17). As such, those living 'in Christ' are part of that new creation, and are called to live with the knowledge that the powers defeated by God's act no longer rule the world. "Do not be conformed to this world", Paul counsels (Rom. 12:2a). Thus, the Bible queers us by calling us to live in an 'undefined open space' made available by the inauguration of the new creation in Christ, a queer space of becoming, or, like queer theorist David Halperin writes of queerness itself, "...an eccentric positionality to be exploited and explored: a potentially privileged site for the criticism and analysis of cultural discourses" (Saint Foucault; 122).

Regardless of what our human perspective is, our categories of male and female are non-categories in God's eyes. 'Hetero-sexuality' is revealed as yet another power relation of the old creation from which we are freed – not to become 'homosexuals', but to live lives for God regardless of what sort of human relational configurations are 'in power' or acceptable at the time. Even as my sexual expression becomes less queer in our society, as a Christian I must always remain awake to the ways God continuously surprises, eternally unsettles, and relentlessly astounds us with the unanticipated and unanticipatable.

I'm not wanting to deny all the obvious social, political, and personal benefits of the struggle for GLBT rights. A sense of belonging to the human community is an essential part of being whole human beings. I have often felt the painful sting of exclusion and discrimination, and I continue to hold a very tenuous and fragile relationship with my own Mennonite Church. I wish only to warn that while rejection and marginalization have their challenges and dangers, acceptance and inclusion have as well. Privilege has its price, and one of the costs is that where we once destabilized an oppressive status quo, we now run the risk of stabilizing it. Relating to the Bible as calling me to remain queer raises the question of whether society's growing acceptance of a variety of sexual expressions is not necessarily because the world has become a safer place to be different, but rather because sexual difference is no longer considered a threat to the powers that decide who's in and who's out.

A Bible that queers keeps us asking the question of whose turn it is to be marginalized and rejected, and to seek the voice and presence of God there. Perhaps we should think twice before insisting that GLBT are not a threat to church and society. Perhaps there is much in church and society that should be threatened.

So in conclusion, what might a dis-located Church, in which we are called to be queer, look like?

- It would be one in which we are content to live as the 'odd ones', the 'peculiar people' – unafraid of being called foolish by the wisdom of our age.
- It would not seek to make the queer, "normal", but rather question the category of 'normal' all together and invite people into the challenge of creating new ways of relating and new possibilities for community
- It would invite people to follow Jesus the Fool, who flexes the rules, challenges the boundaries of a group, and

refutes the categories which define, separate, and oppress people.

- It would not merely echo the values and virtues of decent people, but call them and us to rethink from scratch many basic assumptions about God and matters 'religious'.
- It would be a threat to institutions of church and society in so far as these institutions chooses death over life; cruelty, violence, and oppression over love, peace, and justice.
- And finally, it would never cease to unsettle us, disturb our complacency, humble our certainty, horrify our respectability, and call us all forward into Life, everlasting.

The Church, the Queer(ed): Finding Solidarity in Gender Identity Disorder **Jeffrey Preiss**

But your nature is your essence, and your essence is your nature. So uniting with your body, I share in your nature, and I truly take as mine what is yours, uniting with you divinity.... You have made me a god, a mortal by my nature, a god by your grace, by the power of your Spirit, bringing together god a unity of opposites.

Symeon the New Theologian (949-1022)

I never like dealing with the subject of identity. It is at once limiting and bordered, and at the same time, unlimited and borderless. However, recently the issue of identity has hit home. Not with me specifically, for I am quite comfortable to identify myself, even with the baggage it comes with, as a white gay man. But rather, my challenged relationship with identity is related to a recent experience of an acquaintance of mine who I will refer to as Sam, a name allowing for gender and sexual flexibility. After visiting the doctor, Sam was told to be suffering from *gender identity disorder* (GID). GID is defined by the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* as "characterized by strong and persistent cross-gender identification accompanied by persistent discomfort with one's assigned sex" (American Psychiatric Association 2000: 535). This definition "offers certification of a condition" to which one is deemed to be, according to a heteropatriarchal discourse, "ill, sick, wrong, out of order, abnormal, and to suffer a certain stigmatization as a consequence of the diagnosis" (Butler 2004: 75 and 76).

To place further strain on Sam, the doctor defined Sam as suffering from *gender dysphoria*, as having "discomfort" with his/her/?? "assigned sex" and therefore having the desire to

possess “the body of the other sex” (American Psychiatric Association 2000: 535). The problem, at least the problem that the doctor saw, was the fact that Sam identifies as trans – not as transsexual, transgendered, male or female, but trans the body/bodies in constant fluctuation. On top of all this, Sam “suffers” from another identity disorder that I too suffer from; we both identify in some way as c/Christian. And it is here, at this juncture, that Sam's story becomes intertwined with my favourite pastime – the study of queer theology – for Sam made the bold move to call me and ask where she/he/?? finds place in the Christian tradition(s). Does Christian theology have something to say about trans body/ies and their construction, performance, place?

