

From the Same Spirit: Receiving the Theological Gifts of Transgender Christians

By Mary Elise Lowe

Abstract: Transgender Christians bear four transformative gifts to the body of Christ. They celebrate that humans are God's created co-creators, and that God creates with and through them. Second, gender non-conforming Christians have learned to steadfastly love (*hesed*) themselves as they love God and the world. Next, transgender Christians witness that humans are a coherent unity of body-mind, not a mind in a body. Finally, transgender followers of Jesus welcome the Holy Spirit's gifts of plurality, newness, unity, and freedom.

Key Terms: transgender, queer, theological anthropology, body, *hesed*, co-creator

Better and Worse

In the United States, life seems to be getting both better and worse for transgender individuals. On the one hand, in June 2016 the Department of Defense finally began allowing transgender personnel to serve openly in the military.¹ On the other hand, *The New York Times* recently reported that "L.G.B.T. People Are More Likely to Be Targets of Hate Crimes Than Any Other Minority Group."² The story details what far too many transgender, bisexual, queer, lesbian, and gay persons already know: they are frequently targets of discrimination and violence at home, on the job, in public spaces, at school, and in their places of worship. Those of us who identify as Christian must confess that traditional, heteropatriarchal Christian teachings about God, sex, Jesus, gender, and creation often are used to justify the oppression of transgender persons.

In spite of this religious and secular subjugation, courageous transgender Christians and their families are bearing transformative gifts to the body of Christ that is the church.³ My purpose here is not to answer the question, "What does Christian theology have to offer transgender Christians?" Rather, my goal is to affirm and commend four gifts from the "same Spirit" that transgender Christians *already* are bringing to their congregations and the larger Christian communion (1 Cor 12:4). In contrast to theologies that emphasize God's original creation, many transgender Christians celebrate the promise that God continues to make all things new, and that humans are God's created co-creators. Second, while many theologies tell Christians to give up one's self for the sake of others, transgender Christians demonstrate how each person must steadfastly love (*hesed*) themselves as part of loving God and the world. Next, though Christian theologians often have taught that the body (matter) is separate from the mind (spirit),

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transgender Christians live out the biblical witness that humans are a coherent unity of mud-breath, body-mind.⁴ Finally, while some Christian communities minimize the work of the Holy Spirit, transgender Christians welcome the Spirit who gives plurality, newness, unity, unpredictability, and freedom.

These four precious gifts can and are empowering all kinds of Christians to recognize and celebrate God's ongoing creation, embrace deeper self-love, affirm their body-minds, and open up to the gifts of the Holy Spirit in their lives and their work in God's good world.

Identity and Complexity

It is fitting that I offer a few words about my identity as a theologian and the complexity of identity in LGBTQI theologies. I write as a queer, cis theologian who has been studying and writing in the fields of feminist, LGBT, and queer theologies for over ten years.⁵ I continually work to recognize that my knowledge is partial and to confess how my privileged social locations shape the way I construct, reflect on, and live out my theology. As a queer theologian commending the gifts of transgender Christians, I find that there is no apt word or metaphor that precisely captures my relationship to emerging transgender theologies. I am not a partner, because I have so much more privilege than my transgender siblings, and I am not quite an ally, because I, too, experience marginalization under the power of heteropatriarchy.

The image that informs my theological method is one of journeying-accompaniment. Like the disciples who accompanied one another on the road to Emmaus after the crucifixion, transgender and queer theologians are walking together, trying to figure out how best to follow Jesus (Lk 24:13-32). As we construct our varied theologies, I want to be clear that I strongly agree with transgender writer Mercia McMahan, who states, "Theologians should be encouraged to write trans positive theology . . . Nonetheless, the driving force of trans theology should transfer to members

of the community once there are sufficient trans identified trans theologians to sustain the sub-discipline."⁶

I write with the hope that this article will contribute to the emerging field of transgender theology. The gifts that my transgender siblings offer the church are gifts that I *already* have received.⁷ Their co-creativity, faithfulness-to-self, embodied unity, and Spirit-filled living challenge me to re-think my understanding of God, sex, Jesus, gender, and creation. These four gifts can empower and inspire all Christians to break free from heteropatriarchal theology and practice.

Before moving forward, it is important to clarify that the word *transgender* does not refer to any one way of living out an individual's identity in the world. Rather, *transgender* is "[a]n umbrella term for people whose gender identity and/or gender expression differs from what is typically associated with the sex they were assigned at birth. . . . People under the transgender umbrella may describe themselves using one or more of a wide variety of terms."⁸ Transpeople bring the fullness of who they are into their communities and vocations in many ways.⁹ Some find their home in the familiar categories of male/man, female/woman, transman or transwoman.¹⁰ For others, living as a transgender individual means moving beyond binary categories.

