QUEER SPIRITUALITY:
A GROUNDED THEOPOIESIS ON HUMAN 'BECOMING' AS A JOURNEY OF 'FREEDOM-FOR-LOVE'

by

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ABSTRACT

This research explores the phenomenon of human spirituality as human 'Becoming', in persons who embrace their identity as LGBTQ. The thesis argues that the personal narratives of these non-heteronormative individuals attest to signs of Divinity, through 'movements' of spirituality in their quotidian lives. These 'movements' epitomize a theme of 'freedom-*for*- love', a Way of living in *kenotic* assurance leading to 're-creation'.

This ethnography employs a qualitative grounded theory methodology with residents of rural and urban British Columbia, Canada, and introduces a novel, poetic interview method of *mystagogic accompaniment*. Narrative data from eighteen mystagogic interviews with six non-binary persons, and eleven supplementary interviews with family members and allies, reveal spirituality as a phenomenon involving ten 'movements', evident in three groupings of categories: 1) *beginning*; 2) *homesteading*; and 3) *re-creation*. *Grounded theopoiesis* is the term which coins the constructed theory.

This research makes three distinct, and original contributions. It: 1) expands the field of constructive theology into the realm of human 'Becoming', based on non-heteronormative lives; 2) employs mystagogic accompaniment as a poetic qualitative interview method; and 3) applies Catherine Keller's process theology regarding *tehom* (chaos), as a framework to model theopoetic interdisciplinary epistemological collaborations in a project of theological construction which features these subjects: mystagogy; theopoetics; Queer and 'indecent' theology; process theology; metaphoric theology; Lacanian psychoanalysis; psychology; and the philosophy of religion.

Finally, the conclusions of this study challenge the religious rhetoric which denies the spirituality of persons identifying as LGBTQ.

DEDICATION

To my mother, V. Viola Clarke, the memory of my father, Linton F. Clarke,

and my husband, H. Brian Metzgner.

May I ever be becoming of our family name.

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8. Mystagogic Accompaniment Prayers, Adaptations Based on John O'Donohue, *To Bless the Space Between Us: A Book of Blessings,* New York: Doubleday, 2008.

9. Approval from Humanities and Social Sciences Ethical Review Committee.

10. Participant 4 Interview 1.

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12. Photo of a Piece of Art for Participant 4 – Interview 2.

‘STRAIGHT’ APPRECIATIONS OF THE TERM ‘QUEER’ - PREAMBLE AND GLOSSARY

Prior to defining terms I use in this thesis, I provide a brief overview of common usages of the word, ‘queer’; furthermore, as someone who identifies as a ‘straight’ researcher in Queer constructive theopoetics, I explain my reasons for doing so.

Queer: Adjective, Adverb, Noun, and Verb

To begin, the word, ‘queer’ is employed in at least three ways: 1) as an adjective or adverb to modify a noun or a verb; 2) as a verb; and 3) as a noun.

For example, as an adjective, the word qualifies a trait as being singular or unconventional. This is depicted in the sentence: ‘At present, a relationship that is non-heteronormative is often viewed as a queer one’. Also, while, in the common vernacular, use of the noun includes an offensive slang which refers to someone who identifies as homosexual, in contrast to its pejorative use, the term has been reclaimed by individuals who wish to identify as members of a non-heteronormative sexual minority, as described in the following quote: ‘What it means to be Queer is evident from their expression of identity as someone who is nonbinary’ (Radojcic, 2015, p. 149).[1] In pursuing this study, I am interested in the use of the term, ‘queer’ as an adjective and an adverb, depicting a posture of questioning toward an accepted method, issue, or identity; this refers to a stance of intentional fluidity. Thus, it is said, ‘queer theory is both a critical form of analysis

[1] Natasha Radojcic employs the noun, ‘queer’ in the title of her dissertation about ‘heretical Queers’. She refers to the emergence of the ‘adjective’ alongside the radical political movement which was closely connected with the early AIDS awareness groups in the U.S.A., where persons exclaimed that they were, ‘Out proud!’, and additionally stated, ‘We’re here, we’re queer, get used to it!’ (Radojcic, 2015, p. 149). In another article, religious studies researcher, Sean Smallwood, embraces the word as a noun, entitling his work, ‘Queerituality’: reforming what it means to be a religious Queer’ (2015, p. 74).

and an approach of activist praxis' (Cornwall, 2011, p. 28). This method of investigation is an apt description of myself, for I identify as a Queer theologian who is a straight ally (Cornwall, 2011, pp. 5, 11).[2] However, where identity is concerned, my use of this oxymoron regarding myself raises legitimate questions, on which I now expand.

Queer - An Identity and a Vocation

Sharing the personal descriptive terms by which I define my social location is significant for me, as they play a role in shaping my journey of Becoming – something I view as my calling, or vocational identity. I describe myself to others by employing a number of adjectives, which express my ways of attending to the world. These are: Black; female; Canadian citizen; contemplative mystic; Christ-follower; educated; of Jamaican ancestry; heterosexual; functionally bilingual Anglophone. Throughout my lifetime, within these demographic groups, I have deliberately eschewed any attempts by insiders to assign a prescribed role, behaviour, or system of belief to me. While I appreciate my life to be seasoned with the aforementioned cultural flavours, my sense is that while each of them resonates deeply within me, none is capable of expressing the person I know myself to be sufficiently (Radojcic, 2015, p. 60).[3] Today, I still resist Others' efforts to encapsulate the fullness of my identity within one of these descriptors, and if I were to choose one word to summarize my consistent, natural way of attending to the world, I would describe myself

[2] I am among those to whom Cornwall refers in expounding on the meaning of 'queer' by expressing it as a posture of resistance toward normativities which relate to life, including matters theological.

[3] My own experience is echoed by many of the subjects in Radojcic's study, summarized in the words of a gay male, who rejected the expectations of gay and the straight communities: 'I don't identify with all the stereotypes … At some point being gay meant that you dress the same, you go to the same clubs, you vote the same, you almost become like these mind-numbed robots and you have to go do all these things to be a good gay' (Radjocic, 2015, p. 60). This individual expresses a preference for having his diversities treated hospitably, while appreciating his similarities to Others for what they really are.

as ‘questioning’ (Radojcic, 2015, p. 180).[4] For instance, my natural way of conversing involves raising questions about the validity of normative values; my aim is to steer conversations in directions where opportunities hidden in shadows of taken-for-granted assumptions can surface as latent knowledges to be valued afresh; my hope is to allow a diverse, divine rainbow of colours to be seen, and polyphonic melodies heard. In this way, my priorities resonate with ‘queer’ ones. I see the biological, familial, and cultural contributors to my identity as starting points from which I am invited to write my chapter in the Divine’s story - as authentically and responsibly as I can (Hutchins, 2006, p. 143).[5]

Queer: To Whom Does the Term Belong?

Can the word ‘queer’ apply to me, typifying an ongoing process of ‘Becoming’ over an end that is defined?[6] Indeed, I view ‘queer’ as but one aspect of an individual’s identity, supporting their integration of a way of expressing their humanity. I am suggesting that ‘queer’ is equally a part of One’s vocation as a human person; however, I do not presume any entitlement to adopting the noun, ‘Queer’ or the adverb, ‘queer’ to myself apart from in this vocational sense. The term ‘Queer theologian’ expresses my aim of integrating gender and sexuality in the practice of theology without shirking the political realities

[4] The gay men in Radojcic’s study expressed resentment over being ‘pigeon-holed’ based on their sexual identity. This is not an uncommon experience for members of social minority groups, and for these men, Radojcic questions the need to articulate a label as a legitimate way of identifying individuals who have little more in common than their sexual identity. That being said, I appreciate the term, ‘sibs’, used by Queer theologian, Jennie Barnsley, to affirm human relatedness among all persons (2013, p. 11).

[5] Theologian and minister, Christina Hutchins writes that individuals’ journeys present novel opportunities in which they can ‘become’ in ‘creative, subversive, constructive activity’, along with the potentials of God (2006, pp. 142, 143). Hence, I wish to see inhospitable, oppressive hegemonies resisted. On page v, I will elaborate on my use of the term, ‘Becoming’ in this thesis.

[6] Hutchins highlights Judith Butler’s proposition that identity is neither essential, fixed, nor the outcome of an inner substance of being. Rather, it is formed one moment at a time (Hutchins, 2006, p. 134).

surrounding these ventures. By offering a critique of theology, I am 'queering' theology, mining for gems which lie outside the margins of the exclusive Western Christian hegemonic within which I have been raised, shaped, and concerning which I am writing in this thesis. The role of Queer theologian holds categorical prophetic undertones for me, because I employ this approach for the purpose of extending theology in the service of justice and love, aiming to see the study of the Divine freed from social forces which prefer to deny such realities, or to politicize them for exclusive ends.[7] In this sense, the vocational call 'to queer' is not to perform a task in an odd manner, but to restore reality and honesty to life (Althaus-Reid, 2000, p. 71).[8] Lastly, I have not walked in the shoes of LGBTQ 'sibs' whose sexuality has provided them a distinctive quill with which to write their chapter in the Divine's story. The queer prophetic-political vocation may not belong to all who identify as non-heteronormative. It is my experience that One's life vocation is discerned both individually and collectively, and I trust that those LGBTQ persons who are on a journey which intersects with my own are better suited to discern their calling than I.

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[7] Cornwall acknowledges that due to its elusiveness as a concept, Queer theology can be hijacked by a circle of people who define it in their specific way (2011, p. 9). I would suggest that Queer theology then becomes an exclusive field of study (albeit unwittingly), and a poor representation of its potential spirit.

[8] Here, indecent theologian Marcella Althaus-Reid describes 'queer' as that which restores authenticity to the quotidian (2000, p. 71). For the reasons mentioned above, I am left wondering: Should the term, Queer be reserved for those who *feel* called to challenge powers which idolize not only heteronormativity, but all normativities which attempt to restrain the expression of diversity (regardless of their gender or sexual orientation? Are there truly few prophets among us who exhort us to affirm our relationship as human siblings within one human family truly? Cornwall's repetition of Elizabeth Stuart's words about the 'prophet' are *à propos*: 'The radical awaits the adoration of the crowd but the only sounds are of splatter of rage coming out of the fundamentalist and the conservative, and the anxious perspiring of the liberal in the changing-room. The radical cannot understand it: he is hurt, he has risked his reputation, even his career, to speak out for lesbian sisters and gay brothers. He turns to the crowd: 'What *do* you want then?' he shouts in exasperation. And with one voice the answer booms: 'Can we have our ball back please?' (Stuart, 2003, p. 86, cited in Cornwall, 2011, p. 7). Unfortunately, reality is sometimes deemed exclusive to a select few.

GLOSSARY

For ease of reference, I list this glossary in alphabetical order. It refers to the terms I use, and the way I understand them. Sometimes I cite a source to explain my reasons, but I do not propose them as the *only* way these terms may be understood. Within my definitions, words in bolded italics are a cross-reference to another term in the glossary.

Agape. I use this term (one of the Greek words for 'love'), to refer to process theologian Catherine Keller's explanation of the 'responsive love' of God, which remains in relationship with persons who are ***Becoming*** with God (Keller, 2008, p. 99).

Ally. This word is one I use when speaking of any individual who supports justice for non-heteronormative persons to participate as equal, contributing members of society.

Becoming. I use this gerund instead of 'being'. I do this to refer to the human life journey as a teleological enterprise involving a fluid, ongoing process, without a point of origin or ending. My thesis describes *Becoming* as comprised of ***'movements'*** of the transformation of the human 'self', rather than as a way that is fixed and predictable.[9] I also refer to *Becoming* as ***'spirituality'***, a holistic path which touches on human persons' physical, sexual, relational, psychological, spiritual, and intellectual capacities and limitations.[10] After I have introduced this term, I capitalize it, and no longer surround it with apostrophes.

[9] By proceeding alphabetical order, you will find a definition of 'movement' on page xi.
[10] A full definition of Becoming as 'freedom-*for*-love', the main theme of this research, is found in Chapter 7.

Christian. I use this term as a noun and an adjective. The noun refers to the person who orients their quotidian life in accordance with traditional articles ascribed to Christianity as a world religion; these include, but are not limited to the following articles: beliefs and creedal statements; scriptural texts and sacred writings; individual or communal liturgies and rituals; ethical loving, and praxis focused on justice. I use the adjective to qualify any building, congregation of persons, or religious organization described as existing for the purpose of pursuing these articles. This signifier does not define a specific tradition, sect, or denomination, but includes a range of expressions which fall under it.

Church. When capitalized, this word refers to the global body of persons, denominations, organizations, and institutions which fall under the rubric of the Christian religion, be they Orthodox, Catholic, or Protestant. I also refer to them as the ***ecclesia***.

Conscious. I use this term to refer to a characteristic of human personhood which involves sentient capacities. This ability relates to perception via the senses, and it also includes the capacity to be self- and or other-reflective.[11]

[11] Later in this thesis, I refer to the psychoanalytic concepts of Jacques Lacan, who, in 1963, after years of lecturing on the works of Sigmund Freud, parted ways with the French psychoanalytic establishment to start his own school (Homer, 2005, p. 10). Since his writing pertains to this mention of the conscious mind, I include Sean Homer's commentary on Lacan's explication on the unconscious as it pertains to consciousness. Homer, quoting Lacan, writes, 'the unconscious … must 'be apprehended in its experience of rupture, between perception and consciousness, in that nontemporal locus … Freud calls … another scene' ' (Lacan, cited in Homer, 2005, p. 67). This is to say that, according to Lacan, consciousness is both distinct from, and connected to the field of human perception. In fact, Homer also quotes René Descartes who said, '… so long as I think I am something …one must then, in conclusion take as assured that the proposition: I am, I exist, is necessarily true, every time I express it or conceive of it in my mind' (Descartes, 1968, p. 103, cited in Homer, 2005, p. 67).

Created(s). I employ this original term to express what I appreciate as the status of organic, inorganic, animate, and inanimate matter in a universe which finds its source in a relationship with ***Divinity***. I am able to appreciate humankind and everything which exists, as having their beginning in the context of Becoming in/with the ***Divine***. In this thesis, I refer to everything other than ***God*** as one among the ***createds***.

Divine, Divinity. I use these terms interchangeably with the referents, ***God***, and ***Mystery*** of the cosmos. I see God as a subjective reality experienced and discussed by the participants of this research, a concern of constructive theologians, philosophers, ministers, and scholars whom I cite. When quoting participants, I use the terms they use to refer to the ***Divine***.

Ethnography. This form of qualitative research methodology derives from anthropology and sociology; it involves the study of behaviour patterns, language, and actions of a particular cultural group in their natural context over a period of time; the method involves the collection of data via observations and interviews with group members (Creswell, 2014, pp. 14, 242). In this study, the cultural group in question involves persons who embrace their identity as ***LGBTQ*** (Court, 2018, pp. 7, 16, 17).

Eros. I use this term (another Greek referent for love), adopting Richard Kearney's and Catherine Keller's interpretations of love to signify the draw of the ***Divine***'s desire for intimate encounter with an ***Other*** (Keller, 2008, pp. 98-99); it also represents the purity of passion, relational union, and commitment (Kearney, 2001, pp. 53, 55).

Foreign language terms. I italicize all foreign language terms.