In this paper, I would like to begin to open up a discussion of queer(ed) bodies and how they relate and find solidarity in the body of Christ – that is, the Church, the people of God, and our shared traditions. I am arguing for a queer theology (both in a positionality and a identity) in which the rejected Christian trans body/ies finds place in and with Christ – the bodily imago. To be a queer(ed) body is to “identify without and essence [I]t describes a horizon of possibility whose precise extent and heterogeneous scope cannot in principle be delimited in advance” (Halperin 1995: 62). The queer(ed) body/ies is that which exists against the normative discourses of heterosexuality that tries to limit, border, institutionalize, and define body/ies. Queer(ed) bodies are bodies fractured and in diaspora without defined and limited meaning(s). The queer(y)ing of body/ies locates them/us in a constant “struggle against the straitjacketing effects of institutionalization, to resist closure and remain in the process of ambiguous (un)becoming” (Sullivan 2007: v).

The trans body/ies within this queer(ed) discourse are those body/ies who are featured as “otherwise” from society's gender assumptions (Mollenkott 2001: 40); I am speaking of the intersexed, transexed, transgendered, cross-dressers, of drag queens and kings, and the androgynous. According to the definition of GID, they/we are bodies which need to be fixed, changed, and cured. If this is the case, then the body of the bodiless Christ, I am suggesting, also needs to be fixed, changed, and cured. Rather than being blind to the “erasure” of trans people (Namaste 2000: 51-52), a queer(ed) theology makes visible trans body/ies in the Church – in Christ. In this exploration, I want to take us down three short paths to exploring the queer(ed)/trans body of Christ. Firstly, I want to explore the sacrament of communion in which we, as members of churches, share in the sacred meal of bread and wine. Secondly, I want to look at the image and

language of medieval mysticism. Finally, I want to look at the doctrine of incarnation.

Theologian Graham Ward argues that the body of Christ consumed in the bread and wine, is a place where the gender identity of Christ is no longer biologically male (as represented in the figure of Jesus the Christ), but rather, it is a body being *trans/posed*. This body is further *trans/posed* in its *trans/*substantiation into the church – a multi-gendered body of peoples. In the practice of the sacramental life, in the consumption of the sacramental food, Christians become participants – potentially even divinely linked – in Christ's “permeable, *transcorporeal* and *transpositional*” body (emphasis added; Ward 1999: 168). This trans Christ body, consumed in the sacrament of bread and wine, is a queer sacramental flesh that Elizabeth Stuart suggests is “nudging the Christian towards the realization that in Christ maleness and femaleness and gay and straight are categories that dissolve before the throne of grace” (Elizabeth Stuart 2007: 75). In the consumption of communion, we are called to join one to the other in the most erotic of experiences. For me, communion is more than the sharing in the bread and the wine, it is more than a remembrance and a practice of an ancient tradition, it is literally the intertwining of my being with the being of Christ – with you. In communion, I commune with *your* body and *your* blood. Whether you are male or female or androgynous, or ... (blank)... , you and I are intricately linked to each other. This becomes the site where theology in communal practice is queer(ed).

In moving away from the sacramental life of the church, the history of the mystics allows us an encounter with the trans body/ies of Christ. Angela of Foligno, a late 13th century mystic, expresses an erotic desire for the wound of Christ. Through a dictator, Angela writes: “In the fourteenth step, while I was standing in prayer, Christ on the cross appeared ... to me ... He then called me to place my mouth to the wound on his side. It seemed to me that I saw and drank the blood, which was freshly flowing from his side. His intention was to make me understand that by this blood he would cleanse me” (Angela of Foligno 1993: 128).

The fourteenth century mystic, Catherine of Siena, is one of those fascinating characters of the medieval church who presents for us a relational experience with the body of Christ that is deeply erotic, sensual, and often hot! Raymund of Capua was Catherine's confessor, spiritual director, and hagiographer. His account of her life opens up for us a queer(ed) relationship with Christ's body/ies. This body, however, cannot be read as the male body of Jesus the historical man. Rather, the body/ies of Christ

trans from male to female. Capua writes of Catherine's experience: "[Christ] tenderly placed his right hand on her neck, and drew her toward the wound in his side. 'Drink, daughter, from my side,' he said 'and by that draught your soul shall become enraptured with such delight that your very body ... shall be inundated with its overflowing goodness.' Drawn close to the Fountain of Life, she fastened her lips upon that sacred wound, and still more eagerly the mouth of her soul and there she slaked her thirst" (Capua cited in Bynum 1987: 172). Like a mother to her baby, pulling and holding her child's head to her breast to feed and nourish, Christ brought Catherine to his/her breast – that is his/her nourishing wound. Catherine so craves the wound of Christ, that Christ becomes the wet nurse, the mother, the trans body/ies from the male Christ to the female Christ. In a letter to a Florentine abbess, Catherine writes, "We cannot nourish others unless we nourish ourselves at the breasts of divine charity. ... Yes, mother, we must do as a little child does who wants milk. ... We must do the same if we would be nourished. *We must attach ourselves to the breast of Christ ...*, which is the course of charity, and by means of that flesh we draw" (my emphasis; Catherine cited in Bynum 1987: 174).