Theologian Monica Joy Cross offers the following cornucopious description:

We gender-variant are, like all human beings, complex and unique. We are straight, gay, and bisexual, cross-dressers, pre-operative and non-operative and intersexuals of many types, drag queens and kings; female and male illusionists; androgynous persons and other gender outlaws of various kinds . . . who somehow manage to transcend, transgress, alter, blur, or confuse the usual categories of gender.¹¹

Cross's words remind us of the diversity and creativity of the transgender experience and call us to openly and honestly receive and celebrate transpeople and their many gifts. I suggest that the first offering transgender Christians bear is their creativity.

Receiving the Gift: God Is Continually Creating In, With, and Through Us

One of my students (I'll call them Peyton) recently told me that their parents were refusing to support their transition. (Here *they* is used as a gender-neutral third-person singular personal pronoun.¹²) Peyton's parents are Christians, and told Peyton, "God made you a boy, and God doesn't make mistakes."¹³ They insisted that their child must remain a "boy" even if it made Peyton feel incongruous and unfaithful to the person they feel themselves to be. Allow me to suggest that Peyton's parents are making two harmful theological assumptions. First, they think that God created *only* at the beginning of creation. Second, they mistakenly believe that *only* God creates. Today, many transpeople are co-creating new identities and reforming their body-minds, thereby demonstrating God's ongoing creative activity in the world.

Numerous resources in the biblical and theological tradition testify to God's ongoing work. God is still creating new life and new identities, and renewing body-minds. When describing the new life that Christians have in Jesus Christ (in contrast to their old life), Paul celebrated how the Spirit continually renews each person. "So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new" (2 Cor 5:17, also see 2 Cor 3:3; 4:16). And Martin Luther—the founder of my own tradition—taught that God is still creating through humans in a sacramental way. "All creatures are God's masks and disguises; God permits them to work with God and help God create all sorts of things."¹⁴ When discussing Christ's presence in the Lord's Supper, Luther wrote, "But [Christ] is present in the sacrament and in the hearts of believers not really because he wants to be worshipped there, but because [Christ] wants there to work with us (*mit uns schaffen*) and help us."¹⁵ For Luther, this is an active, embodied work. "*Mit uns schaffen*' is (bodily) coparticipation with Jesus Christ in realizing new creation."¹⁶

Created Co-Creators

Peyton's transition is an expression of God's continuous creating in the world. Being formed in God's own image means that Peyton is a created co-creator with God.¹⁷ Theologian Philip Hefner explains the creaturely vocation of humans this way: "Human beings are God's created co-creators whose purpose is . . . acting in freedom, to birth the future that is most wholesome for the nature that has birthed us."¹⁸ The transgender person who chooses a new name and pronouns is co-creating with God. And when an individual lives out a novel gender expression or embodied identity, this affirms their innovation and authenticity as God's co-created creature.

God creates through all persons. What is particular to the varied experiences of some transgender Christians is that their journey calls them to weave identities and fashion renewed body-minds in ways that help them experience congruity and freedom. Justin Tanis¹⁹ describes it this way: "Trans bodies also speak of a collaboration between God and humanity in co-creating what our bodies are and what they become . . . while God set in motion the process . . . we who are these bodies make choices about . . . how we move our bodies—and all these actions play a role in shaping our bodies, literally and figuratively."²⁰ To say that God set the process in motion does not mean that God is not continuing to create in, with, and through transgender persons like Justin.²¹ The process of coming out also is an imaginative journey. Coming out is "about self-actualization through liberating our spirits, our pride . . . and minds, and self-understanding, [and] our relationships with God and others."²² Coming out and expressing a new identity and body-mind is a creative process that involves both Creator and created co-creators.²³

Some readers may wonder how my claim that transgender Christians are co-creating new identities relates to the debate regarding the stability (essentialism) or fluidity of sex and gender. On one hand, some transpeople say they were born with a particular essence in terms of their personal identity, sex, or gender. For these individuals, creating a

congruent self might involve claiming this essential (and perhaps God-given) identity.²⁴ On the other hand, there are transpeople who assert that their personal identity, sex, and gender are fluid and constantly changing. For them, creating an integrated self is an ever-flowing process of becoming. How an individual views their identity and transition experience is, of course, entirely up to them.

My personal view is that every individual is a creature-in-process. We are a unity of body-mind that is continually shaped by discourses. We occupy multiple subject positions, we always are becoming, and we are animated by the Holy Spirit.²⁵ Identity (personal, sex, and gender) involves both stability and fluidity, materiality and agency. God continually is creating in, with, and through human creatures whether one is living out their essence or living within and amidst fluidity.