'Freedom-for-love'. This original phrase represents the main motif for the theory grounded in the narrative data of this qualitative research. It derives from theoretical concepts in Catherine Keller's process theology, regarding humankind's experience of the lure of the divine ***Eros***, and Richard Kearney's philosophy of religion, describing a name for God, as a liberating, 'I-self-*for*' humankind (2001, pp. 28-29). This term signifies the voluntary motivator of self-giving love, aimed at holistic freedom, for 'self' and/or Other.[12]

Gender*.* This term relates to an identity construct that is claimed (or expressed) by a person, with words which include 'man'; 'woman'; 'masculine'; 'feminine'; ***nonbinary*** (not accepting the binary defined by male/female or masculine/feminine), 'agender' (not identifying with any particular gender); ***'transgender'***; 'cisgender' (identifying with the gender assigned at birth); and 'genderqueer/queer' (embracing facets of male and female in one's identity). 'Gender variant' is a word used by persons from outside the Global North/Global West, and who may not use the terms ***transgender*** or ***queer*** when referring to gender identity (Wilcox, 2021, p. 10).

Grounded theory. This term describes the qualitative design of inquiry utilized in this research. With origins in sociology, it is an approach used in social and behavioural sciences (Strauss and Corbin, 1990, pp. 19-23; Creswell, 2014, p. 14). The distinctiveness of this methodology is its inductive method of constructing theory from data which is collected and analysed repeatedly, based on findings during the research process (Corbin and Strauss, 2015, pp. 3, 4, 7).

[12] 'Freedom-*for*-love' is defined fully in Chapter 7.

Incarnation. This verbal noun is recognized by Catherine Keller as a reference to 'divine incarnation'. In the Western Christian tradition, the human person, Jesus Christ, is believed to have been God incarnate; in Keller's words, which couple mystical theology with process thought, incarnation is 'the overlap, of divinity with world, of world with divinity' (2003, pp. 219, 229);[13] it is a process which results in an erasure of boundaries in the course of Divinity's begetting in humankind. Consequently, acts of caring, tending, challenging, and loving createds are seen as human manifestations of the Divine (Keller, 2003, p. 222).

'***Indecent' theology***. This term was introduced first to describe the scholarship of **Queer** theologian, Marcella Althaus-Reid, a work of 'questioning' and 'disrupting' the context and agenda of traditional liberationist theology (2000, p. 5). Both Althaus-Reid's distinctly provocative topics, and her style of expression, addressed the issue of marginalization in certain members of the global society: women; the poor; non-heteronormative-identifying persons; and individuals deemed subaltern in race and class by Western theology's patriarchal, capitalistic, individualistic, and heteronormative agendas.

Insider. I employ this word when speaking of someone who possesses a quality used to identify a person who belongs to a distinct subgroup of society. For example,

[13] A term for this overlap is, 'apophatic panentheism', a theological concept Keller describes as, 'multiple, organic realms of becoming … evidence of the Divine's incarnation in creation'. Unlike pantheism, panentheism does not imply that createds and Divinity *are* one in the same, but that createds are *in* God, and God is *in* createds, there is a 'co-mingling of … self-organizing relations' (Keller, 2003, p. 219). Some uses of this term are mentioned in Note 276, Note 294, and Note 340.

someone who identifies as lesbian would be considered an insider by another person who identifies as lesbian; however, they would not be considered an ***insider*** by a gay man.[14]

LGBTQ2AI. This acronym is one example of a non-heteronormative grouping, referring to the identities: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer/Questioning, 2-Spirited, Asexual, Intersexual. ***Lesbian*** is a term which refers to a female person who identifies as having a sexual orientation towards a person of the female sex. ***Gay*** speaks of a male person whose sexual orientation is toward a person of the male sex. The term ***Bisexual*** is used to speak of an individual of male or female sex who has a preference for both an opposite or same-sex relationship. I use the word ***Transgender*** when referring to someone who may or may not identify with their assigned sex- or gender-identity at birth, or may not experience these as aligned. They may or may not have experienced surgical reconstruction or hormonal treatment to pursue ***sex*** and/or ***gender*** alignment, and their dress or presentation may or may not be represented by their assigned sex at birth (Wilcox, 2014, pp. 12-14). I use ***Queer/Questioning*** to refer to individuals whose sexual orientation is not reflected by the descriptors LGBT, and describe themselves as non-heteronormative or ***nonbinary*** in regards to gender and/or sexuality; this includes those who describe themselves by the terms, ***2-Spirited, Asexual,*** **and** ***Intersex***, among others, as well as those whose sexual preferences have yet to be articulated (Barnsley, 2013, p. 12).[15] In this thesis, I use the acronyms LGBTQ in referring to this cultural group.

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[14] Radojcic, (2015, p. 24). While acknowledging her *outsider* status and her work in negotiating this lived reality in her ethnography with gay men, Radojcic mentions the debate among qualitative researchers about the advantages of being an insider within their field of study.

[15] I appreciate Barnsley's commitment to avoid terms she knows are offensive to persons (ibid.). I do not refer to them often in this thesis, the terms 2-Spirited, Asexual, and Intersex are also used in the following ways, respectively: 1) to refer to an individual who embraces the status conferred on Aboriginal persons

Movement. This term refers to a category comprised of one to three related categories, together representing a motif or theme in this grounded theory. This research isolated ten distinct 'movements' of human Becoming that participants shared in common. I distinguish this word by enclosing it in apostrophes.

Mystagogic accompaniment. This term refers to a relationship of spiritual companionship in which a ***mystagogue*** (***spiritual accompanist***) supports an individual who is involved in a process of discerning 'movements' of Becoming in their life in relation to 'self', God, and Others. This term is used interchangeably with **spiritual accompaniment** or **spiritual direction,** and it describes the process adopted to conduct qualitative interviews with participants in this study who identified as LGBTQ.

Mystagogue*.* This is a descriptor used for an individual who provides ***mystagogic accompaniment*** to **One** who is seeking a relationship of companionship or direction on their journey of ***Becoming***. They may be a lay leader, volunteer, or professional within a ministry context who is sought out for their gifts of personal presence, maturity, and discernment. They are also called a spiritual accompanist or companion.

Mystagogic research is recognized as examining ways of mystery (*mustérion*) which characterize a person's life (Waaijman, 2002, p. 872).

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known to possess a third, spiritual alternative, to a binary sexual knowing; 2) to speak of someone who does not experience sexual attraction to other persons; 3) to express the reality of a person who possesses both male and female, or genitalia which are unclearly defined at birth (Wilcox, 2014, pp. 12-14).

Mystagogy is the study of mystical experience (Waaijman, 2002, p. 870). It explores an individual's manner of spiritual apprehension, or the clarification of the course of their life as a spiritual way.

Mystès. I utilize this referent when speaking of an individual who seeks mystagogic accompaniment from a ***mystagogue*** (Waaijman, 2002, p. 870).

Narrative. This is a referent to a person's storied interpretation and meaning made of the events and facts which occurred during their lifetime. It is not to be confounded with the *actual* details of their account, but more accurately, as a tool to understand the meaning it holds for them. That is, it is a means by which they represent themself to themself and others. The meaning an individual makes is the product of the historical, social, or cultural locations in which they have participated (Ganzevoort, 1993, pp. 277-287; Lawler, 2002, p. 242).

Nonbinary. In this thesis, when discussing non-heteronormative sexual orientations and gender identities, I use this referent interchangeably with ***LGBTQ.***

One. I choose to capitalize this word to employ it as a pronoun, the subject or object of the verb which immediately follows or precedes it. My intention is to emphasize the personal quality of the action or interaction on which I am focusing. In this context, the word is not used as an adjective.

Other. In a similar way, the capitalized form of this word is a pronoun, the subject or object of the verb following or preceding it. I am also emphasizing the human quality of personhood involved in acting, or being acted upon. It is not adjectival.

Outsider. This term has a connotation that is opposite to that of ***insider***, mentioned earlier. It refers to someone who does not share an identifying quality that is typically associated with a particular subgroup in society. For example, in the case of the ***LGBTQ*** community, despite my self-description as a Queer theologian, I am also perceived as an outsider by persons of nonbinary gender and sexual orientation because of my identification as heterosexual.[16]

Postmodern. This term refers to the historical period after the modern era following the Enlightenment in the Western world. During the postmodern era, systemic explanations for phenomena, and identity categories that had been accepted previously as facts were acknowledged to be tied to power structures. The era signaled the advent of the 'deconstruction' of assumptions underlying previous 'givens', recognition for the subjectivity involved in knowledge-making, and critiquing social, or meta-narratives that had been embraced as 'truths'. In this time period, questions, rather than answers, became favoured in discourse.

Plural gerunds. I frequently pluralize gerunds, the noun form of a verb. This is a narrative, collaborative style I adopt to convey my understanding of information that is fluid or shared, rather than certain or purported as owned by an individual or subgroup of one population. For example, I refer to words such as, '***knowledges'***, '***learnings'***, '***understandings'***, and '***sensibilities'*** (all general terms), to convey the value and potential I ascribe to pluralism concerning personal and group experiences.

[16] (Radojcic, 2015, p. 24). By virtue of their status as 'outsiders', researchers who identify with this term are recognized as benefitting from some objectivity to data analysis, in comparison to those who are 'insiders'.

Self. I allow this noun to stand apart in order to convey a concept of the 'self' as a real and personal entity. Additionally, I qualify it by surrounding it with apostrophes. I capitalize the word only when signifying the authentic 'Self', as not controlled by the *Ego*.[17]

Sex. This noun relates to an individual's physical embodiment, as male, female, and intersex (where the latter involves having both male and female physical characteristics) (Wilcox, 2021, p. 10). The word also refers to an act or fantasy regarding intercourse that is sexual in nature.

Sexual orientation. This relates to the focus of **One's** sexual attraction, and includes a reference to persons who have no sexual attraction to an **Other** (i.e. they are **asexual**). The term, 'same-sex attracted' is used with persons from outside the Global North/Global West, who may not use words such as ***gay*** or ***lesbian*** or homosexual to refer to persons' sexual identity (Wilcox, 2021, p. 24).

Sibs. An abbreviation of the word, 'sibling', this term is used to focus on the relatedness of persons in the human population, despite their cultural differences.[18]

Spirituality. In contrast with persons' embrace of religious doctrines, creeds, traditions, or rituals, I use this term interchangeably with ***spiritual Becoming***, or ***Becoming***, to connote an approach to life in relation to that which is transcendent, or extends beyond the 'self'. I also refer to spirituality as individuals' way of living in the

[17] See section 3.3.4.1, Note 89.
[18] See Note 4 in this glossary.

context of cosmic Mystery, regardless of communal affiliation or expressed belief.[19] Because it concerns a subjective reality of human quotidian life, I do not define it primarily as an action, although it is appreciated as a phenomenon that is evident in persons choices and behaviours (Ingersoll, 2005, pp. 134, 135).[20]

They, Them, Their. My appreciation of God is also fluid. In the course of this theological construction, I have chosen to use a third person, plural noun, instead of the impersonal form, 'it', or gendered forms, 'he' and 'she' when referring to God, the Divine, or Mystery. Since I am drawing on my own spiritual formation based in the Christian tradition, employing the third person plural respects uncertainty and the possibility of Divinity in cosmic relationship with createds, and the ineffability of God as Mystery.

Theme. I use this word as a referent to a grouping of categories. For example, the theme, 'beginning' is a theme which reflects three different categories or 'movements' of Becoming.

[19] Regardless of whether One acknowledges their spirituality as relating to the transcendent, or a reality of another form, the unique way they negotiate their course through life, and the methods they employ in doing so, are very personal. Psychologist and spiritual director, David Benner, argues that depending on the benefits individuals experience from this way of living, the *form* of their spirituality can be recognized as contributing to their sense of living fully into their humanity, or failing to do so (2011, pp. 24, 26, 72).

[20] The issue of the dialectic involved in spirituality as a subjective and objective phenomenon is discussed further, in section 3.3.4.3.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

This chapter introduces my thesis and provides an outline of its components. The argument of the thesis is that the phenomenon of human spirituality appears in the lives of six Canadian persons who identify as LGBTQ; I also argue that their spirituality is a mark of Divinity with, and within them, evident through ten interrelated 'movements' of human 'Becoming'. Furthermore, these 'movements' are subsumed in three groupings of categories that I entitle, 'beginning', 'homesteading', and 're-creation'. Together, these 'movements' epitomize a theme of 'freedom-*for*-love',[21] a concept which refers to a voluntary act, with a *telos* of self-giving, *kenosis*.

I commence with a story, to share the innocent beginnings of a call to justice which grew within me, and led progressively to this qualitative study – an experiment in poetic theological construction on the phenomenon of human spirituality. One mark of what is queer about this research is its arising out of a childhood experience, when I first encountered the reality of social constructions of gender, sex, status, and marginalization, and witnessed their effects on a playmate.[22] After an introduction to my sensibility toward justice, I share details on the progression of my journey toward this research question. My

[21] See the definition of 'freedom-*for*-love' in the glossary, after this, it is discussed in Chapter 7.

[22] *In The History of Sexuality: An Introduction* (1978), Michel Foucault wrote about the politics of power, operational over persons' anatomy, biology, and social relationships, as early as the 18 ^{h} century. This was a time when social practices of stratification and hierarchy appeared in major institutions, such as religion, education, science, and medicine (Foucault, 1978, pp. 103 - 105). Furthermore, systemic education about

choice to sidestep the hegemonic pillars of Western Christianity, which impose injustices on human persons who have been marginalized in society, led me to embrace my natural penchants for practical theology, mystagogy, and theopoetics; I reach this touchstone in the section on the 'call' to justice.

Then, I engage with a most significant issue, that of taking a 'constructive theopoietic approach' to exploring LGBTQ spirituality. In particular, I discuss the evidence of world spirituality seen in contemporary trends that are described as 'post-Christian', and 'post-secular'. Because contemporary researchers in theology, religious studies, and the social sciences, have begun to address the potential of studies which examine trends in constructive theology and post-secular spirituality, the matter leads to the section on the academic value of my research. This concerns the significance of a qualitative study which raises questions and merges lived spiritual realities, non-heteronormative sexualities, human Becoming, and meanings they suggest about the Divine - issues heretofore considered conflictual (Wilcox, 2021, p. 189). I end the chapter with a statement of my thesis, and last, provide an outline of this dissertation.

1.2 Beginnings

I was four years old when I met my new acquaintance, a stranger, who was but a child himself. His name was Christos.[23] It was the year after my mother, my sister, and I had arrived at the Toronto International Airport, eager to join my father who had

behaviour that was appropriate for children, women, and couples, revealed inconsistencies in reasoning, and in their political influence in persons' lives in social bastions such as education and psychiatry (Foucault, 1978, pp. 104, 105, 107). These inconsistencies signal the progressive manipulation of knowledges in these social arenas for capitalistic purposes, and which ultimately led to the marginalization of those oppressed by their use (Foucault, 1978, p. 141).

[23] Christos is a pseudonym.

immigrated to Canada from Jamaica a year earlier, to pursue university education. People from all over the world were moving to Toronto in those years; it was a multicultural city, peppered with ethnic communities of people. Here, my parents made our new home.