These medieval mystics use erotic imagery and language to describe their relation to the body/ies of Christ. The image and language of a female sucking the wound of a female Christ figure challenges heteronormative assumptions of relationality through an eroticization of female-female desire. It queers Christ's body/ies through *trans/exualising* it, displacing it from a "proper" place of male performativity. The body/ies of Christ, I would suggest, become so radically fluid that it is not quite clear what exactly it/they is/are. The body/ies become "disordered" and "abnormal." In a sense, Christ does not know what Christ's own body is. Christ is, perhaps, confused about his/her/its gender identity.

The third place where we are able to witness the trans Christ is in the doctrine of ~~the~~ incarnation. As the above examples show, Christianity is a tradition of body/ies. Though it has been the source of bodily regulation, it is also the source of tradition that holds the divine body *trans/itioning* or *trans/forming* into the human body. Through the doctrine of ~~the~~ incarnation, suggests theologian Martín Hugo Córdova Quero, the body of Jesus – fully human – is *trans/gendered* into a glorified divine body (Quero 2008: 95). Jesus becomes, as orthodox (that is "right" thinking) theology argues, both fully human and at the same time fully divine. He is neither one *or* the other in ~~the~~ incarnation, but a combination, a mix, a fluctuation of identities (and this is just in the incarnation; what happens when we bring the Trinity into this mess?).

One of the challenges we as Christians face is the reality that much of our theology/ies has/have been influenced by Platonic dichotomies. In our shared discourses on gender(s), we typically note gay/straight, on sex, we note man/woman. However, a queer(ed) reading of ~~the~~ incarnation finds neither this nor that, but all of the above. Indeed, the divine body/ies of Christ incarnated in Jesus the human, is a trans body that is neither of the dichotomies. It is in the moment of constant *trans*/ition and *trans*/fluctuation. Jesus, as the new Adam, represents the incarnation of the divine in all of humanity. Indeed, creation is fully penetrated by this ambiguous understanding of messy mix. The incarnation is an identity with a disorder – it is literally an identity *in disorder*. The trans body, that body which is itself not ordered by the heteropatriarachal taxonomies, finds place, meaning, identity in the body of ~~the~~ incarnation. Reading queer(ly) patristic theologian Gregory of Nazianzus, Quero writes: “You should not decide whose body/ies are going to be saved because the logos incarnated the whole of humanity!” (Quero 2008: 112).

Coming full circle, we are now back at Sam's story. Sitting on my floor, eyes teared up, Sam found that there *might* be a space for her/his/?? body/ies to praise and worship God. In the space of our conversation, Sam began to realize that Christ – the church – is queer(ed). Indeed, as theologian Anita Fast reminds us, Christianity actually calls us, peoples of faith, to be queer. She says, “the Christian call is one which asks us all to be queer, responding in faith and in hope to the scandalous calling of God's Word” (Fast 1999: 4). But would community, that space where we as Christians find root, accept Sam? Perhaps Fast has something else to share: “a queer theology is one which lives in that 'open space' made available by the inauguration of the new creation” (36) through the resurrections of Christ living in the church.

My cell rang. It was one of those moments where I could think of no worse thing. I wanted to focus all my attention on this moment, but the cell kept ringing. Sam suggested I answer; perhaps Sam just needed a moment. On the other end was my friend John who was in the DT Eastside and wanted to come over. Without asking Sam, I said yes. Now, I have asked John's permission to say that he does define himself as a straight male (even if one night, after a few drinks, we did have a kiss). Nonetheless, he is a straight identifying male. He also knows Sam, and knew a little of what Sam had been struggling with.

When he came and joined our circle, Sam shared her/his/...??.. story. All of our eyes swelled with tears. And then the moment happened. John knows where my wine is kept. He got up,

grabbed a bottle, a wine glass, and some bread that was on my counter. Without talking or asking, he poured the wine into the glass, and looking at Sam he said: “take, drink, this is my body, broken and open for you. It is the body that causes pain and harm; it is a body that loves and desires to be loved. It is my body, Christ’s body, Jeffrey’s body, your body. Do this to remember me.” Without thinking, I took the bread, and looking into Sam’s eyes I said, “take, and eat this bread, for it is my body, queer, broken, lonely, desiring, loving and loved. It is the body of John, it is Christ’s own body, it is the body of all who shun and hate, who love and accept. Do this to remember me.” Nothing more needed to be said. No other actions needed to be taken. Nothing. Stillness and motion filled the room at the same time. All three of us were fully welcome, fully accepted. We were bodies in praise of God in a queer(ed) – perhaps an uncomfortable – space. We had no other identity than the identity that we as Christians receive at the moment of our baptism – Christ.

The trans body/ies that we see, that which we as Christians perhaps are, are not unknown bodies in our tradition – they are the bodies of this church and of this/our Christ. Amen.

**Spiritual Intimacy: What the Church Can Learn From the
Radical Faerie Movement**
Rev. Neil Fernyhough

In his book, *Cascadia: The Elusive Utopia*, Vancouver Sun religion editor Douglas Todd explores what he calls the “unique spirituality and culture” of the region comprising British Columbia, Washington, Oregon, and Northern California. This region – Cascadia – is home to the least institutionally religious people in North America; people who frequently describe themselves as “spiritual, but not religious.”¹

I want to address one group of people who are very explicitly spiritual, and for the most part, alienated from institutional expressions of practically everything – including religion. This group is the Radical Faeries. I will discuss who the Faeries are and how their spirituality emerges from a particular view of gender, sexuality, and relationship. Through this, I want to explore what Christians can learn from the Faeries.