By embracing their congruent selves, transgender Christians live out their vocations as created co-creators. And this inventive claiming of one's identity and re-imagining body-mind is a powerful gift that transgender Christians bear. Indeed, many people feel trapped in culturally and religiously "appropriate" sex and gender roles, and too many individuals are victims of sex and gender discrimination and gender-based violence. Think how liberating it can be to cast off stereotypes and fashion authentic ways of living as coherent selves in our homes, workplaces, congregations, and public spaces. And imagine how theology can be reformed and queered by setting aside binary categories and embracing transgression and multivarious ways of thinking. Many transgender Christians are embracing their imaginative agency and showing others how to live as created co-creators in God's diverse world.

Receiving the Gift: Faithfully Loving One's Self

A second gift that transgender Christians give the body of Christ is the queering of traditional conceptions of both divine and human love. (Here,

queer is used as a verb.) Many gender non-conforming and transgender Christians have made the challenging journey from self-doubt to self-affirmation, from discontinuity to continuity. In the midst of overwhelming personal and structural oppression they know that loving God and loving the world must be woven together with faithfully loving (*hesed*) one's self.

In the last forty years, womanist, black, mujerista, and feminist theologians have argued that the call to sacrifice oneself for the sake of others is very harmful for those who have little power, agency, or privilege. Some transpeople feel forced to conceal their gender expression from others—thereby sacrificing a part of themselves—because they fear losing important relationships or risk discrimination at work or where they worship. Yet these same individuals often share that at some point they realized that not being open with others was leading to anxiety, depression, or suicidal thoughts.²⁶ For many transpeople, living authentically becomes the only way to truly live.

Hesed

Claiming one's identity and expression is a powerful act of extending faithfulness or steadfast love (*hesed*) to oneself. In the Hebrew Bible, the word *hesed* often is translated as covenantal love, faithfulness, steadfast love, mercy, or loyal love. "Surely goodness and mercy [*hesed*] shall follow me all the days of my life" (Ps 23:6). Biblical scholars have long taught that God extends *hesed* to creation and that humans can offer *hesed* to one another (Ps 109:16). *Hesed* can be "the ongoing attitude and continuing acts done by one person for another in support and maintenance of their friendship."²⁷ Ruth is praised by Boaz for her loyalty/*hesed* (Ruth 3:10); and *hesed* also can denote honesty and integrity (Prov 20:28).²⁸ In a potentially queer twist, the deep faithfulness between Jonathan and David also is expressed with the concept of *hesed* (1 Sam 20:8 and 2 Sam 9:1).²⁹

I suggest that we think of God's *hesed* to creation as having a vertical dimension, and that human acts of *hesed* to other humans and creation

have a horizontal dimension. Martin Luther celebrated both trajectories—God’s steadfast love to creation and the merciful love humans show one another. In Luther’s lecture on Psalm 51, he writes, “For he [David] declares that God has great mercy . . . This picture of a gracious and merciful God is a picture that gives life.”³⁰ And when reflecting on Jesus’ words, “I desire mercy, not sacrifice,” Luther emphasizes the horizontal dimension of mercy/*eleos*. “Mercy is doing good towards one’s neighbor amid [their] miseries or needs.”³¹ Transgender Christians are queering *hesed* and expressing its circular dimension by loving God, creation, and self in one ever-spiraling act of faithful self-love. They are living out Jesus’ teaching, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Mt 22:39). Too often Christians focus only on the neighbor to the exclusion of “love yourself.” When transgender Christians trust their own truths, speak in their own voices, claim their own pronouns, and fashion their own embodiment, they are receiving, living out, and passing on the encircling gift of faithful love that God has for creation.

Learning to love self is something for which everyone should strive. But this can be particularly difficult for members of marginalized groups who are told that they are less than fully human because of their sex, identity, practices, loving, race, or abilities. The particular expression of the transgender witness of *hesed* can be seen in several ways. For many transgender persons, faithfully loving self involves creating a new identity. One transgender Christian describes the connection between self-*hesed* and claiming a new name. “Choosing my name . . . was an act of radical self-love. I had never done something so loving for myself . . . In choosing my name, I decided that my happiness and self-care were worth the effort.”³² Second, some transpeople feel called to express their new identity within the familiar categories of male or female, and they identify as a man or a woman. Finally, for others, loving self means crafting an identity that refuses to fit into familiar identities and categories (like male/female or gay/straight). Loving themselves involves affirming the fluidity of their identity. Their sense of self, their gender expression, loves, and embodied experiences may

change over time. No matter how a person lives out their congruent identity, to *hesed* one’s self is not a one-time achievement. It is an ongoing and unfolding part of each individual’s journey over their lifetime.