Christos had made a transnational journey with his family similar to mine; but having moved to Canada from Greece, he spoke few words of English. I recall two things which attracted me to my childhood comrade, and both set him apart from the majority of children in our neighbourhood primary school. The first was his natural fluency in Greek, a language that, although foreign to me, I immediately longed to master. The sound and cadence of Christos' words, and the fluidity of their oddly-shaped characters, intrigued, and invited me to explore their meanings, and the peculiar ways of his people. I had already started learning to read, so oblivious to our cultural differences, that were superficialities to me, I proceeded to tutor him in English. What made my ambitious undertaking even easier was the second quality which soon endeared Christos to me. Of all the boys in our kindergarten class, his singularity lay in the one characteristic which superseded language: he played with dolls.

The reason for my young companion's rejection of heteronormative prescriptions for male and female play mattered little to me, but for many of the children in our kindergarten class, it was just cause for his marginalization. Excluding me, the boys and girls in our class avoided Christos, and as I would learn subsequently, their behavior conveyed a message of prejudice. In their view, there was something wrong with anyone who behaved in non-heteronormative ways; that was why at the tender age of four, he was a social outcast. As a young girl among a handful of students who reflected the face of a visible minority group in our class, my friend's experience of discrimination was among

my first notable memories of this social phenomenon. Today, Christos' story remains indelibly imprinted in my mind. Half a century later, among the fruit it has borne in my life has been a decades-long journey of intellectual and theological fermentation about my own passage of human Becoming.

1.3 The Journey

As a woman who was raised in a bilingual multicultural First-World Western Christian country, I have been touched by marginalizations on the basis of gender, language, race, and class; each, a distinctive feature of the country whose citizenship I appropriated. More importantly, I have been graced to be influenced by the remarkable life of a brother's journey with a congenital physical disability. Hence, the themes which have given shape to my Becoming have been manifold, including: 1) the socio-cultural and religious hegemonies which oppress persons whose lives are non-normative; 2) individual and familial narratives of courageous vocal, and subversive protest to discrimination; and 3) personal testimonies of healing and transformation from friends and loved ones, who have wrest themselves free of ideological restraints on their flourishing. Also of significance, is that I recognize my Becoming as the product of two categorical factors. The first, a burgeoning Christian spirituality which, for a significant portion of my life, was touched by an evangelical fundamentalist Plymouth Brethren tradition within which I moved and gathered with other persons of faith.[24] The second, a broad, diverse

[24] The term 'fundamentalist' was first used to describe Christian groups of the early 20 h Century, who associated themselves with the practice of adhering to the 'fundamentals' of the faith (Munson, 2008, p. 691). As self-proclaimed 'evangelical Protestants', known in the late 19th and early 20 h Centuries by their self-definition as 'merely' 'Christians', I remember the Brethren marker employed in our gatherings, '[we are] Christians who gather *unto* the name of Jesus Christ', rather than being defined by clergy, religious music, traditions, and rites. As fundamentalist, the Brethren prided themselves in holding fast to the following

formation as a professional psychotherapist, in philosophies which gave rise to modern (e.g. structural, systemic, neurobiological) and postmodern (e.g. collaborative, hermeneutic, pluralistic) models of inquiry in mental health and family therapy. During my transition into graduate-level theological study, my perspective on the roots of modernism and structuralism, and the limitations of their expansion onto theological ground, continued to expand. Along with this**,** grew a discomfort about my complicity with religious discrimination based on a social location by which I had not been intimately touched since childhood – that of non-heteronormative sexual and gender identities. This time, I found myself being challenged personally by what I was learning by way of social-scientific, postcolonial, and feminist criticisms of theology; the consequence was a heightening of my natural penchant for theology, justice, and hermeneutics.

1.4 The Burgeoning Call to Justice

Shortly thereafter, the question of the spirituality of persons who identify as LGBTQ grew prominently in conversations within my new Christian denominational context;[25] and I became preoccupied with what I perceived to be the potential costs of justifying human Becoming in relationship with the cosmic Mystery I understood as God, via discursive rhetoric and apologetic argument alone. My theological formation for ministry had sensitized me to potential shortfalls of giving preference only to historical-critical

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persuasions: 1) persons who describe themselves as Catholic, Mormon, or liberal Christians are not 'Christian' in the way that they are; 2) Jesus Christ will return to earth before the thousand-year reign of God on the earth, which is prior to a period of tribulation (i.e. a position of premillennialism); 3) any attempt to approach the Bible with reason, or as a writing of religious myth, is errant; 4) the Bible is to be accepted as 'the inerrant word of God'; 5) Christians must live according to 'a strict Biblically-based moral code' (Munson, 2008, pp. 691-692).

[25] At this time, I was being nurtured and supported by the Canadian Baptists of Western Canada.

exegetical approaches for the theological field, over newer forms of ideological criticism.[26] I could envision a rift erupting between persons who apply conservative, heteronormative biblical exegesis on the question of the spirituality of persons with non-heteronormative sexual orientation (Grenz, 1998), and others, who promulgate both the plurality, and the distinctiveness of human Becoming in/with God, *experienced* by LGBTQ persons (Woods, 1978, p. 9; Rodriguez and Ouellette, 2000, p. 345; Stuart, 2006, p. 337; Halkitis et al., 2009, p. 260).[27] In fact, the Queer Bible Commentary demonstrates scholarship of

[26] In one of the texts in my theological studies in New Testament, theological scholar, David DeSilva approaches the issue of theological bias by examining some of the sensitivities of ideological criticisms of New Testament texts. These included, postcolonial criticism and cultural studies, and feminist criticism (DeSilva, 2004, pp. 677-682, 757-770). It was during this period of reflection on the realities of theologians who have engaged in biblical criticism and have taken these alternative hermeneutic paths, that my interest in theological construction was piqued.

[27] These scholars refer to various themes related to the journey of spirituality for LGBTQ persons, and all of them raise issues that, for Grenz (1998), are secondary to the fundamentalist priority of approaching the Christians scriptures literally, as the divinely inspired Word of God. For example, Catholic priest, Richard Woods introduced awarenesses related to the physiological, psychological, mystical, spiritual life of nonbinary persons at a time when the compatibility of non-heteronormative sexuality and spirituality was considered an afront to many, not least, to God (1978, p. 9). His priority was to offer practical, pastoral support to those who desired to honour their inspiration to live fully in life as human persons provided a comprehensive outline of the questions these Christians confronted (Woods, 1978, pp. 16, 24, 27, 38, 41, 106-109, 115, 127). Theologian, Elizabeth Stuart's interpretation of Proverbs in the Queer Bible Commentary (2006) introduces the reader to the unpredictable nature of Mystery, in a spiritual relationship in which God, who/which is Mystery, refuses to be controlled, bound, and pacified. This spiritual path is one, Stuart argues, 'only the queer can take', defying the human penchant for stability, security, and 'truth', and confronted with the reality of 'undoing' (2006, pp. 325, 327, 332, 337). Halkitis' and colleagues' mixed methods research provides narrative descriptions and categories, and statistical indicators of religiosity and spirituality from 498 LGBTQ persons in a Northeastern region of the U.S.A. (2009, pp. 252). Their grounded theory coding, and quantitative methods provides evidence that nonbinary persons of Christian, Jewish, Eastern Christian religious backgrounds, as well as those who identify as agnostic and atheist, are committed significantly to living in a way they describe as spiritual, rather than religious, and have progressed in this way in the face of considerable hostility (Halkitis et al., 2009, pp. 253, 254, 259). While three quarters of their sample were raised in religious households, only one quarter engaged their spirituality in a religious context, thus, their study suggests a need for research which explores how the lived experiences of LGBTQ persons influence their understandings of the Divine and the burgeoning of their faith (Halkitis et al., pp. 259, 261). Finally, Rodriguez and Ouellette explored the common question of 'identity integration' for LGBTQ persons, members, and adherents at the Metropolitan Community Church of New York, from a variety of religious backgrounds (2000). They found integration to be a psychological process which transpires over time (Rodriguez, and Ouellette, 2000, p. 345), and while 25% of their sample lacked sexual and spiritual integration, 72.5 % reported that they possessed this, and furthermore, these identities were so strong that they refused to relinquish either one (Rodriguez, and Ouellette, 2000, pp. 339, 340, 345). Hence, the researchers recommended further studies on the catalysts and stages of integration.

theologians whose plentiful queer theological insights, sensibilities, and practical theological reflections on the books of the first and second testaments, provide a compendium of Queer hermeneutics, written with distinctive, thoughtful critique (Guest et al., 2006). I perceived the heteronormative, categorical preference for uniformity in human experience in historical arguments with hegemonic priorities to be misleading for matters of sexuality and gender identity (Schner, 2002, p. 32); in the long run, I considered it inadequate as a foundation for knowledges mystical (ibid.).

I recalled the words of one of my professors when I was approaching the end of my M.Div. degree: 'You score higher than most Canadians on the Association of Theological Schools Profiles of Ministry scale for justice. You might keep this in mind as you explore ministry locations in the future'. After a period of discernment, the question of my long-term goals no longer begged resolution. I wanted the exploration of this issue to become the focus of my future work. My interest was to study the very question with which I had become impassioned: 'How might I combine a social-scientific and a hermeneutic method of theological inquiry, and develop a theory about existential transformation and freedom for LGBTQ persons - those to which the Christian scriptures allude?[28] I wondered, 'If I were to formulate such a theory, might its shape be an unconventional one?' Hence, my doctoral study.

Refer to Note 8 on the next two pages for details on other areas of focus of spirituality research with LGBTQ persons.

[28] I am referring to the New Testament letter of Paul the Apostle to the Galatian Church, and specifically to the sections, Gal 3: 26-29, and Gal 5:1, 22, 23. Writing on Galatians in the *Queer Bible Commentary*, Patrick Cheng comments on a number of ways in which LGBTQ persons can enjoy the freedom to which this passage alludes (2006, p. 627).

1.5 A Void in the Research

Since discerning my vocational call of justice now, through doctoral research, I remarked that the matter of the spiritualities of nonbinary persons has been an issue of increased social interest, especially in light of marginalizations suffered by those whose priority is to live fully into their humanity.[29] While LGBTQ persons share a history within the Christian faith tradition, some have chosen alternative paths toward enjoying their human gifts of spirituality and sexuality (Kennedy, 2010, pp. 1068-1070). For instance, David Hart emphasizes the spiritual journeys of gay men who have left organized religion;[30] he makes the significant

[29] One example of such an investigation is Rachel Murr's (2015) grounded theory research, where she examines the spiritual journeys of eight lesbian and bisexual women. Murr's focus is on: 1) the experiences of women with histories in non-affirming Christian communities, 2) the reasons why these women chose to maintain a faith or spiritual practice, and 3) the variety of ways in which the women constructed a spiritual life that was affirming and meaningful (2015, p. 351). Murr mentions both harmful detractors from, and salient contributors to an affirming spirituality, and illuminates relational mechanisms involved in women's identity integration (2015, pp. 355-362). In another project, Sean Smallwood (2015) studies New England college students who identify as Queer, and who experience cognitive dissonance around their religious/spiritual identities. He underscores the need for young adults to subvert heteronormativity in order to fully embrace their own identity (Smallwood, 2015, pp. 77-79). This conclusion is a common focal point for LGBTQ persons seeking to reconcile their sexuality and spirituality: Buchanan et al. (2001); Yip (2008); Gross and Yip (2010); Rodriguez (2010); Hattie and Beagan (2013). In another project, Daryl White and O. Kendall White Jr. (2004) reviewed the autobiographies of six gay Christian men, and highlighted significant aspects of their struggles with personal and denominational change in social religious contexts. Their focus did not rest on the process of identity growth, but demonstrated the interactive and social nature of spiritual transformation which resulted in men's construction of a new self-concept (White and White Jr., 2004, pp. 209-216). This is a factor that Smallwood also identifies as significant (2015, p. 91). Additionally, with an aim of supporting clients in a therapeutic counselling relationship, David Hart's (2015) dissertation in the field of educational psychology and counselling explores the way gay men construct spirituality outside the context of organized religion. He also employs grounded theory methodology tool. However, the study of LGBTQ persons' processes of constructing an alternate spirituality outside of a faith like Christianity, is not typically the subject of Christian religious studies and theological writing. Still, Hart's interest here bears a semblance to my concern with the *course* of spirituality for LGBTQ persons, for, in a distinct way, my research focuses on a *course* which accompanies participants' appreciation of a transcendent Divinity. This is because while I embrace a Christian religious tradition as a starting point for my theological construction, I interpret my research findings according to a range of theoretical epistemologies.

[30] Hart's doctoral research focuses on four research questions, which are the following: '1) How do gay men describe and practice spirituality and what role does it play in their everyday lives? 2) What beliefs, rituals, images, customs, texts, leaders, etc. influenced their spiritual development? 3) What is the process for integrating beliefs, rituals, images, customs, texts, leaders, etc., into their spiritual understanding? What is

point that few studies in theology and religion investigate the actual *course* of the spiritual journeys of this diverse group of persons of faith (Hart, 2015, p. 11). However, he states, even rarer, is research which traces the actual processes by which persons in this community encounter and engage with Mystery, or God (Hart, 2015, pp. 11-12).

Among researchers of spirituality, religious studies scholar, Melissa Wilcox, remarks on different definitions of secularization and post-secularism as a phenomenon in their investigation of statistics on gender, ethnic, and sexuality differences in post-secularism (2012, p. 639).[31] In a summary on their research, they note that post-secularism in different parts of the world is a trend which demonstrates that religion is being transformed, rather than dying out, and that spirituality has at its focus, qualities of self, nature, and balance (Wilcox, 2012, p. 641). Indeed, many persons identify as spiritual, and have alternative ways to practice spirituality which do not include a regular or traditional community, and these point to post-secular forms of religion (Wilcox, 2012,

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the process for omission? 4) How does their spiritual understanding and practice(s) impact how they view their sexual and affective orientations? How is spirituality integrated with other cultural identities?' [sic] (Hart, 2015, p. 18). Hart's aim is distinct from my own, in that it is to: 'generate a description of how participants' spiritual identities developed over time and to learn what comprises the essence of participants' spiritual identities in terms of the cognitive, affective, social, physiological, behavioral, and experiential elements of participants' spiritual identities' (Hart, 2015, p. 18). For a researcher such as I, who desires to reconstruct theology, along with its education and praxis, my priority is not to explore how LGBTQ persons separate from institutionalized religion and its abuses, and succeed in reorganizing a spirituality for themselves. All the same, I do not view research such as Hart's as less significant than my own. In fact, in addition to demonstrating human resilience, these studies are utile for demonstrating 'movements' of Mystery residing in a multiplicity of secular (i.e. worldly, or non-religious) locations. This is one reason why I am described as, possessing a quality of being 'futuristic', a trait about which I have written previously as, a 'talent [that] is expressed in my leadership as one who expresses hope-filled dreams of a better life, a better world, and a better future which reflects the reign of God's Kingdom on earth' (Metzgner, 2014, p. 7). Personal weaknesses notwithstanding, I am growing increasingly realistic and hopeful. I do not consider myself naïve or Pollyannaish where progress in justice-making is concerned.

[31] In a personal communication with my supervisor, Deryn Guest (2020), I learned that Melissa Wilcox, who identifies as transgender, uses the personal pronouns they/their/them.

p. 646).[32] Furthermore, Wilcox is a proponent of using qualitative research to tease out the complexity of issues related to post-secular spirituality, gender, sexuality, and ethnicity (2012, p. 651), a point of focus in this research.