The Faeries are a loosely organized collection of queer people, mostly gay men, founded by the gay rights pioneers Harry

¹ Douglas Todd, *Cascadia: The Elusive Utopia* (Vancouver: Ronsdale Press, 2008).

Hay and John Burnside thirty years ago. Hay, the movement's guiding light, saw it as a successor to the Mattachine Foundation – the homophile organisation he co-founded in 1952. In Hay's view, the creation of the Faeries was a necessary corrective to what he called the "hetero-imitative" assimilationist ideology of the gay rights movement that emerged after the Stonewall Riots of 1969.

Hay was a strong believer in the distinct identity, history, and culture of gay men. He was unwilling to speak for other sexual minorities, such as lesbians and trans people; but he clearly felt that those groups, too, were distinct in their own ways. Hay said that the Faerie movement was the most advanced form of gay liberation, because of its belief that queer people constitute a separate people – what he called a "third gender."² To that extent, Hay called on us to "stop behaving like heteros," and to discover "the beautiful faerie prince hidden beneath the ugly green frog skin of hetero-imitative conformity."³

For Hay, the Radical Faerie ethos not only articulates a political, anthropological, and social understanding; but a spiritual one, as well. His initial radicalisation emerged from exposure to Hopi and other Native American expressions of spirituality. He detected in gay men particular creative, spiritual, and shamanistic gifts, writing: "Our gay windows are indicative of our natural inclinations to perceive manifestations of the...seen and unseen...the known horizons and the unknown."⁴

Building on his study of Native spirituality, Hay sought to replicate in the Faeries what he saw as the organising principle of pre-modern societies, where "within the collective all members are responsible to and for each other, and the community life of spirit is accountable to its collective belief system." Hay saw this organising principle, mediated through this third gender brotherhood, as a potential gift to the world.⁵

Like the church, the Faeries gather. There are no officers or meetings, consonant with Hay's idea that such structures were the hetero-imitative death-knell of queer uniqueness. Instead, Faeries come together at gatherings, frequently tied to significant seasonal dates, or to tribal or pagan holidays. The spirit of the gatherings is playful, intimate, and often erotic. The intimacy can be physical, but not necessarily sexual. At the heart of the gathering is, appropriately enough, the heart circle. Each is invited

² Mark Thompson, *Gay Soul: Finding the Heart of Gay Spirit and Nature* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1995), 83-4.

³ *Ibid.*, 84.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 86.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 89.

to stand within a circle of his brothers and share his thoughts or feelings on any topic. Frequently that topic touches on intimacy, love, and self-acceptance. As a means of support, other Faeries will hiss like snakes in approval of what is spoken and shared.

Through heart circle and other practices, Hay believed that spiritually enlivened Faeries procreate through birthing spirit children – creations of ideas, poetry, art, etc. He said, “We believe that one spirit child can lead a hundred of the physical children out of the woods.”⁶ This conviction emerged out of his vision of gay men generally. Hay wrote, “Gay men are those who are constantly trying to put their dreams into words, music, and motion – into new ways of talking to one another. We find the means to bring into articulation our innermost visions.”⁷

Ultimately, the Faerie gathering is an alternative community – or, from the Faerie perspective, it is the genuine community to which the hetero world is alternative. Hence, the salutation when one arrives at a gathering is “Welcome home.” As Hay put it: “At Faerie gatherings we discover that we want to share rather than compete, that we like to listen to one another and exchange our touch in loving ways. We begin to recognize that we’re moving in a different direction from the world we left behind.”⁸

Implicit in the Radical Faerie rejection of hetero-imitation and the creation of authentic gay community is a concern with roleplaying. Not surprisingly, much of this focuses on the roles we play with respect to expectations regarding gender and sexual expression. It is in this regard that we gain an entrée into the most profound critique of Christianity implicit in Faerie theology – namely, Christianity’s narrow, difficult, and binary view of gender and embodiment.

A good place to begin is with Hay’s denunciation of hetero-imitation. What, precisely, is being imitated? For Hay, and, I would assert, for Faeries generally, the most destructive attribute prone to imitation is objectification. Through objectification, one places oneself in a power relationship to the other; and, in order to do this, represses and eliminates all subjective passion and compassion. In their place, fear, anxiety, and hostility emerge as tools to seek and maintain power and control. Or, in the words of the poet, essayist, and Radical Faerie, James Broughton, “So much of human society is resentfully loveless, no wonder it is

⁶ Ibid., 96.

⁷ Ibid., 83.