This courageous and sometimes transgressive act of *hesed* is a powerful gift that transgender Christians bring to the body of Christ. Far too many individuals give up self for the sake of others or struggle with identity and embodiment. What would Christian congregations look like—and how might people live as Jesus’ disciples in the world—if every individual passionately and steadfastly loved self, experienced integrity in body-mind, and celebrated their own particularity? Our congregations could be more authentic, more welcoming, more diverse, more equitable, and more willing to take risks if we steadfastly loved ourselves and others with the faithful and passionate love that God has for creation.

Receiving the Gift: The Unity of Body-Mind

In June 2014, transgender actress and advocate Laverne Cox was featured on the cover of *Time* magazine, and in June 2015, Caitlyn Jenner’s image was on the cover of *Vanity Fair*. Their stories encouraged many people to think deeply about the connections between and among body-mind and identity. Much of the sensational media reporting about transpeople focuses on bodies. But it is important to remember that any physical changes are only one aspect of the journey for many transpeople. From a theological perspective, news stories about transgender individuals generally involve four false and unspoken beliefs about embodiment. These include assumptions that (1) the mind and the body are somehow separate and distinct; and that (2) the body is of lesser value than the mind. In addition, there are the seemingly paradoxical assumptions that (3) a person can use their mind to control their body; or that (4) an individual’s physical form fully determines their mind, identity,

or gender expression. These damaging beliefs about mind and body have their roots in Greek philosophy and Gnosticism. The Hebrew Bible and the New Testament, however, contain a more holistic understanding of embodiment. Thankfully the lived experiences of many transgender Christians lead them to reject these false assumptions, reclaim the biblical testimony, and witness to others that humans are an inseparable unity of breath-mud, body-mind.

When telling the story of their journeys, some—but certainly not all—transgender Christians say they have experienced a lack of coherence regarding their embodied identity and gender expression. They share that from a very early age they felt they were not the sex and/or gender that was assigned to them at birth. “As I grew up I became more aware of my body, and how . . . it did not seem to fit with the image I had of myself. I was in conflict with my body . . . For me, survival meant disconnection.”³³ Others recount that they felt uncomfortable in the “boys” or “girls” clothes they were supposed to wear. And some say that they have never fit into either of the binary categories of male or female. In the face of transphobia and violence, many in the transgender community feel forced to suppress their feelings of discontinuity. Some attempt to “control” their own bodies to conform to cultural and religious expectations about how a “male” or a “female” should appear, walk, speak, or behave.

One friend recounts that she tried to “talk herself out of being transgender” for ten years. In the end, this mind (spirit) over body (matter) approach did not work. It took another five years for her to co-create a place of embodied coherence and faithful love of self. What my friend discovered is that body-mind is an inseparable unity. Her “mind” could not control her “body.” Nor did her physical form at birth determine her identity or gender expression. Whether described as congruity, authenticity, or wholeness, many transgender individuals say that a sense of peace and freedom only emerges when they feel unity and harmony in body-mind. Transgender theologian Brett Ray describes a powerful moment of continuity. “I saw myself in the mirror getting out of the shower and

I did a double take. I tilted my head to the side . . . and for the first time I *saw* myself. I saw the body that I had and I was able to say, ‘That’s me.’”³⁴

Reaffirming the Biblical Witness

The authors of Genesis wrote that God formed the first human(s) from mud and then filled them with *neshamah* (breath, wind, or spirit) (Gen 2:7). The prophet Ezekiel described how God assembled bones, sinews, and flesh to create bodies, which only became alive when spirit or breath (*ruach*) entered them (Ezek 37:14). The very core of the Christian message is about embodiment: “And the Word became flesh and lived among us” (Jn 1:14). Paul taught that after the resurrection humans will enjoy some sort of unity of body-mind, having “spiritual bodies” (1 Cor 15:44).

Martin Luther’s understanding of the human person was rooted in these biblical teachings. His trust in the incarnational promise led him to reject any form of dualism that devalued the body.³⁵ “But because the spirit and the flesh are so intimately bound together into one, although they completely disagree with each other, therefore he [Paul] attributes to himself as a whole person [*totus homo*] the work of both of them, as if he were at the same time completely flesh and completely spirit.”³⁶

When transgender Christians claim their own truths and co-create coherence of body-mind, they reaffirm these biblical teachings. And they help others re-consider the incarnation of God and our own embodied experiences in new ways. Lewis Payne testifies that the Word becoming flesh informs their (Payne’s) understanding of Payne’s own body-mind. “At the heart of this new relationship with myself is the incarnation: Jesus becomes flesh . . . Jesus lives in a body . . . Our physical selves bring us unto communion with God and with each other.”³⁷ Transgender children of God are queering theology itself. They are reading their own stories in light of Jesus’ story. And they are encountering the body-mind of Jesus Christ through the knowledge of their own body-minds.