Finally, I appreciate an approach to religion as a social construct, that is not a 'universally shared' aspect of human culture, like a 'truth', a 'given', or a 'universal phenomenon', but a construct which represents the ways human persons engage with 'the world beyond the human, or the sacred, whatever that may be' (Wilcox, 2021, p. 11).[33] Because I share queer theory's social constructivist understanding of concepts like gender, sexuality, Divinity, and the sacred, it is important for me to clarify that the theology of human Becoming I am constructing is *not* a *universal* concept, that I propose as operating across human persons (Wilcox, 2021, p. 33).[34]

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[32] One example of a post-secular form of spirituality is the international service organization known as, the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence, operating in Europe, North and South America, and Australia. The Sisters seek to offer 'indulgences' for persons who have often been proclaimed 'sinners' by traditional religions, and serve those who are also overlooked by nuns of other religious traditions (Wilcox, 2012, p. 653). The Sisters' 'self-described mission is to 'promulgate universal [some say omniversal] joy and expiate stigmatic guilt, and they work to raise awareness of sexual health, domestic violence, sexual assault, sex workers' rights, and other issues' (ibid.). They are seen as 'bellwethers' for post-secular religion in Europe and North America, as the Sisters' work is their spirituality (ibid.).

[33] Wilcox encourages an approach toward religious education which she borrows from Dutch scholar, Gerardus van der Leeuw, who described the study of religion as the practice of sensitivity toward, or the acquisition of understanding of a specific group, which focuses on how that group 'experiences the world around them from the inside' (Wilcox, 2021, p. 11). This method involves: 1) a temporary suspension of one's prior assumptions, and 2) a cultivation of empathic understanding, and these are postures to which van der Leeuw referred as *epoché* and *Verstehen*, respectively (Wilcox, 2021, p. 11). Furthermore, Wilcox reviews the ways religious studies has approached the telling of stories of different people groups, and particularly, how constructed narratives were problematic for those who were marginalized and controlled in the process. This result has sparked the creation of new theories concerning the realities of populations such as LGBTQ persons, women, persons of colour, and others (Wilcox, 2021, p. 17). For me, in addition to being formed by religion and spiritual practices, my training as a psychotherapist assisted in reforming my 'rougher edges'. As van der Leeuw instructed, it helped to cultivate a posture of empathy and a desire to understand within me, a path that has become more than 'learning'. It has been a walk in comprehending my relatedness to other createds, as well as empathy toward myself. Among the vast population of createds, I persevere in meaning-making (to the degree that I can) of the Mystery I name God. Recognizing religion's social construction inspires humility.

[34] For example, Wilcox notes that with the exception of religious traditions which are more recent, or small in organizational size, none views gender variance and same-sex eroticism in the same way (2021, p. 73).

I am focusing on a phenomenon that I recognize to be functioning in the lives of six persons who identify as LGBTQ; while Becoming shares qualities among them, it unfolds distinctly for each one.[35] Theologians, religious educators, and social scientists have written about the importance of a Christian spirituality which speaks to the *lived realities* of LGBTQ persons,[36] and in addition to this, some have interwoven the experiences of nonbinary persons with statements furnishing insights into God.[37] These advancements notwithstanding, qualitative projects focusing on LGBTQ spirituality as a journey of human Becoming in relation to God are rare, yet have been encouraged by some.[38]

An example of this emphasis appeared in the writing of 'indecent' theologian, Marcella Althaus-Reid, who criticized the discourse of North American theological reflection as divorced from the lives of marginalized persons, particularly, those in the Latin American context in which she was raised and began her theological training. Althaus-Reid identified specific issues for which theological reflection in North America had fallen short during her lifetime, namely: 1) few studies exist with marginalized persons as their focus (Althaus-Reid, 2000,

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[35] These stories of spirituality represent matters sacred to these six persons, and are compatible with what Wilcox means by referring to the phrase, 'ultimate concern', coined by Christian theologian, Paul Tillich. She reports that Tillich used this term to refer to individuals' espoused truths concerning the sacred (Wilcox, 2021, p. 49). But Wilcox issues a caution that, when speaking of the sacred, 'boundaries' can be 'blurry' (2021, p. 62), there are no neatly partitioned categories and explanations.

[36] For example: See research by May (1995); Schneider (2000); Buchanan et al. (2001); Hutchins (2001); Goss (2002); Yip (2003); Althaus-Reid and Isherwood (2004); Pears (2004); White and White Jr. (2004); Tan (2005); Barton (2010); Cornwall (2010); Johnson (2010); Kennedy (2010); Mollenkott and Sheridan (2010); Robinson (2010); Wilcox (2012); Hattie and Beagan (2013); Murr (2015); Smallwood (2015); Radojcic (2015); Morgan (2017); Grau and Wyman (2020a); Peckruhn (2020); Thatamanil (2020); Wilcox (2021).

[37] For example: See the constructive theologies written by Queer theologians, Althaus-Reid (2000); Althaus-Reid (2003); Althaus-Reid (2004a); Isherwood (2004); Johnson (2010); Barnsley (2013).

[38] Rodriguez (2010, p. 31); Althaus-Reid (2000, p. 30).

pp. 30-35, 64); 2) theological works which refer to psychoanalytical works, such as those by Lacan are still absent (Althaus-Reid, 2000, p. 30); and 3) few ethnographical methodologies are utilized in theological scholarship (ibid.). My research speaks into this space.

1.6 Issue - The Problem and Questions

Consequently, the purpose of this research is to explore the *actual path* of spirituality evident in the lives of six individuals who claim their identity as LGBTQ and who are on a spiritual journey of Becoming. I designed a qualitative study with the following questions as points of reference:

1) How have the spiritual journeys of persons who identify as LGBTQ and believers in the Divine been shaped by their varied life experiences?
2) How have these journeys affected the lives of those closest to them?
3) How has their spirituality impacted their awareness of who they are as persons who are on a life journey of Becoming?

Subsequently, I examined the life narratives of these nonbinary persons, and have constructed a theory about the phenomenon of human Becoming observed.

1.7 The Academic Value of the Research and Thesis

1.7.1 Queer, Christian, and the Divine - Close Relatives

My three research questions challenge the assumption of 'the oft-told story of Christians and gays being mortal enemies since the beginning of time' (Wilcox,

2021, p. 189).[39] As Wilcox demonstrates, the involvement of Christian congregations in gay rights activism in the United States in the 1960's and 1970's, and their support in the AIDS epidemic, is evidence that religion has been very much intertwined in the queer and transgender movement (ibid.).[40] While their writing refers to the American reality, it is my contention that, if theologians, ministers, and academics hope to work together toward a hopeful future, the following question which Wilcox poses deserves special attention by North Americans as a whole, which is: 'Can queer and transgender studies help religious studies to separate claims about the nature of the world beyond the human from claims about the immorality of sexism, transphobia, homophobia, and the like?' (2021, p. 194). My thesis suggests it can.

In fact, throughout this writing, I present the terms 'Queer', 'LGBTQ', 'Christian', and 'Divinity', as realities which belong together, and I contend that they are more alike than different.[41] By being open to new ways of understanding movements of Mystery in which persons flourish as queer or peculiar, like Godself, there are possibilities to Become in ways heretofore unimagined (Keefe-Perry, 2014, p. 7); by grace, createds Become more like God, and thus, they participate in a process of transformation which transpires in others (Althaus-Reid, 2003, p.

[39] Wilcox states that their comment derives from their reading of Heather White's book, *Reforming Sodom*, and Anthony Petro's publication, *After the Wrath of God*.
[40] Evidence concerning the support of members of the Church for LGBTQ persons is found in discussion Chapters 4 through 6. Specifically, an example of this is found in Eva's story, section 4.2, Note 188; the narrative of Sophie's supplementary interviewee in section 5.2.3; and Andy's recollection in section 6.2.2.1.
[41] Historically, Christians have also been referred to as people who belong to God (i.e. in 1 Pet 2:9, the Apostle Peter refers to the Christians to whom he wrote as, 'peculiar people'). Moreover, Althaus-Reid argued that, 'Queerness is something that belongs to God' (2003, p. 34). If so, and if 'Queerness' is a mark of possession by God, the term is not pejorative in the least. Rather, it is a sign of distinction, esteemed as a mirror of Divinity.

34). In fact, my aim echoes Wilcox's goal; it is to identify how grounded 'theologies' such as mine, constructed from narratives of nonbinary individuals, can serve LGBTQ persons and their families; an ecclesia desiring to support their Becoming; and the academy which seeks to inform public and social life about spirituality for human sexual beings. An aspiration of this research is to promote the re-creation of communities where all may flourish as a result of such collaborative learning.

1.7.2 The Thesis

To reiterate, I am undertaking this research to explore the arc of spirituality evident in the lives of six individuals who have claimed a nonbinary gender and/or sexual identity, and who demonstrate a trust into the Mystery of the cosmos they interpret as God, and with whom/which they are Becoming. Furthermore, my argument makes the following claims: 1) the phenomenon of human spirituality is seen in ten 'movements' of human Becoming, epitomized in the theme, 'freedom for love'; 2) 'freedom for love'[42] is best understood by considering it through my constructive theopoetic epistemological analysis and interpretation as a 'movement' of psychoanalytical/psychological 'surrender', that is *kenotic* in nature.[43] 3) the 'movements' of Becoming image the Divine, with/in human persons. Hence, the soundness of my findings challenge religious claims which deny the spirituality of LGBTQ persons.

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[42] 'Freedom-*for*-love' is defined briefly in the Glossary, and in detail, starting in Chapter 7.

[43] See section 8.3.3.3 to understand how my use of the Lacanian construct, *jouissance* extends the term, 'decreation', and reconceptualizes the theological term, *kenosis* in my construct of 'surrender'. I explain how 'freedom-*for*-love' derives from a process explained in this concept, introduced by Jacques Lacan.

It is my hope to introduce a number of original features to theological scholarship. Namely, to: 1) introduce human Becoming as a new subject for theological inquiry, and 2) base it on LGBTQ lives; 3) create a novel qualitative interview method to examine spirituality in a poetic, rather than a systemic or dogmatic way; and 4) interpret spirituality as a journey of human Becoming by using multiple epistemologies collaboratively.

1.7.3 Thesis Outline

Chapter 2 begins with the methodological ground on which I construct my theory of spirituality. This chapter is positioned here intentionally, before providing a review of the relevant literature. This is because the grounded theory methodology, and the contemporary context of this ethnography, complement the literature which I present *subsequently*, thereby, aiding my interpretation and discussion of the data which follows temporally in **Chapters 4** through **7.** I therefore begin by focusing on ethnography approached from a theological perspective, and explain the attention given to the research method used; this included travelling to different sites for the purpose of conducting mystagogic and supplementary interviews; negotiating issues of power; following ethical standards of research and reflecting them. After discussing my interviews, and the providing details regarding my grounded theory coding process, I remark on the validity and reliability of the data collected. I end with an explanation of the form I adopt to represent the narratives of my primary participants fully, while respecting their anonymity.

In **Chapter 3**, I approach a review of literature in a distinct way, which provides the interdisciplinary epistemology for my grounded theory. Framed within process theology, which recognizes a mysterious relationship between Divinity, chaos, and potentiality, I

describe my writing on contemporary scholarship as a *move,* 'Toward a Grounded *Theopoiesis* of Human Becoming'. In this way, despite some distinct, and even divergent theoretical assumptions, I share the unique contribution each section makes toward an understanding of human Becoming as a phenomenon as it appears in the data, and provide justification for their contributions. The disciplines of psychology, psychoanalysis, and spirituality are the first on which I focus; they provide an explanation of the communicative function of the body, and how persons' bodily awarenesses shape their realities, unique sensibilities, actions, and hence, their Becoming. Next, focusing on the discipline of constructive theology, I emphasize the scholarship of Queer and constructive theologians who write from a theopoetic perspective. Then, process theology enters the conversation, making a contribution to a picture of Becoming in relationship with Mystery distinctly. I mention philosophies of religion which provide alternate concepts of Divinity in human persons, and prior to concluding the chapter, I explain the heuristic I devised and used, in writing a theory based on the three research questions.

The next four chapters include my report and discussion on the data.

I begin with a biographical précis of each participant in **Chapter 4**, pointing to their lived realities. Then, referring to participant narratives, in each chapter, I: 1) describe the details of their Becoming journey; 2) specify the nature of the Divine-human involvement in each of the 'movements' comprising the groupings; and 3) explain the way these groupings are displayed in participants' lives in their contemporary context. In discussing these points, I interpret participants' journeys of Becoming epistemologically, integrating

the themes of the ten ‘movements’ and the three groupings of categories with relevant literature.

Chapter 4 focuses on participant narratives which comprise the grouping of themes I entitle, ‘beginning’. Spirituality in this section refers to three ‘movements’ of Becoming evident in their life stories.

A second set of categories, reflected in the Aboriginal term and name, ‘**aja’sit**’, ‘to move over or make room’, is the subject of **Chapter 5**, and this aspect of the journey of Becoming concerns four ‘movements’ in a grouping to which I refer as ‘homesteading’.

In **Chapter 6** I introduce a third and final grouping of ‘movements’ of spirituality reflected in three ‘movements’ I have entitled, ‘re-creation’.

In **Chapter 7**, I discuss the main theme, ‘freedom-*for*-love’, the motif in which all ten categories find their meaning. It is the most fulsome expression of the *telos* of each ‘movement’ of Becoming, and I begin with its definition. This action is key, for clarity around the meaning and purpose of the main category reifies the validity of the data and its analysis. I provide these details, integrating the theological literature, and expand on its appearance in the ten categories; and before I provide my synthesis of the ‘movements’ and themes, in the section, ‘re-creation’, I provide a recapitulation of the sections which have preceded it. Its placement here is meant to emphasize the significance of the concluding categories, prior to elaborating on the last grouping of ‘movements’. The last grouping, entitled, ‘surrender’, corresponds to what I consider the apex of ‘freedom for love’. I end with a commentary on this category.

I conclude the thesis with **Chapter 8**, in four sections. First, I review the findings and contributions of the research in brief, and focus on Becoming as a topic of interest for an ecclesia which possesses an interest in LGBTQ spirituality. I write on the implications of Becoming as *process*, rather than a *metaphysical state* of *being* to which human persons aspire, and by which they are judged frequently. My comments here point to what I consider as a loss that may be the end of such shortsightedness if the Church were to persist on a path of finite theological reflection. I expand on this point in three subsections, where the three major groupings of themes are used as a focus for providing opportunities for congregations to learn how to live in community with persons in whose lives these themes of Becoming are evident. A third section treats the matters of the unique nature of this study, its limitations, and my suggestions for future research where I appreciate three closing issues as significant; I discuss the reasons why. This includes investigations into the potential of psychoanalytic theory to enhance theological and religious knowledges on spirituality. I end the chapter with a summary of my conclusions.

This is followed by an epilogue, which includes the effect of this grounded *theopoiesis* on me as a researcher in Queer constructive theology, and its contribution to my own Becoming journey.

1.8 Chapter Summary

This chapter introduced my thesis. It provided an overview of the history of: its development; relevant theoretical background; methodological design; and its epistemological strategies.

CHAPTER 2

METHODOLOGY

2.1 Introduction

This research originates from three questions: 1) How have the spiritual journeys of persons who identify as LGBTQ and believers in the Divine been shaped by their varied life experiences? 2) How have these journeys affected the lives of those closest to them? 3) How has their spirituality impacted their awareness of who they are as persons who are on a life journey of 'Becoming'?