⁸ Ibid., 88.

violent and guilt-ridden. All power seekers want to make slaves of other men; hence they create abusive relationships.”⁹

From the Faerie perspective, this is the disordered heterosexual deformation of masculinity. It is important to note, however, that it is not heterosexuality which is considered the enemy here; but rather the propensity to turn gender into an immutable thing, as opposed to the social construct it is. To quote the theologian Macella Althaus-Reid, “Nobody should consider heterosexuality as a particular type of demonic sexuality, but its hegemonic construction is.”¹⁰

A way of breaking down this reification of gender is through play. A frequent element in Faerie gatherings is the wearing of clothing inappropriate to North American expectations of male gender roles – and yet, the drag is frequently not meant to copy female gender expectations; but to comment on them through excess and elaboration. It is not at all unusual to see a man with a full beard and chest hair wearing a cheesy, gaudy dress from the 1960s, a huge wig, and layers of colourful eye shadow and rouge. By the same token, Faeries – often the same Faeries – will also dress in loincloths and tribal paint, or that more traditional staple of gay subculture, leather chaps and harnesses – attire which can be taken as an equally piquant commentary on constructions of masculinity. In the same way, Faeries will frequently refer to the clothing worn by North American men as “boy drag.”

In all respects, in drag and out; naked or clothed, Faeries maintain a consistent way of interaction which is relational. Yet, even power and domination can be integrated as an aspect of gender play – or, more precisely, sexual play. But both that, and its opposite, submission, are still seen as roles sapped of their potency by being domesticated into intimate, loving interactions.

Gender play exists in Christian community, as well – albeit on a more subtle level. The references to one’s colleagues or leaders as “mother,” “father,” “sister,” and “brother”; the wearing of gender non-specific clothing; and the assumption of male names by nuns and suggest that even in the most traditional institutions of the church, social categories are unfixed, and that the church can be a place where gender shifts.¹¹

By peeling away gender preconceptions, Faeries seek to peel away “the ugly frog skin of hetero-imitation” to which Harry Hay alluded. The effect of this, he hoped, would be the

⁹ Idem, *Gay Spirit: Myth and Meaning* (New York: St. Martin’s, 1987), 204.

¹⁰ Marcella Althaus-Reid, *The Queer God* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 13.

¹¹ Elizabeth Stuart, “Sacramental Flesh,” in *Queer Theology: Rethinking the Western Body*, ed. Gerald Loughlin (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007), 70.

development of subject-to-subject consciousness, rather than the objectification of the Other. To quote Hay, “Humanity must expand its experience from people thinking objectively – thinking subject-to-object; that is, opportunistically, competitively, and nearly always in terms of self-advantage – to thinking subject-to-subject, equal-to-equal, sharer-to-sharer, thinking in terms of loving-healing.”¹² This requires rejecting what Hay called “heterosexual-male thinking systems” and the creation of a community which he repeatedly characterised as a “circle of loving companions.”

It is an approach not unfamiliar to Christian thought. For example, in Jesus’ teaching on adultery in Matthew 5:27-28, Jesus locates the sin in objectification – “everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart.”¹³ Even more profoundly, in Logion 22 of the Gospel of Thomas, Jesus says: “When you are able to make two become one, the inside like the outside, and the outside like the inside, the higher like the lower, so that a man is no longer male, and a woman, female, but male and female become a single whole – then you will enter in.” This is a vision of subject-subject consciousness which I am certain would meet with the full approval of Harry Hay.

Confronting gender preconceptions in the service of cultivating subject-subject consciousness allows us to concentrate on the fullness of our embodiment; permitting a genuine intimacy to emerge. This is something almost unheard of in the church, or any other traditional institution built on patriarchal structures. As the theologian Philip Culbertson writes, “patriarchy is built upon the assumption that a male body is a text that will reject all attempts by other men to read it. [For] to accept such an attempt would be to destroy the basis of power and control.”¹⁴

Contrast this view with the words of James Broughton: “The body is a holy place of romp and renewal.” It is a temple, in which “the proper activity...is worship. Open your temple to love. Visit other temples.”¹⁵ This is a vision of a sort of radical embodiment – transcendence in the flesh, as the theologian Mayra Rivera calls it. A transcendence which calls for new ways to conceive of the bonds between human beings...the encounter with the Other.¹⁶ Rivera conceives of this encounter in erotic terms,

¹² Thompson, *Gay Spirit*, 197.

¹³ Philip L. Culbertson, “Designing Men: Reading Male Bodies as Texts,” in *The Spirituality of Men: Sixteen Christians Write About Their Faith*, ed. Philip L. Culbertson (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2002), 168.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 169.

¹⁵ Thompson, *Gay Soul*, 12.

¹⁶ Mayra Rivera, “Ethical Desires: Toward a Theology of Relational

one that “opens the possibility of a new birth, where transcendence takes place.”¹⁷ Rivera adds that, “as mediators of the becoming of the cosmos, human beings meet the transcendence, not only of the sexual Other, but also of the whole creation.”¹⁸

Transcendence requires us to recognise that the structure of gender limits one’s authentic being, including one’s sexuality; and to realise that genuine, erotic, embracing expression emerges from a more fluid and open place of self-identity. Or, again quoting James Broughton: “The most androgynous men, whatever their sexual preference, embody the sturdiest gay spirit. They are freer of the rat races and the desire to be like everybody else. What could give all men liberation and depth would be a realization that their souls include all the reaches of human possibility.”¹⁹