The gift of affirming the coherence of body-mind not only echoes the biblical witness; it also resonates with emerging findings in the field of embodied cognition.³⁸ In contrast to historic, dualistic views which hold that a human being is a mind IN a body, new discoveries in the neurosciences, cognitive and developmental psychology, and philosophy reveal that humans are an inseparable unity of body-mind. Cognition, moral claims, abstract thought, and identity are shaped profoundly by the ongoing interplay of body-mind, experiences, others, and environment.

Embodied Cognition

Philosopher Mark Johnson describes the central claim of embodied cognition this way: “[W]hat reason is and does depends directly on how our bodies and brains work and on the patterns of our bodily interactions with the world. This is not merely the obvious claim that we need brains and bodies in order to think. *It is the much stronger claim that the way our bodies work and the nature of our bodily encounters with our environments shape the nature of reason itself.*”³⁹ So when writer Youtha Hardman-Cromwell says, “I’m not just a body. I’m not just a spirit. Neither are you. I’m both, a complex integration of physical and spiritual,”⁴⁰ their experience is in harmony with biblical and scientific insights about the coherence of body-mind.

By affirming the congruity of body-mind, transgender Christians are giving a gift to the body of Christ that urgently is needed. So many people struggle with issues of embodiment and identity. This comes as no surprise since the dominant message in most capitalist contexts is that only certain types of bodies matter (white, thin, athletic, able, young, etc.), and that individuals should be able to discipline, control, or even heal their bodies. Transgender Christians are living out a different image of embodiment. When an individual claims a new name, employs new pronouns, or lives out a new way of being body-mind in the world, they pass on the biblical

promise that to be a coherent human creature, one must embrace the entire person: body-mind and mud-breath.

Receiving the Gift: Embracing the Enlivening Holy Spirit

Another offering transgender Christians bring to their faith communities is the way many embrace and live out the Holy Spirit’s gifts of plurality, newness, unity, unpredictability, and freedom. The biblical authors used the concepts of breath, wind, spirit, and dove to describe the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Moving in unpredictable ways, the same trinitarian Spirit sustains and offers unique gifts to every person. Luther described it this way: “We live according to the Spirit, in whom the Father and the Son rest and live.”⁴¹ Yet too many congregations—including my own—actively or subtly encourage sameness among their members. Why does this happen? Did not the apostle Paul teach that the Holy Spirit gives different gifts of grace to each person and that the body of Christ has diverse members?

Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit . . . All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses. For just as the body is one and has many members . . . so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body . . . and we were all made to drink of one Spirit (1 Cor 12:4, 11–13).

At Pentecost, the Spirit poured into the body-minds of Jesus’ followers in diverse ways. “All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability” (Acts 2:4). Theologian Thomas Bohache affirms the plurality of Pentecost and contends that “the Pentecost story becomes queer: it testifies that God’s message of inclusion . . . will be heard . . . through diverse messengers . . . Thus, the diversity in the GLBTQ communit(ies) reflects the very Spirit of God.”⁴²

When claiming the particular gifts of the Holy Spirit, transgender Christians celebrate that the Spirit works in humans in new and unpredictable ways. Novel things happen. Fresh identities, gender expressions, and body-minds come into being. Ashley Moore expresses their joy this way: “I have made many changes in my life, my body, and my social role. Today, I live ‘full time’ as a woman . . . My transition has been a journey into my faith in God, and I am deeply spiritual as a result.”⁴³ Many transgender Christians experience the Spirit accompanying and sustaining them on their journey: “[T]he spirit is at work through the many processes (which include but are not limited to medical processes) through which they reconcile their authentic gender with their bodies. The Spirit is at work within creation, re-creating us into our true identity as God’s children.”⁴⁴

For some gender-fluid persons, receiving the unpredictable gifts of the Spirit means embracing the fluidity of identity. This may ebb and flow over the course of a person’s life. When Nicodemus could not understand what Jesus meant by being born again or being born from above, Jesus said, “The wind [or spirit] blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit” (Jn 3:8). There is a joyous unpredictability when one is living in and animated by the Holy Spirit. Martin Luther affirmed the Spirit’s unpredictable presence in human life and work. “Whoever comes to faith can only say that the Holy Spirit comes when and where and to whom [the Holy Spirit] pleases at the time [the Holy Spirit] pleases . . . and [the Holy Spirit] also gives a person as many gifts as [the Holy Spirit] pleases.”⁴⁵

Unity, not Uniformity

Today transgender Christians are queering and reforming theology itself by reclaiming the promise that the Spirit weaves us together as one body of Christ. They know that Christian unity does not require uniformity. Rather, unity flows from the

presence of the Holy Spirit and from affirming and receiving the unique gifts of grace given to each individual. Unity means that gathered by the Holy Spirit, we relate to one another in interpenetrating ways, similar to how the trinitarian persons affect and interpenetrate one another (perichoresis).