In this chapter, I argue that ethnography, with its focus on investigating cultural communities, and grounded theory, an inductive qualitative research methodology, together furnish appropriate tools for research with six western Canadians who identify as LGBTQ. Consequently, I contend that mystagogic accompaniment, as a locus of poetic encounter with Divinity, is an apt interview method for developing a grounded theory of 'Becoming'.

To support these claims, I begin by explaining how my aim led to the choice of ethnography and grounded theory as qualitative methods. I define them, and discuss their advantages as well as challenges. Of particular interest is my focus on mystagogic accompaniment as a novel interview method, requiring intensive time, attention, and analytical care, and providing an apt tool to represent LGBTQ narratives on Becoming with insight and depth.

I then describe my research procedures. Starting with recruitment, I highlight my communal approach to designing advertisements, participant information and consent forms, and screening tools. The learnings from a pilot study are also a significant feature of my procedures, that I share; and as the study employed a distinct sampling process, I explain my selection of participants and fieldwork sites.

Mystagogic research facilitates the study of individuals' stories concerning their appreciations of the Divine in the quotidian. Thus, I focus on the roles of the participants, and myself, as researcher, in this process. However, as intimate as the mystagogic encounter might be, its context requires attention to dynamics of power. I therefore examine the roles I assumed, and the ethical issues which arose.

I address the critical issue of data analysis for my undertaking of theological construction with which this study is concerned. In doing so, a discussion on interpretive interactionism, my guiding poststructural philosophy in this unique exercise of grounded theory, follows. I move to a detailed explanation of my analytical procedures – open, axial, and selective coding – which were applied to the first and third mystagogic interviews.

Concluding this section is a comment on the validity and reliability of the data collected, as well as my decision-making around discussing and representing the themes of Becoming I discovered, as comprehensively, openly, and sensitively as possible.

2.2 Ethnography - Theological Ethical Meaning-Making in Community

2.2.1 Introduction

The aim of this research is to undertake a qualitative study which examines the phenomenon of human spirituality in persons who identify as LGBTQ. Ethnography is a

qualitative approach derived from anthropology, which makes the study of the lived experience of a community possible (Scharen and Vigen, 2011, pp. 8-9; Creswell, 2014, p. 13); hence, it provides a frame for my examination of the three questions with which this research is concerned. In this section, I provide a description of ethnography, as explored by two researchers in theology, Christian Scharen and Aana Marie Vigen, to demonstrate the significance of ethnography for this project of constructive theology.

2.2.2 Defining Ethnography

Ethnographies conduct an in-depth study of subjects within their own context, for a limited amount of time (Creswell, 2014, p. 14; Court, 2018, p. 7). My sample of interest is a group of six persons, who: 1) identify as believers in the Divine; 2) have been touched by the Christian religious tradition, and see themselves as persons who are on a life journey of 'Becoming'; and 3) embrace a non-heteronormative gender and/or sexual identity. By way of introduction to ethnography, in their book, *Ethnography as Christian Theology and Ethics*, Scharen and Vigen examine it under a theological spotlight. It is,

> [the] writing [of] culture … a dynamic process of meaning making that is inherently intertwined with power dynamics … it does not stand wholly outside of that which it explores – it itself and its narrative is also part of the inquiry. Thus, it and the ethnographer, need to interrogate themselves as much as they seek to learn from the people with whom a study is undertaken. There is an inescapable dimension of vulnerability – often more acutely felt on the part of the people being studied. Yet, if it is done well, the researcher or academic will be vulnerable as well (Scharen and Vigen, 2011, p. 16).

These scholars underscore the shortcomings of researchers who have conducted ethnographic research in the past, in addition to responsibilities of future ethnographers. Historically, while ethnographers have set out to capture the lived realities of communities in which they have lived for a time, they have also failed to recognize how their subjectivities have perpetrated naïve and unexamined claims of benevolence in their aims and/or factual representations of people's lives (Scharen and Vigen, 2011, p. 13).

In the field of theology and religion, an ethnographer's professional evaluation of persons' lives must 'represent others faithfully within the domains of theology and Christian ethics' (Scharen and Vigen, 2011, p. 13).[44] Moved by these priorities, I endeavoured to conduct my study with attentiveness, sensitivity, openness, curiosity, and trustworthiness - values that are important in my professional work as a psychotherapist, mystagogic accompanist, and researcher (Waaijman, 2002, p. 883). Speaking of her hopes at the start of her professional journey, Vigen shared: 'I yearned to learn about, and talk through, various theological … quandaries with people who did not identify as academics' (Scharen and Vigen, 2011, p. 6). I shared Vigen's desire, for my intention was not to conduct a *theoretical* exploration of Becoming, divorced from persons' lived experiences, but to *engage with* participants *in the process* of reflecting on their truths in the company of Mystery; this focus is esteemed by certain Queer theologians (Barnsley, 2013, p. 310; Althaus-Reid, 2000, p. 4).

[44] In her foreword to Scharen and Vigen's book, theologian Mary McClintock Fulkerson, describes ethnography as a qualitative method befitting a study of 'other [Queer] spaces' (2011, p. xi). She views it as deserving of recognition in the field of Christian theology and ethics, and her comment suggests its promise for contributing to this research (McClintock Fulkerson, 2011, p. xi).

2.2.3 Grounding Theory on LGBTQ Spirituality

In the 1950's, sociologist Anselm Strauss pioneered a doctoral program in nursing at the University of California, San Francisco, and invited Barney Glaser to join him in qualitative research. Strauss' intention was to build a theory about death and dying which was based on persons' experiences, rather than on theoretical abstractions removed from their quotidian realities (Corbin and Strauss, 2015, p. 6). These sociologists developed an approach to qualitative research for the purpose of theory building, and called it grounded theory. In 1967, they published their work, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory* (Corbin and Strauss, 2015, p. 6).

A distinct method of inquiry among qualitative methods today, grounded theory is utilized in social and behavioural sciences to explore a variety of phenomena (Strauss and Corbin, 1990, p. 21; Creswell, 2014, pp. 14, 128; Corbin and Strauss, 2015, pp. 7, 11). Unlike deductive methods, it is concerned with meaning-making, and theory is gleaned from the phenomenon under study (Corbin and Strauss, 2015, p. 11). Furthermore, the theory undergoes progressive testing and validation as it is developed, to discover the truest reflection of the lived realities in question (Strauss and Corbin, 1990, p. 23-24; Corbin and Strauss, 2015, p. 7-8).

As a qualitative method, grounded theory focuses on: 1) data collection; 2) procedures for interpreting data; and 3) written and verbal reports pertaining to phenomena being explored (Strauss and Corbin, 1990, pp. 19-23; Creswell, 2014, p. 14; Corbin and Strauss, 2015, p. 3). While researchers employ this method in several ways, two primary processes define it: 1) theory is developed from data collected, while research is conducted; and 2) data is collected and analysed concurrently, both actions dependent

on each other (Corbin and Strauss, 2015, p. 7). As a result, theoretical concepts are discovered, investigated, and refined at the same time, and this is done repeatedly (ibid.).

I selected grounded theory as a suitable tool to construct a theory of spirituality (Creswell, 2014, p. 14); and mystagogic accompaniment was the interview method I chose to create narrative texts.

2.2.4 Mystagogic Accompaniment - Providing Data for Grounded Theory

The aim of this study was to write a theory of LGBTQ spirituality. This required an interview method that was sensitive to awarenesses, that are not only cognitive, but also spiritual, and aesthetic (i.e. sensory, emotional, bodily). Mystagogic interviewing achieves this by adapting the linguistic method of face-to-face spiritual accompaniment to the qualitative interview; thus, it is an innovation in theological praxis. Derived from the Greek root, *mustèrion* (i.e. the word 'mystery'), within the Christian tradition, the term, mystagogy, or mystagogic research is the study of lived spirituality which reflects the human journey of transformation (Waaijman, 2002, p. 872; Schneiders, 2016, p. 422); it examines the mystery of the 'inner space' of an individual, which unfolds on the life journey of discovery (Waaijman, 2002, p. 873).

Professor and Carmelite priest, Kees Waaijman, has studied spirituality in religious traditions like Christianity, as well as others which approach cosmic Mystery in different ways (Waaijman, 2002, p. 6). Mystagogic accompaniment is a relationship of spiritual companionship sought by a novice (i.e. mystès) from a mature spiritual guide (i.e.

mystagogue),[45] and the novice's aim is to become enlightened, or acquire a revelation about their way of living in relation to divine Mystery (Waaijman, 2002, pp. 7, 872, 873). In the Western Christian tradition, mystagogic accompaniment is not a nascent practice, it is recorded to have originated in the early monastic period during the Third and Fourth Centuries (Long, 1988, p. 5). At this time, devout believers withdrew to the Egyptian and Syrian deserts, where, as spiritual novices, they set out to pray and devote themselves to spiritual warfare; here they entered into relationships with a spiritual 'abba' (i.e. director) for accountability.[46]

Over time, mystagogic accompaniment became a moyen of spiritual formation, a process of directed companionship; and as One's spiritual formation is viewed to be an ongoing process, it is not uncommon for a mystès to be involved with a mystagogue over their lifetime (Green, 2000, p. 38). Seeking to maintain an awareness of God's presence, illumination, and guidance in their quotidian circumstances, a mystès often hopes to make a prudent choice concerning ways they can possibly take (Waaijman, 2002, p. 921). Although mystagogic accompaniment is practiced in a number of faith traditions, my research does not focus on practices of any tradition apart from that of Western Christian spirituality (Waaijman, 2002, p. 6; Phillips, 2008, p. 4).

Also, this form of spiritual accompaniment is viewed by some as a professional relationship of spiritual care, and in contemporary practice, many *mystagogues* possess training and experience in providing spiritual accompaniment, and receive a form of

[45] I use the following three terms interchangeably: mystagogic accompaniment, spiritual accompaniment, and spiritual direction.
[46] The nature of this support concerned buffering natural temptations to individual excesses, known to arise after prolonged periods of self-denial and isolation (Long, 1988, p. 5).

accountability and supervision for their own development (Phillips, 2008, p. 3). However, unlike the professions of counselling and psychotherapy, no licensing or regulatory body for spiritual directors exists in Canada, and the profession's development in this direction remains a matter of debate (Phillips, 2008, p. 4; Spiritual Directors International, 2022).

Since an individual becomes sensitive to their inner, mystical experience through mystagogic accompaniment (Waaijman, 2002, 882-894), in comparison with other interview contexts, where unstructured and open-ended questions are used, professor and spiritual director, Margaret Guenther, describes the distinct spiritual friendship involved,

> With them, we can let down our defenses and show our less-than-perfect selves. We can let go of the need always to be right. We can also 'unblushingly make known what progress' we have made in the spiritual life. This is a great gift of spiritual friendship, for most of us find it inordinately difficult to acknowledge our own goodness and name our gifts … our spiritual friends can help restore our skewed perspective as they provide a much-needed reality check. They encourage us, give us heart. They are our mirrors and our midwives (Guenther, 1995, p. 27).

As Guenther suggested, this encounter can be shared with others, apart from mystagogues, persons with whom a deep intimacy can be enjoyed.

I recognized that I would be limited to three mystagogic interviews with primary participants. Yet I was sensitive to the opinion of spiritual director Debonee Morgan, who acknowledges the potential these encounters hold for members of a sexual minority, as 'a welcoming space to be seen and heard by another unique person and the Holy' (Morgan, 2017, p. 47). What follows are the procedures I used to facilitate this, and I begin

with recruitment.

2.2.5 Recruitment

At the start of this project, I pursued intentional acts of collaboration with acquaintances and community gatekeepers in various regions in B.C. My intent was to extend my circle of input and resources in an effort to produce valid results (Scharen and Vigen, 2011, p. xxiii; Court, 2018, p. 3). They were individuals employed in various roles with church, parachurch, and ministry settings affirming and/or supporting persons who identify as LGBTQ, and they represented variety in: region and indigenous territory in B.C.; size of urban and rural city; age; ethnic background; denomination; gender; and sexual orientation. My inquiries for them concerned: 1) seasonal travel to their region for fieldwork; 2) recruiting participants, finding suitable accommodation and interview space in their city; and 3) feedback on my advertisement and forms.[47]

In designing recruitment advertisements, procedures, consent forms, and interview questions, I followed principles of qualitative research methodology and grounded theory. I consulted a significant portion of literature, and used it to formulate a personal manual for data collection that would be ethical and respectful of this cultural group, and which would produce valid and reliable results, they were namely: Kohli (1981); Strauss and

[47] My consultations with this community of persons had a significant impact on me, and our conversations pointed to the transformational values I wished to embrace. I was grateful for my colleagues' investment of time, and it reminded me of partnerships involved in research of this nature. Another source of feedback was from a doctoral student at Birmingham who lived in an urban centre in a different region of Canada. As I received input and helpful critique, I nurtured the habit of mindfulness - regarding my abilities and limitations, and qualities I knew of, which produce sound qualitative outcomes. Among these were reflectivity, flexibility, persistence, openness to learning, and practicality, mentioned by Kath Weston in her writing on qualitative research with LGBTQ communities (2004, p. 179). These attitudes were key to remaining grounded later, as I managed a sizeable project, traversing large spans of geographic territory, and living for extended periods as a visitor in rural and urban spaces.

Corbin (1990); Ganzevoort (1993); Miller (2000); Waaijman (2002); Basit (2003); Denzin (2004); Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2004); Miller and Crabtree (2004); Thorne (2004); Van Maanen (2004); Weston (2004); Wilcox (2006); Ganzevoort (2012); Barnsley (2013); Campbell-Reed and Scharen (2013); Creswell (2014); Corbin and Strauss(2015).[48]

2.2.5.1 Advertising and screening

I distributed my advertisement within my network of friends, relatives, and colleagues, who worked in community, ministry, business, and university settings in B.C. Attaching a brief précis about my research focus, I emailed the advertisement to 60 persons. Advertisements were sent by air mail; handed out personally during meetings with individuals; and posted on my Facebook and Linked-In social media sites. People assisted by distributing the advertisement to individuals, and placing it in public spaces.

Fourteen people responded to the invitation to participate in the study. As qualitative researcher, Kath Weston advises, I made an effort to remain mindful of sensitivities and risks for persons who identify as LGBTQ, and who are willing to participate in research (2004, p. 179); therefore, I was persistent in following up with inquirers (Weston, 2004, p. 179). I held screening interviews by telephone, except for two, which I held in person. Respondents' reactions suggested that my interview process and procedures were novel, and intriguing, encouraging them to participate. In total, I held eight screening interviews; once an interested person had read and agreed to all the terms

[48] Recruitment, advertisement, and consent forms are included as Appendices 2 – 7 to this thesis.

of the study, I confirmed them as a participant.[49]

2.2.5.2 Sampling

In his writing on sampling for qualitative research, professor and mixed methods researcher, John Creswell, notes that sample size varies with the research method chosen (2014, p. 189), and he suggests that a reasonable sample for grounded theory methodology is 20 or 30 subjects (ibid.). Corbin and Strauss, however, contend that while subjects can be selected beforehand, there is no preconceived number of participants in grounded theory, for the developing theory is the focus. This leads the researcher to expand the search for participants or additional data as needed (Corbin and Strauss, 2015, p. 135). My aim was to recruit primary participants who identified as LGBTQ, and their partners, close relations, or friends to participate as guest participants.