While at first glance extremely variant from Christian understanding, indeed this sense of radical embodiment which invites transcendence is right there in our Eucharistic theology. As Elizabeth Stuart observes, “At the consecration of the elements, the church learns again and again of the instability, fluidity, and transposable nature of the body. In the Eucharist, the church reconstitutes itself as the bride of Christ and the body of Christ. Desire is refocused on the divine.”²⁰

At this point, I think it is necessary to refocus on the question at hand – the possible mutual exchange between Christianity and Faerieism. I am not counselling erotic encounters between Christians as a way of finding transcendence in embodiment. But I am interested in discovering an achievable and desirable equivalent. The sensual and the spiritual inform one another, but they are not identical with one another. In other words, spiritual activity can be infused with sensuality, and sensual activity can incorporate a spiritual reality. To this end, what I think we can achieve is an overcoming of social constructions of gender in order to broaden and deepen intimacy.

Of course, anything human beings can imagine and physically do is possible. The language of intimacy – even erotic intimacy – between humans and God is not unknown in our tradition. Almost everyone knows about the erotic love poem, the Song of Solomon, in the Old Testament. There, two lovers

Transcendence,” in *Toward a Theology of Eros: Transfiguring Passion at the Limits of Discipline*, ed. Virginia Burrus and Catherine Keller (New York: Fordham University Press, 2006), 260.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 261.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 265.

¹⁹ Thompson, *Gay Soul*, 14.

²⁰ Stuart, 72.

express their desire for one another – and Christians have long been invited to view this as a metaphor of the longing and desire between Christ and the church. In addition, there is the same language of desire in the Christian mystics. Notable is the sixteenth century monk, St. John of the Cross, writing of “the soul’s inflamed desire for God.” Yet, John was careful to express a sensual intimacy that cannot simply be conflated with sex.²¹

This intimacy – this holy friendship – is at one with the ethos of the Faeries. Harry Hay’s approach to welcome and inclusion is indicative. In discussing how the Mattachine Foundation was formed in the dark days of the 1950s, Hay said that its strength lay in ten-member discussion groups – what we might call cell groups in a Christian context. One participant would be designated as a guide or counsellor, who would also act as a liaison to the wider community. If an individual visited a discussion group and showed interest, this guide would engage him or her in conversation afterward. If, as Hay put it, “we sensed you as a brother,” the individual would be invited a second time. If that went well, and the person began participating; he or she would be invited out to dinner by a member and, as Hay put it, “[we would] share our call with you.” At the third meeting, “our collective family circle suddenly opened to enfold you and welcome you home.”²² Herein lies an instruction for Christians, I think, in the theology of intimate inclusion and holy friendship.

One theological avenue for assimilating this aspect of Faerie theology lies in the Christian notion of the Trinitarian God. Marcella Althaus-Reid asserts that the real mystery of the Trinity does not lie in the relationship of the persons of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit with one another; but rather “how it has been possible, theologically speaking, to merge the God-Father’s self-referential monogamous love (the discourses of the jealous God) with the polyamorous love of God in community,”²³ i.e., the Trinity. It invites us to ask: “Does God’s identity depend on our relationships, [that is, our] befriending, loving acts?”²⁴ Certainly it must, if belief systems are organized around bodies, including bodies in relationship, such as the Trinity and the Body of Christ in the church with the body and blood of Christ in the Eucharist.

It is unfortunate that Christians take the gender switches and gender dynamics we apply to our three-personed God for

²¹ Christopher Hinkle, “Love’s Urgent Longings: St. John of the Cross,” in *Queer Theology: Rethinking the Western Body*, op cit., 194-95.

²² Thompson, *Queer Spirit*, 190.

²³ Althaus-Reid, 37.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 43.

granted – not to mention the inherent intimacy of the Trinitarian construct. To quote again Althaus-Reid, “mono-loving lives and mono-loving gods sooner or later may face short circuits in their systems, expressed by the lack of creativity and nurture.” Instead, she states, we should “[locate] God in the intimate reunion of poly-loving...intrinsic to the Trinitarian image.”²⁵

Although unaware of it, Althaus-Reid’s construction of a “Trinitarian sexual identity” for God perfectly accords with several Faerie principles. First, it rejects a hetero monoculture of self-identity and social construction; second, it permits a fluid notion of gender, in which it alternately is deconstructed, mashed-up, reconstructed, and parodied; and third, it advances a notion of the ideal community as a “circle of loving companions,” to again quote Harry Hay’s marvellous vision. Without this gender-exchanging and gender-malleable vision of the Trinity, to quote Althaus-Reid, “theology becomes inefficacious and self-neutralised by totalitarian heterosexuality. Reciprocity becomes hetero-reciprocity; [and] solidarity becomes hetero-solidarity.”²⁶

Whether we care to admit it or not, God sees our bodies and our relationships as an all-knowing voyeur. Moreover, God invites us to gaze as well upon his body – or her body – with equal intimacy in God’s eternal, three-personed loving encounter. In so doing, we open ourselves to the possibility of transcendence – whether it is transcending gender, sexuality, or any other aspect of identity we have foreclosed for ourselves; or, perhaps more appropriately, have had foreclosed for us.