We do not merely sit next to each other in church. United by the Spirit, we deeply affect one another. When someone is celebrated and respected for who they are in their congregation, that individual feels profoundly loved in the depths of their being. Many transgender Christians have experienced what it feels like to be united with others through the Holy Spirit, and they are sharing this queer gift of the Spirit with the entire body of Christ.

Finally, being sustained by the Holy Spirit means living out one’s God-given freedom as a unique child of God. “For freedom Christ has set us free” (Gal 5:1). This freedom is a gift from God that transgender Christians have received. Imagine what our communities and congregations would look and feel like if each person freely embraced their own God-given gifts and identity, and if they were truly welcomed. Transgender Christians are inspiring all Christians to celebrate and receive the diverse talents, new ways of being, unity, unpredictability, and freedom that the Holy Spirit gives.

Confession, Love, Openness, and Justice

As a constructive, queer theologian, I argue here that Christian communities are privileged to celebrate and receive these four distinct gifts from transgender Christians. These powerful and transformative contributions are urgently needed because so many individuals fail to celebrate their own creativity and struggle to love themselves. Others cannot embrace their own body-minds, or affirm their particular gifts from the Spirit. Transgender Christians witness that God continually is creating through, with, and in us. Our body-minds are coherent gifts from God. We are called to love

ourselves faithfully. And each one of us has unique gifts of grace from the same Spirit.

In addition, LGBTQ followers of Jesus are queering theology itself. Categories that were once viewed as binary and stable (like male or female) are called into question. Identities that were once viewed as fixed (like straight or gay) can now be understood as fluid. And teachings that were once beyond question (Christians must be celibate or in a monogamous, heterosexual marriage) are interrogated and re-interpreted. Traditional theological claims are being reformed, transgressed, and re-invigorated.

There is a great deal of work left to do to ensure that transgender, bisexual, queer, lesbian, and gay Christians feel affirmed in their faith communities, are treated equitably at work, experience safety in public spaces, and are shown steadfast love in their homes. Church leaders, Christian communities, and theologians must confess how they have vilified transpeople, and they should support transgender Christians as they speak from their own rich theological perspectives. Furthermore, congregations and church members must advocate with and for gender non-conforming, transgender, and queer persons in their struggles for justice and support them as they determine their own theological, ecclesial, and political agendas. This task requires vulnerable and patient listening in which our hearts are renewed (Ezek 36:26) and the work of our hands is strengthened by encountering one another as members of the body of Christ. The challenge “to do justice, and to love kindness/hesed, and to walk humbly with your God” is a call to all of God’s co-created children (Mic 6:8). When we carry out this work with courage and love of self and neighbor, we begin to experience in new ways the transformative power of the creative, faithful, coherent, and ever-new body of Jesus Christ in the world.

Endnotes

1. U.S. Department of Defense, “Department of Defense Transgender Policy,” online at http://www.defense.gov/News/Special-Reports/0616_transgender-policy (accessed November 28, 2016).

2. Haeyoun Park and Iaryna Mykhyalyshyn, “L.G.B.T. People Are More Likely to Be Targets of Hate Crimes Than Any Other Minority Group,” *New York Times*, June 16, 2016, online at http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2016/06/16/us/hate-crimes-against-lgbt.html?_r=0 (accessed November 28, 2016).

3. In a 2009 chapter, Virginia Ramey Mollenkott framed emerging transgender theology as a gift. See Virginia Ramey Mollenkott, “We Come Bearing Gifts: Seven Lessons Religious Congregations Can Learn from Transpeople,” in *Transgenderformations*, eds. Marcella Althaus-Reid and Lisa Isherwood (London: SCM Press, 2009), 46-58.

4. “I have often used Dewey’s term, ‘the body-mind,’ which is intended to capture the fact that what we call ‘mind’ and ‘body’ are not two separate and ontologically distinct entities or processes, but instead are aspects . . . of an interactive . . . process.” See Mark Johnson, *The Meaning of the Body: Aesthetics of Human Understanding* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 274.

5. “The prefix *cis* is derived from Latin and essentially means ‘same.’ Your gender identity is the same as your birth sex. If you were born male, you identify as male.” See Nicholas M. Teich, *Transgender 101: A Simple Guide to a Complex Issue* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 15. *LGBTQI* is an abbreviation for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and intersex.

6. Mercia McMahon, “Trans Liberating Feminist and Queer Theologies,” in *This is My Body: Hearing the Theology of Transgender Christians*, eds. Christina Beardsley and Michelle O’Brien (London: Darton+Longman+Todd, 2016), 61.