Additionally, theoretical sampling, that is part of grounded theory data analysis, requires the researcher to explore questions which arise from participant disclosures and/or while reviewing data; thus, I projected time for consultation with persons or documents or attending special events (Strauss and Corbin, 1990, pp. 180-185; Charmaz, 2004, p. 503; Corbin and Strauss, 2015, p. 134; Court, 2018, p. 34); such analysis is particularly important, for, investing in theoretical sampling produces a theory with more explanatory power (Corbin and Strauss, p. 154). I employed supplementary interviews to this end, and followed up on extraneous questions by holding a final wrap-up meeting with primary participants before leaving their community. As researchers, Cleary, Horsfall, and

[49] See Appendix 3. Also, I organized details related to: 1) living on-site; 2) facilitating mystagogic interviews; and 3) a temporary route, with dates of travel to fieldwork sites.

Hayter note, my sample size was determined to develop ‘quality data’ (Cleary et al., 2014, p. 473).

Grounded theory researcher, Juliet Corbin, describes anchors that researchers employ to fulfill their aims, highlighting wise use of time as one of them. Corbin summarizes the outcome of this investment by expanding on the importance of a researcher’s ethical practice of producing work which will respect the self, the profession, and participants; this involves exercising thoughtful self-care during interviews (Corbin and Strauss, 2015, p. 14). Like other interviews utilized in grounded theory research, mystagogic accompaniment facilitates disclosures of an intimate nature. Due to the potential emotional nature of the interview that may be encountered by the mystagogue, the meeting requires attentiveness and engagement; thus, sessions often extend for a period of an hour (Phillips, 2008, p. 27; Spiritual Directors International, 2022). Consequently, I left margins of time between interviews, transcription, coding, and travel from one site to the next, which resulted in interviewing fewer primary, guest, and supplementary participants.[50] Before committing to a research site in a region, I selected, and received confirmation from two persons living within reasonable commuting distance from each other. Still, given the uniqueness of this ethnography, to conduct it with success, technically, scientifically, and economically, I required a realistic gauge of the feasibility of the procedures I had constructed. Hence, two months prior to the projected start of my

[50] I compared my aims with Jenny Barnsley’s unique qualitative interview method, which she described as ‘silent waiting’ (2013, p. 14). In her study of complex gender with eleven transgendered persons, Barnsley used unstructured interviews to offer participants ‘generous attention’, and her meetings ranged in duration between one and five hours (Barnsley, 2013, pp. 104-108). Given my projected travel time, I reduced my aims for sample size to less than 20 – 30 participants (Creswell, 2014, p. 189).

fieldwork, I conducted a pilot study.

2.2.6 Pilot Study

Both the distance of my domicile from research sites, and the fullness of my schedule, made leaving a site or taking time away from the study to address oversights, impractical, without significant consequences to my project. Pilot studies test research procedures (Miller and Crabtree, 2004, p. 196). They are used as a gauge for feasibility, oversights, and flaws.

In the summer of 2017, I had planned to conduct a pilot study; but wildfires in my region in B.C. restricted my travel anywhere but to the nearest village (Province of British Columbia, 2019b). Thus, to acquire a participant, and to honour my commitment to my already scheduled interviews, I engaged the one person who was readily available to me at the time – my spouse. Although he identifies as heterosexual, my spouse fulfilled the remaining criteria for participating, and was willing to be involved.[51] In fact, qualitative researchers, William Miller and Benjamin Crabtree, encourage the use of friends, relatives and acquaintances when conducting pilot studies which use depth interviews (Miller and Crabtree, 2004, pp. 194-196).[52] Pilot studies enable researchers to make decisions on procedural details, such as the presentation of interview questions, method of recording, and style of transcription to be used (Miller and Crabtree, 2004, pp. 195-196), details that were critical for managing my time onsite. My procedural check list ensured consistency

[51] While this was not my original intention for a pilot study on LGBTQ spirituality, it was a creative option in view of the unexpected circumstances, as well as the anticipated potential consequences of conducting the study without a pilot trial.

[52] Characterized by open-ended questions, depth interviews facilitate the collection of narrative accounts (Miller and Crabtree, 2004, p. 189).

in my interview procedure, which contributes to reliability (Corbin and Strauss, 2015, p. 347). Thus, my pilot study allowed me to work through 'kinks' in the procedures, from the review and signing of consent forms, to my transition into, and conclusion of interviews.

The pilot study also gave me another, unexpected insight – it related to the mystagogic interview's potential to provide a transformative experience. I had intended to have a final wrap-up meeting with participants after our mystagogic interviews had concluded, but the closing conversation with my husband allowed *him*, as *mystès*, to share his impressions on the mystagogic process; it was *his* reflection on our polyphonic encounter *together*, in the company of the Divine.[53] The prospect that a person without experience in this form of encounter would derive benefit from three brief sessions, reified Eileen Campbell-Reed's and Christian Scharen's thesis that 'qualitative interviewing [could be] experienced as holy ground' (Campbell-Reed and Scharen, 2013, p. 232). I prepared to enter participants' communities and lives, anticipating such encounters.

2.2.7 Preparing for the Participant Sample

My procedures involved holding three mystagogic interviews per primary participant. Participants were self-selecting. Having confirmed their interest prior to my departure for a fieldwork site, I planned for a minimum of fifteen days onsite per participant, and constructed a tentative schedule involving a total of 112 days (sixteen weeks) for fieldwork. The projected duration of the ethnography spanned over a six-month

[53] As the mystès, my husband participated in two interviews, and then, he facilitated me, as I assumed the role of guest mystès in the second interview. I also recruited a member of our extended family who visited sometime later, and they assumed the role of supplementary interviewee. Having a supplementary participant in the pilot study allowed me to engage in theoretical sampling related to these mystagogic interviews; we were able to complete all of the consent forms, and I determined their appropriateness.

period, with travel and data collection beginning in the Fall of 2017, and culminating in Spring 2018. Table 1.1 on the following page provides a summary of the types of interviews conducted in three anonymous regions in B.C.

Table 1.1. Type of interview and duration of fieldwork by anonymous region/territory in B.C. (A, B, C).

Interviews	A	B	C	Totals
Mystagogic	3	9	6	18
Supplementary	1	5	5	11
Duration (days)				
Onsite	daily (only 3 trips)	56	51	107
Travel to site	daily	N/A	N/A	8

2.2.8 Sample Demographics

At the time of the interviews, the six participants ranged in age from 39 to 67 years, had experienced an average of 36.3 years of Christian religious formation, and had 4.8 years of postgraduate education after high school (i.e. after age 19).[54] Relative to the average population in their region, only one individual fell within an age range that represented less than 20% of the average (Province of British Columbia, 2019b), and the other participants fell within the dominant age range of their region. Only one person was working in an industry in which greater than 10% of the persons in their region were employed. In contrast, the remainder were in occupations reflecting 4 - 6 % of occupational fields, fewer than what was typical in their region (Province of British Columbia, 2019b); thus, participants' occupations were non-representative, relative to

[54] In Canada, youth attend high school (also called secondary school), and complete grades 9 through 12 when they are between the ages of 14 or 15 until 18 or 19. A secondary school diploma is the normal prerequisite for admission into postsecondary education, that is, college, university, or other specialist or technical training.

their regions. Table 1.2 and Table 1.3, below, illustrate sample demographics.

Table 1.2. Participant age, postgraduate education, and duration of church membership.

Age range (yrs)	
- 30-39	1
- 40-49	3
- 50-59	1
- 60-69	1
Postgraduate Education (yrs)	
- 1-2	1
- 3-4	1
- 5-6	3
- 7-8	1
Duration of church Membership (yrs)	
- 1-9	
- 10-19	
- 20-29	1
- 30-39	2
- 40-49	2
- 50-59	
- 60-69	1

Table 1.3. Number of urban and rural participants in B.C. by gender identity, sexual orientation, marital and parental status.

	Number of persons using identifiers
Gender identity	
- Female	5
- Male	1
- Gender fluid	1
- Transgender	1
Sexual orientation	
- Lesbian	3
- Gay	1
- Bisexual	1
- Queer	1
Marital status	
- Single, never married	1
- Single, divorced	3
- Married	2
Parental status	
- Children, biological or step-parent	3
- No children	3

To clarify, qualitative studies are not designed primarily to measure correlations between variables, and this study does not set out to evaluate the relationship between context, age, or marital status, and participants' spiritualities, or to make comparisons based on these characteristics (Court, 2018, p. 7). Rather, grounded theory takes advantage of demographic variables, not as its main focus, but as a means of analyzing how they might contribute to a fuller understanding of the developing *theory*, the *main theme* of the data; thus my interest in referring to these variables is to assist in the production of a rich theory concerning *why* the phenomenon of Becoming *is* the way it is (Corbin and Strauss, 2015, p. 12).[55] As mentioned, because this research is concerned with spirituality, and not demographic qualities of individuals primarily, the method of qualitative interviewing is important. The procedures for the interviews are described in Appendices 4, 6, 7, and 8.

2.2.9 Section Summary

This section of the chapter appreciated this study as an ethnography concerned with ethical meaning-making in community. I began with a quote from theologians, Scharen and Vigen, which reflects my goal that the study provide a true reflection of LGBTQ spirituality. I explained how mystagogic accompaniment was promising as a

[55] For example, the influence of context has been considered in new ways in research in Queer placemaking. An example of this is found in Chris Wienke's and Gretchen Hill's (2013) comparative study on the well-being of gay men and lesbians in rural and urban U.S.A. It may be that factors which operate in a way that is comparable with these researchers' 'determinist' or 'selective migration' theories can be found to be active in human Becoming (Wienke and Hill, 2013, p. 1274). Specifically, what this means is that like the findings concerning personal well-being, the construct of Becoming may be affected by *selective* factors which influence *the choices participants make* about what they feel they require to live and flourish in the regions, communities, and religious contexts where they make their home (ibid.). Uncovering participants' *ways of Becoming* in relationship with Mystery, 'self', and others, and isolating their strengths and vulnerabilities, can promote the identification, support, and augmentation of spiritual Becoming for other nonbinary persons. In this way, the study of spirituality can inspire new methods of ethnographic inquiry (Court, 2018, pp. 3-4). It can also suggest mixed methods approaches for future examination of other variables related to participants' realities (Creswell, 2014, pp. 133-136).

context within which stories of Becoming for LGBTQ persons could be shared, and serve as the ground on which a theory could be constructed. This led to a description of the development of my procedures, with a focus on recruitment, involving: advertising; screening; conducting a pilot study; and sampling.

2.3 Interviews

2.3.1 Introduction

In this section, I elaborate on the procedures involved in establishing contexts, questions, and processes of the interviews in this ethnography. The first, the mystagogic interview, was an intimate, aesthetic encounter with primary participants; in the words of Campbell-Reid and Scharen, it was a 'holy ground' that we created together (2013, p. 232). The second, the supplementary interview, played a role in adding density to LGBTQ participants' narratives and the theory of Becoming.

After sharing details on these interviews, I provide my reflections on my practices in negotiating the issue of power in this research context, in addition to the way the roles that participants and I assumed influenced my experience of ethical issues. I end the section with an explanation of my method of terminating the grounded theory research, and the important matter of analyzing for theoretical saturation.

2.3.2 Mystagogic Interview Setting

I selected locations for mystagogic interviews in spaces that were quiet, free from distraction and disturbance, and where our conversations could not be overheard; participants were able to access them independently (Miller and Crabtree, 2004, p. 194). The most common space was the living room in participants' homes; we also met in a

private office, a church manse, a sanctuary, a seminary chapel and a classroom.[56] They were clean, comfortable spaces, where the mystès would feel safe, and assured that their physical and emotional needs would be attended to (Miller and Crabtree, 2004, p. 196).[57] One practice regarding the space for accompaniment in the Western Christian tradition includes placing a candle in a visible location in the proximity of the mystès and mystagogue, to represent the presence of the Divine (Phillips, 2008, pp. 8-9). I adopted this symbol.[58] As a mystagogue, it was my responsibility to be mindful of the passage of time and the energy within the room. Hence, I informed participants that my cell phone would play a melody quietly when we were approaching an hour's duration.[59] I confirmed that no one had unfinished business prior to ending an interview; only one person expressed a need to extend our time. I utilized a Samsung tablet to record interviews.

A point might be raised that, in order to represent a true qualitative depth interview, the mystagogic interview should not have had a pre-established time constraint. Qualitative researchers, William Miller and Benjamin Crabtree list some of the qualities which take advantage of the depth interview as 'a powerful qualitative research tool':

1) 'the focus of inquiry is narrow'; 2) 'respondents represent a clearly defined homogeneous bounded unit with an already known context'; 3) 'respondents are familiar

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[56] Prior to travelling to a research site, I discussed options for meeting spaces in participants' cities. During this conversation, some participants offered their homes as an interview location. See also Appendix 4, 'The Research Procedure – 2', where required qualities of the meeting space are outlined.

[57] See Appendix 4, 'The Importance of a Safe Research Environment', for a statement concerning expectations of participants' expressions of emotion.

[58] I utilized two types of candles in the interviews, ensuring I had a spare one. In one case, a mystès had an intolerance to the smell of carbon, so instead of using matches, I used a lighter they provided. Another person was unable to tolerate candles, and offered me two decorative stones for use instead.

[59] I had selected a melody, entitled 'Dawn Chorus', that was accompanied by bird songs. Reflecting on our use of this practice with participants later, they expressed that they had not found my use of the song startling or aversive, but were surprised that our time had passed so quickly. The majority appreciated a cue to keep us attentive and focused on the question at hand, being mindful of their time constraints.

and comfortable with the interview as a means of communication'; and 4) 'the goal is to generate themes and narratives' (Miller and Crabtree, 2004, p. 186). Referencing writing on interviewing strategies, Miller and Crabtree also discuss inhibitors to the depth-interview, one of which, is competing demands for time (2004, p. 197).[60] This is supported by Guenther's comment that, the 'directee should feel unhurried' in the mystatogic session (1992, p. 16); being attentive to our time was an important part of this. As I facilitated these interviews, I concurred with Miller and Crabtree, that, the least intrusive direction is the most tactful approach (2004, p. 197), and when I reviewed my recordings, I judged that I had respected this, and treated the interview as a 'conversational partnership', 'a journey' which needed to be tended carefully (Miller and Crabtree, 2004, pp. 188, 199).

2.3.3 Mystagogic Interview Process

2.3.3.1 Interviews 1 and 3

Journeys of spiritual Becoming were the focus of this research,[61] and each interview began with an open-ended question: 1) interview one - 'Please share how your spiritual journey unfolded and how it has been affected by the ebb and flow of various experiences in your life'; 2) interview three - 'Please share about your sense of the person you are becoming and how your relationship with The Divine/God and others is related to this'.[62] An alternate question was prepared in the event that the individual had difficulty understanding what was being asked. The procedural steps of the interviews are also

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[60] In their chapter and endnotes, these researchers made reference to R. L. Gordon's (1975) writing, *Interviewing: Strategies, Techniques and Tactics*, Homewood, IL: Dorsey.