The Radical Faerie visionary James Broughton was fond of saying that “the greatest enemy of the soul is the literal mind.”²⁷ Perhaps the greatest gift that the Faeries can bequeath to the Church – or any other organized expression of spirituality – is that insight. What if it was a vision that we applied not only to the Bible, or to church structure, or even to our own personal circumstances – but to the things we take as givens of our identity? How might we then view God – this multi-gendered reality in whose image every human possibility is created?

²⁵ Ibid., 55.

²⁶ Ibid., 127.

²⁷ Thompson, *Gay Soul*, 11.

“Thank God I’m Gay!”
Rev. Markus Dünzkofer

“Thank God, I am gay!” The acclamation rang through the church. “Thank God, I am gay!” After years of struggling with his sexuality, after getting married and having kids, after years of trying to pray himself straight, after even entering the priesthood, my friend Bill didn’t have the strength to run anymore. He just couldn’t keep the closet door shut.

He had entered an ancient church in London, and disturbed more than the silence. When Bill told me the story he couldn’t remember if anybody else was there. But who cares. This was between him and God. He could do no other. He could only give thanks for what God had done and what God had affirmed even before he was born. And so he bellied it out with a scream that liberated him from the doubts, the lies, the fears, and the shame. From the bottom of his heart, from the bottom of his soul it rang through – and it rang true: “Thank God, I am gay! Thank God, I am gay!”

“You are the salt of the earth,” Jesus says to us today. You add the flavour. You make it taste good. Without you the world would be stale, would be tasteless, would even be lifeless. “You are the salt of the earth.” And of course, we need to remain the salt, need to remain the ones who make the world flavour- and tasteful. We shall not go stale or flat, but must continue to be life-givers to a world that is caught up in darkness, imprisoned by destruction, and suffocated by death of body, mind, and soul.

But how?

Well, I believe we remain salt of the earth as long as we continue to preach by word and deed the life-giving message of our crucified and risen Lord Jesus, as long as we witness and celebrate the love of our triune God, and as long as we are not afraid to be servants of one another, advocating for peace, justice, and the preservation of creation.

However, this is not just a question that affects our interactions with the world. I believe there is something more: We cannot become salt of the earth, if we are stale, tasteless, and flat within ourselves. We cannot be life-givers if we have drain life out of our own members, as we silence some voices or squash many gifts. The church can only remain “salt of the earth” if we are alive in ourselves, if dare to expect life breaking into our mission an ministry from the most unlikely of places by the most unlikely of people. Prophetic voices do not come from the dead centre, they are to be found on the edge, among those for whom the church

has not been a place of safety or nurture, has neither been a haven nor a home. Their very presence is a sign that the work of the church even within herself is never done. The Spirit urges us on to new shores. *“Ecclesia semper reformanda est”* – the church is always to be reformed. This is an insight not just revealed at the time of the Reformation! When those who have been marginalized and oppressed do not abandon the Body of Christ, but push back, something profound is revealed. And this goes for all on the margin: for women, visible minorities, as also GLBT-folk, who I believe have quite a particular role to play.

Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender people remind the church that there are things more important than the allegiance to a church-body, which in the end is an fallible institution – just like any construct maintained by human beings. It takes more than guts and stamina to remain in an institution that is oppressive and hurtful. It takes a deep faith, a deep trust in the power of God. Being true to God, and to whom God called us to be, is more important than what the church might say today. Many of GLBT-folk have tried everything possible to adjust to the demands of the church, and it just didn't work. Only when finally embracing what God has made, did the love of God penetrate every fibre of our being.

My coming out as a gay man was akin to an exorcism, as the demons of lies, deception, and unworthiness were cast out by the love of Jesus Christ: I did not have to lie to my family and friends anymore. I did not have to deceive myself anymore. Above all I did not have to run away from God anymore. I could finally see and understand that I am not puny, not unworthy, not un-loveable by God just because I am gay. I was finally able to claim my rightful place at the table in God's reign, where Jesus was already waiting to share his all with me.

So, here we are, my friend Bill and I, and we won't go away. And neither will other queer folk in denominations old and new that now fight our prophetic insights tooth and nail. You wait and see! One day, there will be GLBT-ministry within the breakaway Anglican Network!

Yes, we won't go away, because we know and trust that in the end is not about the church's approval, but about God's, who has said “yes” to each and every one of us, who delights in us not despite of what or who we are, but because of it, and who continues to embrace us with eternal love, whoever we are and wherever we find ourselves on the journey.

The second reason why GLBT folks have a special place in the life of the church is that GLBT folks make the church face

issues, which most church-folk really do not want to talk about. Discussing sexuality, or even worse intimacy and sensuality are hard. Yes, this is not easy. I know, because as I was writing this sermon I was indeed second-guessing myself: Am I too radical? Am I offensive? Is what I say really grounded in biblical theology? Am I too exclusive? Will people still like me?

However, this kind of second-guessing comes from a place that speaks of fear and of shame. Yet, God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ, is quite clear: God is love and we are God's children, loved and showered with compassion by God beyond our imagination. God is our true mother and our true father. And there just is no place for fear or shame in true love. It within this love that we can face the tough questions, even those that make us go "eek!" Because, do I really want to know what you are doing with each other, what you are doing in bed. "Eek" indeed! No, I don't wanna talk about this. After all, I am English! ... Wait! I am not English!