7. Although I wrote this article, the stories, wisdom, theological insights, and gifts of numerous individuals inform and guide my writing and reflections. So I issue a heartfelt and fully embodied thank you to Karla, Tosche, Jane, JamieAnn, Mark, Nicole, Mary, Monica, John, Doug, and Elizabeth.

8. “People under the transgender umbrella may describe themselves using one or more of a wide variety of terms—including transgender . . . Use the descriptive term preferred by the individual. Many transgender people are prescribed hormones by their doctors to change their bodies. Some undergo surgery as well. But not all transgender people can or will take those steps, and a transgender identity is not dependent upon medical procedures.” See GLAAD, “Media Reference Guide—Transgender,” online at <http://www.glaad.org/reference/transgender> (accessed November 28, 2016).

9. Here I use Virginia Ramey Mollenkott’s term *transpeople*. See Mollenkott, “We Come Bearing Gifts,” 46.

10. “[A] transman/transguy is usually someone who was labeled female at birth but now identifies as a man or a male . . . transwoman is usually used as a descriptor for someone who was labeled male at birth but now identifies as a woman or a female.” See Nicholas Teich, *Transgender 101*, 10.

11. Monica Joy Cross, *Authenticity and Imagination in the Face of Oppression* (Eugene, Ore.: Resource Publications, 2016), 67.

12. Bill Walsh, “The Post drops the ‘mike’—and the hyphen in ‘e-mail,’” *Washington Post* (December 4, 2015), online at https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/the-post-drops-the-mike-and-the-hyphen-in-e-mail/2015/12/04/ccd6e33a-98fa-11e5-8917-653b65c809eb_story.html?utm_term=.c09267a733da (accessed November 28, 2016).

13. See Jennifer Linda Brooks, “The Right Choice for Me,” in *Transgendering Faith: Identity, Sexuality, and Spirituality*, eds. Leanne McCall Tigert and Maren C. Tirabassi (Cleveland, Ohio: Pilgrim Press, 2004), 97.

14. Martin Luther, *Martin Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe* (Weimar: H. Böhlau, 1883-2009) (hereafter cited as WA), 17 II, 192, as quoted in Paul Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, trans. Robert C. Schultz (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1966), 107-108.