[61] Appendix 4 shows the Participant Information and Consent Sheet, which all primary participants read prior to the start of the study to familiarize themselves with the process of the mystagogic interviews.

[62] See Appendix 6 for the interview schedule. After reading a question aloud, I asked participants if they wished me to read it again, and often, they replied that they would. Later in the study, in response to a

described in Appendix 4.

I expected interviews to include a quality of expressed emotion, given the plethora of accounts of marginalization, discrimination and abuse experienced by persons who identify as nonbinary; hence, spiritual director, Susan Phillips explains,

> Tears are a way the body expresses its openness to God ... [they] often reflect an opening to God's grace … tears and laughter are emotionally related, and when we open ourselves to God, our emotional core is touched. After the sobbing, there is often a sense of relaxation, deep sighing, maybe some shrugging surrender to a reality coupled with gratitude for God's love. A weight is lifted from the heart, and laughter can follow (2008, pp. 36-37).

In our mystagogic encounters, tears were a common form of expression, appearing in concert with expressions of anger, doubt, and confusion, among other pungent feelings. But our meetings were also sites of laughter and joy, moments when we celebrated participants' burgeoning awarenesses.

2.3.3.2 Interview 2

A unique feature of the interview process was the second mystagogic encounter with a guest mystès, a friend, colleague, or family member of the primary participant. This person shared how the primary person's journey of Becoming had influenced them; the primary participant joined our interview, sitting aside. This was the question with which the interview began: 'Please share how you have been affected by the life of your partner/family member/friend [name], and how you think their spirituality has affected you.'

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suggestion from my supervisor, I printed the interview questions on a piece of paper, handing it to the mysès to read. Being attentive to participants' nonverbal cues, this minor change eliminated a barrier of dependency, and the formal tone which arises when a researcher controls this part of the research context.

These meetings were approached differently by guests, and raised issues that the LGBTQ participant had not articulated, or about which they were not aware.[63] As a result, the interviews fostered rich interchanges, to which the guest participant sometimes invited the primary participant to respond or comment. This required my attentiveness to gather data from the guest, while recognizing the dynamism of our polyphonic encounter.

Although all guests in the role of mystès had been invited to express their thoughts or feelings about the primary participant in written, artistic or melodic ways, only one took advantage of this by creating a piece of art work. It was a miniature scroll, made of parchment, resembling an ancient artifact.[64] This resulted in expressed emotion by the guest about contributions their friend had made in their life in the years of their recent friendship. In interviews with two other guests, I was also involved in being present with their tears. Their narratives were reminders of their moments of sadness, hurt, and

[63] In this circumstance, it was the primary participant who interjected comments or asked the guest participant questions about their opinion on the issue. This demonstrated the meaning the exchange assumed for the LGBTQ participant, as one which fostered insight and placed individual and shared experiences into perspective. In the end, a deeper level of understanding was fostered between the two, despite their not being intimately connected in the recent past. Another guest, who had had a longstanding sensitivity to the plight of LGBTQ persons since the start of the AIDS epidemic in Canada, addressed a significant issue related to common misconceptions they had witnessed among members of the Christian church concerning the 'command' to 'love' children who identify as LGBTQ. Yet another person, who had been an acquaintance of the primary participant since youth, engaged in an unexpected dialogical exchange with their friend about the changes in their understandings about sexuality, and regrets about falling prey to discriminatory, patriarchal, and heteronormative practices in the faith tradition of their early years. This was a surprise, as it fostered rich thinking and interchanges with the primary participant. It also caused me to be acutely attentive to my priority of gathering data from our guest in this second interview. I also needed to facilitate a dynamic polyphonic encounter – one in which we three individuals and our subjective experiences of Divinity, were playing a role in the exchange concerning our experiences of the Divine. This was not the only occasion on which a guest and primary participant engaged in a two-way conversation for part of interview 2. In the meeting in question, the guest and primary participant (who had been involved within the same ministry circles for a significant period of their lives), used the second mystagogic interview with unanticipated rewards. The result was that the disclosure had these effects. It: 1) clarified details about the nonbinary participant's personal experiences about which they were not aware; 2) provided affirming feedback about the other's character and qualities which had positively affected them; and 3) shared their sadness over some of primary participant's lived realities which the conversation had uncovered.

[64] This piece of art expressed the effect that their nonbinary person had had on their life. The guest had written a piece of prose, as a gift for their friend. See Appendix 12 for a photo of this piece.

trauma, among other challenges the pair of friends had weathered in the course of their relationship. Hence, interview 2 was a testament of the depth, strain, and courage involved in the Becoming journey – one where superficiality was not easily masked, and where persons' vulnerabilities could be attended to and received.

In addition to the data culled in mystagogic interviews, I undertook theoretical sampling during supplementary interviews with family members, friends, colleagues, and acquaintances of LGBTQ participants.

2.3.4 Supplementary Interview

I held supplementary interviews in person in LGBTQ participants' communities; where primary and supplementary participants did not live in the same city, I initiated phone calls to the latter. Interviewees had shared a significant portion of primary participants' lives as family or friends, or had been work colleagues, or members of their church communities. While the interviews were not mystagogic in nature, these persons did share their perceptions of the role which spirituality and sexuality played in the lives of their friend and/or loved one. Some shared their personal hopes and their fears for the person about whom they disclosed, and regardless of their focus, they expressed pride in the integrity and perseverance of the nonbinary person; it was clear that they cared for them deeply. Our meetings lasted between one and two hours.[65] Supplementary participants received no compensation for their assistance, and completed a consent and

[65] With participants whom I interviewed in person, I met in a public location, over coffee, a snack, or lunch. My practice was to pay for this from my research budget. These persons provided information that was relevant for theoretical sampling, and they were generous with their time, comments, and knowledges.

information form.[66] I made written notes of our conversations, and typed them for analysis.

My experiences as a psychotherapist, mystagogue, and researcher gave me added perspectives for theological reflection on these interviews regarding the practical theological issues arising from this research, and my fulfillment of my roles.

2.3.5 Researcher Reflexivity - Negotiating Realities of Power

2.3.5.1 Introduction

Assuming roles in relationship with participants was an occasion for me to confront the issue of a researcher's power (Creswell, 2014, p. 98). This section involves my experiences and reflections in three pairings of roles I assumed: 1) insider and outsider; 2) researcher and justice activist; and 3) mystagogue and guest.

2.3.5.2 Insider and outsider

Writing on spiritual direction as a site of inclusivity, Morgan challenges her colleagues to become aware of the biases they bring to the work of accompaniment with LGBTQ persons (2017, p. 46). In the relationship between the mystagogue and mystès, Morgan highlights some important matters: 1) the harmful implications of professionals' lack of awareness about personal issues they hold, and which they must resolve;[67] and

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[66] This form is found in Appendix 4.

[67] These reactions are not exclusive to heterosexual persons. Those who identify as nonbinary may recognize homophobic assumptions that they, too, have internalized, even while attempting to support persons who identify as non-heteronormative in sexual orientation or gender (Windsor, 2014, p. 260). In *Out Proud: Stories of Pride, Courage, and Social Justice*, Valerie Windsor contributes one of the 55 short-stories about Canadians' lived experiences as members of a sexual minority. She identifies as lesbian, and shares an occasion when her own daughter came out as lesbian, and expresses how her own internalized homophobia became evident at this time (Windsor, 2014, p. 260). In professional contexts, both sensitivity, and discomfort, can affect the services a mystagogue provides.

2) professionals' potential for microaggressions toward LGBTQ persons.[68]

Like some of the LGBTQ participants in this study, my social identities are multiple. I recognized that I could be approached, and/or received in a number of ways, depending on the context, and the individual with whom I was engaging (Yip, 2008, pp. 7-8). My status shifted based on being an: 1) insider, based on my identification with the female gender; 2) insider, with respect to my previous participation and membership within Christian, and Protestant religious subcultures; 3) insider, based on my postgraduate educational formation; 4) insider, within the middle class social stratum; 5) insider, based on my interest in justice for nonbinary persons in Western Christian and other communities; 6) outsider, based on my identification with the female gender; 7) outsider, based on my identification as cis-gender; 8) outsider, related to my heterosexual identification; 9) outsider, based on my region of residence in B.C.; 10) outsider, based on my visible minority status, and ethnicity as a Caribbean-Canadian; 11) outsider, in relation to my status as a researcher.

I was, at times, self-conscious. On a few occasions, participants asked if I identified as nonbinary; how my motivation to investigate this research had arisen; and whether I intended to write a book about my research findings. To pretend that sensitivities did not arise, would be disingenuous of me, for there were many occasions when my frank question betrayed my ignorance about the lived realities of my LGBTQ sibs. But, despite my ignorance, I received grace, and patience from participants. I was aware that at times,

[68] In her article, Morgan quotes scholar Derald Wing Sue's description of a microaggressions as 'brief, everyday exchanges that send denigrating messages to certain individuals because of their group membership' (Sue, 2010, p. 24, cited in Morgan, 2017, p. 46). They are evident in 'inadvertent slips, when well-meaning people speak or act in a hurtful way' (ibid.).

those with whom I was engaging were also risking being misunderstood. Sociologist, Andrew Yip describes this as a common issue between the researcher and the researched (2008, p. 7), and as these were significant matters to consider in my role as researcher, I raised them in communications with my supervisors; others, I shared with my own spiritual director in sessions I organized via Skype during my fieldwork.

2.3.5.3 Researcher and justice activist

Of the roles I represented, it was my outsider statuses as researcher, and as heterosexual that were on my mind most often. This was not necessarily due to participants' reactions, for they expressed interest and care toward me, all inquiring about how I had arrived at my research question, and knowing that my project would require years of devotion. They also understood that if it were published, my research could place me on the margins of most Western Christian religious traditions in Canada.[69] In fact, when writing on the issue of protective hospitality, public theologian Jayme Reaves suggests that, when involved in an act of justice extended on behalf of a threatened Other, One who is working for justice must confront the reality of the lack of guarantees related to their choice to be an ally (2017, p. 135).

What this meant for the participants of this study, and for me, as the principal investigator, was that by welcoming this research question into our lives, we had made a decision to encounter a variety of unspoken risks (Reaves, 2017, p. 143). One of these risks was that, despite my efforts to maintain their anonymity, as a result of being involved

[69] Refer to Appendix 1, and the section on the second page about the uniquenesses of the affirming denomination, The United Church of Canada.

in this research, participants and I risked being 'outed', as a member of the LGBTQ sexual minority group, and as an ally, respectively, albeit unintentionally. This was one reason why my experience as a *heterosexual* researcher with nonbinary participants shared some similarities with Vigen, in her role as a *non-Latino* Spanish-speaking chaplaincy intern with Latino patients in a California hospital. Despite our different circumstances, I identified with Vigen's choice to undertake her research as a response to a call toward something greater than her, which had been blossoming within for some time,[70]

> What I did not fully understand then is that my desire to engage the wisdom and insights found outside the common domain of academic Christian ethics and within embodied persons very different from myself … would involve not only learning through conversation with such people, but that it also necessitated an even great *conversion* on my part – conversion to the other, to learn and labor [sic] with others. And implicit in this desire was a budding sense that as a scholar, I needed to do more than simply advance a thesis. Instead, I felt called to seek … transformation in society, in practices, and importantly, in my own heart and way of being in the world. Yet I don't think I realized how I would be changed by the research – or how important it was that I be open to such change. I also don't know if I fully comprehended the degree and complexity of self-critical awareness that would be required (Scharen and Vigen, 2011, p. 7).[71]

As participants and I 'learned and laboured' together (Scharen and Vigen, 2011, p. 7), Vigen's words represented the call of LGBTQ spirituality to me. It involved openness, and humility; transformation which results from qualities that were key to fulfilling my role as researcher.

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[70] I would not have been surprised if, in the course of our conversations, the participants with whom I engaged also had an inkling of the call I was embracing. Their respect of my expressed motivations, suggested to me that this was the case.

[71] My feelings on these matters are expressed in chapter 1, section 1.4.

2.3.5.4 Mystagogue and guest

Another identity I held was that of mystagogue, and I approached this role similarly to that described by Guenther, who suggested that spiritual accompanists neither endeavour to be concerned with *assessing* an individual's problems, nor attempting to *fix* them (1992, p. 19). The priority of the mystagogue is to explore issues with which the mystès is concerned, as they relate to their desire to live fully as a human being in relation to cosmic Mystery. Although I approached our interviews as a collaborative polyphonic encounter, a trialogue, including me, the mystès, and the Divine, my role was not devoid of responsibility. Embracing honesty and vulnerability, as I ventured onto a narrative journey with participants, I tried to be attentive, open, curious, and honest, while being informed by ethical standards, current scholarship, and contemporary, artful practice (Scharen and Vigen, 2011, pp.17-18; Spiritual Directors International, 2018, p. 2).

There was a novel aspect of my role as researcher, the role of guest, one I experienced in a couple of ways. With participants who hosted our interviews in their homes, I was privy to gracious generosity. In this intimate residential setting, my experience was similar, in some ways, to that of Natasha Radojcic, doctoral researcher in sociology at the University of California, Riverside, who conducted an ethnography with two subcultures within the gay community in Los Angeles, California where she lived (Radojcic, 2015, p. 18). The subjects in Radojcic's study were men who were members of Dignity, an American parachurch organization for Roman Catholics, and the Log Cabin Republicans, a political group associated with the Republican Party (2015, pp. 1-2). While an outsider in terms of her gender-identity, Radojcic was welcomed warmly by the participants who identified as male (Radojcic, 2015, p. 22-25). Because she had occasion

to socialize with participants during the study, Radojcic felt a need to negotiate her role with an individual in the group – it was a question of being researcher or friend; as a result, she made a choice between the two options (Radojcic, 2015, pp. 24-28). In my case, apart from two occasions, where I accepted a participant's invitation to dinner with their friend, and another, to lunch in their home, my meetings focused on gathering data, and remained so throughout my project's duration.

The second added quality to my role as researcher, was that I was touched by the generous hospitality participants' extended toward me; when meeting in their personal spaces, I was served tea or coffee, and this was sometimes accompanied by food they had prepared or purchased, especially for our meeting. Reaves explains these as provisions of welcome that a host normally offers their guest (Reaves, 2017, p. 46); however, they also signified a blurring of my insider-outsider status. For, although it was ***I*** who had invited these persons to participate in my research project, *they* were now inviting me into the privacy of their homes, into their daily lives, in a different way. It was a way which involved my receiving *their* provisions. As a result, along with the welcome I felt, there was a tension, one which lay unexpressed, and it was described by Reaves as a responsibility to honour the unspoken rules of the space being shared, in addition to those of our written contract (Appendix 4; Reaves, 2017, p. 46). Thus, while sipping tea, and indulging in the tasty treats that had been set before me, in the back of my mind was the matter of how (as Radojcic had), I would choose to hold this tension as a researcher. My hopes remained: to be impartial, connect with participants, and fulfill my commitment as a mystagogue.