Joking aside, we really must move the discussion of sexuality away from focusing on what we do with our genitals. Sexuality is so much more than sex. This is our gift as GLBT-folk to the church.

As Anglicans we are rooted first and foremost in the Incarnation, in the coming of God into the flesh in Jesus Christ. God became one of us and did not shy away from the reality of the human experience. The Incarnation affirms our creation and thus our human sexuality. Sexuality is part of God's creation, is part of God's plan for humanity. There is goodness and beauty in human sexuality, in human intimacy, and in even in human sensuality. We must reclaiming sexuality, intimacy, and sensuality as something created for our good, something that can produce positive and wonderful thing, something that can help us become co-creators with God of a world that reveals the beauty that God intended for it.

Does this mean that anything goes? Far from it! Just like anything God has gifted we are free to use or abuse it. We all know how sexuality can be abused. Whenever there is an imbalance of power, whenever another person is objectified or simply becomes the means to satisfy our desires, whenever sexuality leaps beyond faithfulness, mutuality, or the relational, then sin can distort the wonder and awe of sexuality. Sexuality is a wonderful thing, but it is also powerful and we sometimes underestimate its power.

But there has been too much fear-mongering in the church about sexuality, sensuality, and intimacy. We have been so afraid to get it wrong that we have abandoned the courage to get it right,

to celebrate with gusto God's wonderful gifts of sexuality, sensuality, and intimacy. In fact, we have been so scarred that we have even demonized the body. However, God's love for humanity includes our bodies and our sexuality. That we proclaim Jesus Christ to be fully divine and fully human should remind us that God embraces all of what we are. And it is high-time the church to start teaching positively about the body and about sexuality, sensuality, and intimacy.

When I first came out, it was all a bit scary. And I was content with the crumbs from the table. However, I now know that I and my GLBT sisters and brothers have a place in the church, not despite of who we are, but because of who we are. We have a place at the table of the Lord because it is Jesus himself who invites us and who welcomes us. And we have a place in the church, because the church needs us – not the other way around. The church needs us, because we can offer unique insights into how we can remain “salt of the earth.” This is why being gay indeed is a gift that needs to be celebrated and embraced. It is a gift that has so much to offer, for ourselves, for the society we live in, and for the church. And so I will join my friend Bill today: Thank God, I am gay. Thank God indeed.

About the Presenters

Rev. Markus Dünzkofer was born and raised in Germany. He read theology at the University of Nuremberg-Erlangen and the University of Edinburgh and graduated with the degree of Master of Theology (M.Th.) from Edinburgh in 1994. In 1996 he moved to the US on a Fulbright Scholarship to continue his theological studies at Seabury-Western Theological Seminary in Evanston, IL, a seminary of The Episcopal Church. After graduating with the degree of Master of Divinity (M.Div.) in 1998, he completed a year of hospital-chaplain training (Clinical Pastoral Education – CPE) in Chicago and was ordained by the Bishop of Chicago in 1999. In September of 1999 he started serving as the Assistant Rector of St. Matthew's Episcopal Church in Evanston, IL. The Bishop of New Westminster called Fr. Markus to serve as rector of St. Paul's Anglican Church in Vancouver's West End in June of 2004.

Anita Fast (MTS) began developing a queer theology from an Anabaptist-Mennonite perspective for her Master's thesis in 1999. Since then she has given numerous workshops and lectures on the topic. She is employed at Vancouver School of Theology as

Registrar, and is active on the Board of the Brethren/Mennonite Council for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Interests in Canada, and the Working Committee of the Interfaith Summer Institute for Justice, Peace, and Social Movements.

Rev. Neil Fernyhough, M.Div., Th.M., was ordained an Anglican priest in 2000, and is currently priest-in-charge of St. Hilda's in Sechelt. His graduate work has been in New Testament ethics; and he has begun doctoral studies on the role of conscience as an ethical guide in the work of St. Paul. He is active in the Anglican Church of Canada, currently serving as co-chair of the Diocese of New Westminster's Ecumenical and Multifaith Unit, and is a co-founder of *The Widening Circle*, a group dedicated to upholding the inclusive heritage of Anglican Christianity. His current research interests include finding points of contact between contemporary west coast folk spiritualities and Christianity.

Jeffrey Preiss is a graduate of Vancouver School of Theology (MATS) where he now works in the Admissions Office. His thesis, entitled "[en]Gendering the Desert of Late Antiquity: Exploring Prescriptions of Masculine Body Performance in the *Life of Antony*" explored the construction of masculinities in the early church by reading the bodily performance of St. Antony as related in Athanasius' *Life of Antony*. Jeffrey continues to research in the area of gender and queer theory. He has most recently been a guest speaker for the Centre for the Study of Canada at Thompson Rivers University's conference "Navigate the Labyrinth: History Philosophy, and Politics." While still holding on to his historical and theological roots, Jeffrey is now working on a second masters (Educational Studies) in which he intends to focus of gender and queer theory in relation to university policies of gender inclusion.