15. Martin Luther, "Adoration of the Sacrament," 294 (WA 11:446) as quoted in Kyle A. Pasewark, *A Theology of Power: Being Beyond Domination* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 80. See also David Löfgren, *Die Theologie der Schöpfung bei Luther* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1960), 7.
16. Larry Rasmussen, "Luther and a Gospel of the Earth," *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 51, no. 1/2 (1997): 21.
17. For a transgender reading of the creation accounts see, Virginia Ramey Mollenkott, *Omnigender: A Trans-Religious Approach* (Cleveland, Ohio: Pilgrim Press, 2001), 90.
18. Philip Hefner, *The Human Factor: Evolution, Culture, and Religion* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 27.
19. Tanis builds on the work of Carol Ochs, who wrote, "We are not simply created, we seem to be co-creators in forming and transforming our self." See Carol Ochs, *Song of the Self: Biblical Spirituality and Human Holiness* (Valley Forge, Penna.: Trinity Press International, 1994), 5.
20. Justin Tanis, *Trans-Gendered: Theology, Ministry, and Communities of Faith* (Cleveland, Ohio: Pilgrim Press, 2003), 166.
21. A similar proposal could be made regarding persons with disabilities and the way some renew body-mind as a part of their vocations as God's co-creative co-creatures.
22. Virginia Ramey Mollenkott and Vanessa Sheridan, *Transgender Journeys* (Eugene, Ore.: Resource Publications, 2010), 146-47.
23. In an October 31, 2016 telephone conversation discussing a draft of this article, Nicole Garcia cautioned me about the concept of "choice." She shared that too often cis, heterosexual persons wrongly assume that transgender persons have or make a "choice" about their identity. Nicole stated, "The only choice I had was between life and death." (Nicole Garcia is a candidate for ordained ministry in the ELCA who self-identifies as a transgender Latina.)
24. "[T]he decision for transition did not only serve the will of the person making it, but also served the will of God. As Rebecca says . . . 'If God knew me in the womb then God has always been calling me to this.'" See Ellen Clark-King, "The Divine Call to Be Myself: Anglican Transgender Women and Prayer," *Anglican Theological Review* 98, no. 2 (Spring 2016): 336.
25. See the final section of my book: Mary Elise Lowe, *The Human Subject and Sin: The Anthropology of Pannenberg, Ruether, and Fulkerson* (Saarbrücken: VDM Dr. Müller, 2010), 182-186.
26. "The prevalence of suicide attempts among [transgender] respondents . . . is 41 percent, which vastly exceeds the 4.6 percent of the overall U.S. population." See Ann P. Haas, Philip L. Rodgers, and Jody L. Herman, "Suicide Attempts Among Transgender and Gender Non-Conforming Adults: Findings of the National Transgender Discrimination Survey," American Foundation for Suicide Prevention & Williams Institute, UCLA School of Law (January 2014), online at <http://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/AFSP-Williams-Suicide-Report-Final.pdf> (accessed November 28, 2016).
27. Katherine Doob Sakenfeld, "Khesed," in *The New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, vol. 3 (Nashville: Abingdon, 2008), 496.
28. Charles Francis Whitley, "The Semantic Range of *Hesed*," *Biblica* 62, no. 4 (1981): 525.
29. Harold M. Kamsler, "Hesed—Mercy or Loyalty?" *Jewish Bible Quarterly* 27, no. 3 (1999): 184. For a detailed analysis of the David and Jonathan narrative, see Markus Zendher, "Observations on the Relationship between David and Jonathan and the Debate on Homosexuality," *Westminster Theological Journal* 69 (2007): 127-74.
30. Martin Luther, "Lecture on Psalm 51" in *Luther's Works*, 55 vols., ed. Jaroslav Pelikan (St. Louis: Concordia, 1955-1986) (hereafter cited as LW), 12:321.
31. Martin Luther, "Annotations on Matthew," LW 67:68. "[T]he LXX . . . uses *eleos* 'mercy' for the more wide-ranging Hebrew term *hesed*, covenant love and faithfulness." See R.T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 354.
32. Brett Ray, *My Name is Brett: Truths from a Trans Christian* (Amazon Digital Services, 2015), 93.
33. Lewis Christopher Payne, "The Body Site for the Divine," in *Transcending Faith*, eds. Leanne McCall Tigert and Maren C. Tirabassi, 88.
34. Brett Ray, *My Name is Brett*, 89.
35. "Over and against the Platonic separation of body and soul, he [Luther] defended biblical anthropology." See Hermann Sasse, *This is My Body: Luther's Contention for the Real Presence in the Sacrament of the Altar*, rev. ed. (Adelaide, South Africa: Lutheran Publishing House, 1976), 150.
36. Martin Luther, "Commentary on Romans," LW 25:333. See also LW 37:95, LW 37:135, and LW 25:340-341.
37. Lewis Christopher Payne, "The Body Site for the Divine," 88.
38. Arthur M. Glenberg, "Embodiment as a Unifying Perspective for Psychology," *WIRE's Cognitive Science* 1 (July/August 2010): 586-596, online at <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/wcs.55/abstract> (accessed August 15, 2016).
39. Mark Johnson, "The Meaning of the Body," in *Developmental Perspectives on Embodiment and Consciousness*, eds. Willis F. Overton, Ulrich Müller, and Judith L. Newman (New York: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2008), 19-20.
40. Youtha Hardman-Cromwell, "Spirituality and Sexuality: Both or Neither," in *Shaping Sanctuary*, ed. Kelly Turney (Chicago: Reconciling Congregation Program, 2000), 8.
41. Martin Luther, WA 2, 536, 28-31, as quoted in Bernhard Lohse, *Martin Luther's Theology: Its Historical and Systematic Development*, trans. Roy A. Harrisville (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999), 235. Elsewhere Luther writes, "We ought not . . . doubt whether the Holy Ghost dwelleth in us . . . if any [person] feel in himself a love towards the word of God . . . let that [person] know that this is . . . the gift of the Holy Ghost." See Martin Luther, "Commentary on Galatians," in *A Compendium of Luther's Theology*, ed. Hugh T. Kerr (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1943), 70.
42. Thomas Bohache, "Pentecost Queered," in *The Queer Bible Commentary*, eds. Deryn Guest, Robert E. Goss, Mona West, and Thomas Bohache (London: SCM Press, 2006), 568.
43. Ashley Moore, "Transcending Physical Boundaries and Sick Religion," in *Transcending Faith*, eds. Leanne McCall Tigert and Maren C. Tirabassi, 108-109.
44. Ellen Clark-King, "The Divine Call," 338.
45. Martin Luther, WA 47, 31-E 46, 294-SL 7, as quoted in *What Luther Says: A Practical In-Home Anthology for the Active Christian*, compiled by Edwald M. Plass (Saint Louis: Concordia Press, 1959), 665; Luther also writes, "As for the Christian, their action as a new human rises from the presence of the Spirit within them, and no rules can be written for the rules of the spirit." See Martin Luther, "Commentary on Romans, 1515-1516," quoted in Gustav Wingren, *Luther on Vocation*, trans. Carl C. Rasmussen (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2004), 146. In *The Disputation Concerning Justification* (1536) Luther wrote, "The Holy Spirit breathes where he wills [John 3:8] and God justifies whom [God] wishes." See LW 34:173.