Third, and toward the end of the study, as a researcher, the camaraderie that existed between participants and me was translated into a deep fondness, as I became their guest in a new way. Shortly after concluding my data collection, I received, and informed participants of my unexpected diagnosis with colorectal cancer; with openness, I shared with them about my anticipated medical leave of absence from the research project.[72] After surgery and the extensive treatment for complications which followed, I received emails and cards from participants, expressing kind thoughts and wishes for my recovery. One person provided a meal for me and my spouse when I returned home from hospital. When I resumed my research after an extended period of time, I was struck by the feelings of fondness and accountability that I held within me. These experiences as a guest renewed a vision for justice within me – I felt bound to these sibs (Mesner and Leggo, 2014, p. 226). Perhaps, this bond was inspiring the healing which was transpiring. Transformation had, indeed, been occurring; and now, it included me.[73]

2.3.6 Section Summary

The primal site of narratives for this grounded theory was in the mystagogic interview. In this chapter, I described the interview setting, as well as the participant roles of mystès and supplementary interviewee. As the principal investigator, I assumed several

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[72] This diagnosis had not been anticipated, especially as I had maintained a regimen of sleep, meditation, diet, and exercise throughout my fieldwork time onsite, and noticed minimal bodily change. It was not until I had returned home, prior to concluding my final interviews, that I detected symptoms. Within the next two months, I was assessed, diagnosed, and scheduled for surgery, and began a medical leave of absence from the University.

[73] Unexpected and traumatic life events are accompanied by opportunities for change. I did not anticipate that my research focus would change very significantly as a result of a season of illness and time away from my work. However, it did. My engagement with my body's physiology and functions, and healing, brought the reality of sensory awareness, learnings about materiality, and their potential for spiritual and psychological transformation to the forefront. This allowed my theorizing concerning the body, and human communion with the Divine to become a lived experience that was more pungent than it had been previously.

roles, which offered multiple learnings, including negotiating power and boundaries. My reflections on these roles, and the realities of power in relationship with participants, furnished many insights; one of these was that my statuses as insider and outsider were tinted with the multiple social locations I had been assigned, and their lines of demarcation were fluid, depending on the identity construct in question.

The writings on ethnography by practical theologian, Aana Marie Vigen, and on hospitality by public theologian, Jayme Reaves, shed light on how my aims for this study might have affected participants and me. I was confronted by tensions, which became my task to negotiate. I also recognized that the fluid nature of the roles I had assumed had had an unexpected effect, when, after diagnosis and treatment for cancer, I became a guest – a recipient of participants' care.

Personal dividends of qualitative research aside, my project was grounded in ethical standards and values, an important starting point for an ethnography.[74] There were many issues to be considered, and to which I attended.

2.3.7 Ethical Considerations

2.3.7.1 Introduction

Ethical issues arise when conducting research with human subjects (University of Birmingham, 2018). In this section, I extrapolate on certain ones, the research contexts in which they arose, and my practice of these ethics.

[74] See Appendix 9, for the approval my project received from the University of Birmingham's Humanities and Social Sciences Ethical Review Committee.

2.3.7.2 Avoidance of adverse effects

Professionals involved with human persons have a duty to minimize adverse events and potential harm to the individuals involved. In this study, those involved included me, as researcher, and the participants who volunteered their time and life stories as research subjects. As noted on my participant information and consent form, the intimate helping nature of the mystagogic encounter requires the protection of all persons involved (Morgan, 2017, p. 46). [75] For one, care of the self is critical when the professional duties of the researcher include responsibility for the well-being of others. Thus, when on fieldwork sites, I was aware of the distance from my spouse, in B.C., and my doctoral supervisors in the U.K., and I established some precautionary practices for safety and accountability, which kept me aware of my obligation to represent the research community.[76] The University of Birmingham's code of ethics, and code of practice for research provided accountability, protection, and responsibility for me and toward the individuals who consented to participate (University of Birmingham, 2018; University of Birmingham, 2021).

[75] See Appendix 4 for this form.

[76] For example, when conducting mystagogic interviews, I followed a regular protocol for my security and accountability and the safety of participants: 1) I confirmed the date and time of the interview with each participant before it occurred; 2) I advised my supervisors, as well as my spouse of the date and time of each interview prior to leaving to conduct it; 3) I provided my spouse with the address of the interview, without revealing the identity of the person I was scheduled to meet; 4) I apprised my supervisors, and my spouse of the completion of an interview no later than 48 hours after it had ended. They were provided with the others' contact information in the event that they did not receive my confirmation within this time. These precautions were conducted in the event of an unanticipated situation which would place either me, or my participants in danger (University of Birmingham, 2018); 5). For this reason, I kept a cell phone with me at all times, leaving it on silent mode during meetings; otherwise, it remained operational.

2.3.7.3 Duty of care

The ethic of ‘duty of care’ operates to maintain the confidentiality of participants’ personal details and records. I drove from one fieldwork site to another, staying in accommodations that were not my own, so, I kept a portable, fireproof safe with a digital entry code with my belongings, in which I stored participants’ completed research forms, my notes, and the various data I was accumulating and backing up daily on flash drives (University of Birmingham, 2018, p. 6). Duty of care is not limited to material documents, it extends to my communications. I held meetings with primary and supplementary participants in different public spaces, which included restaurants, cafés, seminaries, and churches, and it was important for me to anticipate and maintain security where breaches to privacy were *possible*. Often, my meetings were characterized by active engagement and expressed emotion, including laughter and/or tears, thus, my priority was to practice discretion, and to maintain confidentiality for all concerned. Also, during supplementary interviews, where individuals shared details about LGBTQ persons’ lives, I was sensitive to honour the confidences of both parties, especially when, out of care and concern, the interviewee raised a point for which a breach of confidence would be unethical.

This raises anonymity as another issue, which I negotiated on multiple occasions, and it remained at play long after interviews had concluded.

2.3.7.4 Participant anonymity

In rural and urban fieldwork sites, I was mindful to avoid revealing names or identifying details of persons with whom I was meeting. Still, another, more subtle matter, was the likelihood that participants might then, or in the future, share in the social or

professional circles in which I might engage. I have found that it is not uncommon to discover mutual acquaintances while attending regional social, volunteer, or ecumenical religious events, especially in rural cities. The issue here is not one of *intentionally* releasing information about participants', but rather, of failing to *keep their identifying characteristics as anonymous as possible*. Despite participants' lack of concern about having their locations identified, it was needful to consider the reality of the 'small world' in which we lived (Creswell, 2014, p. 100).[77]

I move from this discussion of research ethics to my practice of concluding this study, another issue of import for qualitative research. I now discuss saturation.

2.3.8 Terminating the Grounded Theory Research and Theoretical Saturation

Methodologically, attaining theoretical saturation in grounded theory research can be presented as a component of qualitative study that is not a facile accomplishment (Corbin and Strauss, 2015, p. 139); yet, it is considered a critical indicator of success (Saunders et al., 2018, p. 1894). Qualitative researchers, Benjamin Saunders and colleagues suggest that current research still demonstrates a lack of consistent understanding about how to conceive of and use saturation (2018, p. 1893). In fact, after examining its applications in deductive and inductive studies, these researchers uncovered four models related to its use (Saunders et al., 2018, p. 1903); in the end, they suggest that the purpose of saturation be clarified when the type and aim of a study is understood (Saunders et al., 2018, p. 1903). The four models concerning saturation

[77] The issue is the challenges of anonymity in rural Canada was one which I raised with one of my supervisors, and which we explored in detail.

that they discussed were: ‘1) theoretical saturation; 2) inductive thematic saturation; 3) a priori thematic saturation; and 4) data saturation’ (ibid.).[78] When deductive methods of analysis were adopted in research, saturation was observed to serve a purpose of assessing instances of the categories conceived of *previously* in the data (also known as ‘saturation for theory development’ (Saunders et al., 2018, p. 1899); this is considered to occur separately and prior to theory development (ibid.). However, in the case of inductive analysis, particularly in grounded theory, saturation is an indicator of the sufficiency in *sampling* which fosters theory development (also known as ‘saturation for data sampling’) (ibid.). Furthermore where research is of a narrative nature, the role of saturation is not as easily determined, although, in a situation such as this, it has been posited as being closer to an indicator of ‘completeness’ of the biographies of focus (ibid.). This is the reason why analysis in narrative research focuses on the ‘accounts of individual informants (e.g. interpretive phenomenological analysis)’, and the ‘strands within individual accounts rather than on analytical themes’ (Saunders et al., 2018, p. 1898).

This matter raises issues for consideration in this research; this is because the problem Saunders and his colleagues saw in the way the term ‘saturation’ has been employed, and the various meanings it has assumed, is that investigators do not appear

[78] Saunders and his colleagues emphasize that understanding the types of research in which saturation plays a role assists in clarifying its purpose. They describe four models, and the purpose of saturation related to each in this way: 1) *theoretical saturation* - refers to the development of theoretical categories, is related to grounded theory methodology, and focuses on sampling; 2) *inductive thematic saturation* refers to the emergence of new codes or themes, and focuses on analysis; 3) *a priori thematic saturation* refers to the degree to which specific codes or themes are evident in the data, and focuses on sampling; and 4) *data saturation* refers to the repetition of findings of previous data in the new data, and focuses on data collection (Saunders et al., 2018, p. 1897).

to understand either its meaning, or significance, for what they were seeking to achieve (Saunders et al., 2018, p. 1903). In the end, the claims of investigators concerning their research were misleading; Saunders and his colleagues quote Glaser and Strauss on this topic in their original grounded theory writing,

> The criterion for judging when to stop sampling the different groups pertinent to a category is the category's *theoretical saturation. Saturation* means that no additional data are being found whereby the sociologist can develop properties of the category. As he sees similar instances over and over again, the researcher becomes empirically confident that a category is saturated. He goes out of his way to look for groups that stretch diversity of data as far as possible, just to make certain that saturation is based on the widest possible range of data on the category (Glaser and Strauss, 1967, p. 61, cited in Saunders et al., 2018, p. 1895).

Hence, in grounded theory, normally, data is collected until themes continue to be repeated, suggesting that nothing of new significance is being gleaned from the data (Creswell, 2014, p. 189), and this is known as saturation.

As my research progressed, I continued interviewing until I had utilized my resources of time, finances, energy, and information to their capacity, *and* had collected ample data from which to begin theory building (Corbin and Straus, 2015, p. 238). Moreover, I determined that I had made sound decisions, taking advantage of opportunities which had provided useful insights; the boundaries I had set for my resources were judged as reasonable, given the realities of the doctoral project.[79] After I had completed my data analysis, I confirmed that saturation had transpired; it was a matter of *theoretical saturation* (Saunders et al., 2018, p. 1895); the methods I had applied had furnished rich data.

[79] Once again, these conclusions were made in consultation with my doctoral supervisors.

In conclusion, I began my fieldwork at the beginning of October 2017, and terminated site visits at the end of March 2018. I travelled a total 6,348 km by car, and engaged in a total of 29 interviews with participants, by spending 115 days in four cities, in three different regions and territories in B.C.

2.3.9 Section Summary

Qualitative interviews were a distinctive feature in this phenomenological research. I began this section with a focus on the mystagogic interview with primary and 'guest' participants, and elaborated on the supplementary interview, which provided data for theoretical sampling.

I had practiced reflecting theologically on sites of power and roles I assumed in my research relationships. These reflections included roles of: insider and outsider; researcher and justice activist; and mystagogue and guest. Despite their functionality and complexity, these roles provided opportunities for learning, and surprisingly, participants' hospitality and care toward me as researcher. The closeness, support, inspiration, and accountability I was privileged to enjoy, made these encounters memorable. After reviewing some ethical considerations, situations in which my reflections arose, as well as their outcomes, I summarized my activities in numerical totals.

My concluding comments on the grounded theory methodology I employed ends with data analysis. In line with Kathy Charmaz's approach, I generated data by making an effort to investigate aspects of life that participants may have taken for granted, exploring their meanings, intentions, and actions (Charmaz, 2004, p. 504). This fostered a more coherent analysis (ibid.). Now, I expound on my analytical method in detail.

2.4 Data Analysis

2.4.1 Introduction

In this section, I explicate, discuss, and illustrate my process of data analysis, including interpretation. As a way of substantiating my application of sound grounded theory methods, I detail my progression from open coding, to axial coding, and finally, to selective coding; I end by specifying the themes that arose from participants' narratives. In this way, I demonstrate my discovery of the theory of spirituality (*theopoiesis*) grounded in individuals' stories.

To begin, I offer a brief review of grounded theory as a 'postpositivist' interpretation style. I provide it to explain why this qualitative method does not rely on technical literature to furnish a *theoretical* framework from which a grounded theory is designed, but rather, to *explain nuances in data* collected (Corbin and Strauss, 2015, pp. 49, 50). However, with this as the foundation for my approach to qualitative study, I demonstrate how this 'postpositivist' approach gives license to the *epistemological* framework I shaped later in pluralistic theological construction.

After this, I describe the beginnings of data analysis, with open and axial coding of participants' first mystagogic interview; then, I review some similarities and differences of this coding process in relation to the third mystagogic interview. I employ tables and diagrams to illustrate themes located in the codes and categories uncovered. The final part of coding is the selective coding process, and I discuss this final stage of grounded theory analysis, in which I name the main category; it is the theme which summarizes the phenomenon in question.

2.4.2 Interpretive Interactionism – The Guiding Analytical Approach

In his chapter entitled, 'The Art and Politics of Interpretation', Norman Denzin characterized interpretation as 'storytelling' (2004, p. 450), for, he argued, 'in the social sciences there is only interpretation' (2004, p. 447); it is the process whereby qualitative researchers 'make sense of what has been learned' (ibid.). Furthermore, describing the ethnographic craft of John Van Maanen, Denzin explains that the text which 'communicates these understandings to the reader … constitute tales of the field. They are the stories we tell one another. This is so because interpretation requires the telling of a story, or a narratives that states 'things happen this way because' or 'this happened, after this happened, because this happened first' ' (ibid.). Denzin also cites Chris Argyris and Donald Schön, who argued that 'the storytelling self that is presented is always one attached to an interpretive perspective, an 'espoused theory' '(Argyris and Schön, 1974, p. viii, cited in Denzin, 2004, p. 450). These theories were referred to as 'theories-in-use' by the researchers (ibid.), and are accompanied by a 'taken-for-granted and problematic writing style' which leads a writer to 'impose a particular order on the world studied' (ibid.). Denzin then described four interpretive styles of practice in qualitative research which employ four models: 1) positivist and postpositivist; 2) constructivist; 3) critical (Marxist, emancipatory); and 4) poststructuralist – including ethnic, feminist, and cultural studies (Denzin, 2004, p. 459).

Traditionally, grounded theory falls under the 'postpositivist' category (ibid.). What this means is that grounded theorists are known to privilege a 'naturalistic approach to ethnography and interpretation, stressing naturalistic observations, open-ended interviewing, the sensitizing use of concepts, and a grounded (inductive) approach to

theorizing, which can be formal and substantive' (Denzin, 2004, p. 459).

I value what Strauss and Corbin have described as 'the usual canons of 'good science' ' (Strauss and Corbin, 1990, p. 250, cited in Denzin, 2004, p. 459), and these have been recognized to concern 'significance, theory observation compatibility, generalizability, consistency, reproducibility, prevision, and verification' (Denzin, 2004, p. 459). Still, I acknowledge that I exemplify priorities of the poststructuralist researcher, who embraces 'interpretive interactionism' (Denzin, 2004, p. 464). Thus, while I esteem clearly-specified procedures which allow research to be reviewed and replicated for readers to 'judge the credibility of the theory' (Strauss and Corbin, 1990, p. 258, cited in Denzin, 2004, p. 459), just as critical is my embrace of a philosophy which states that, despite a researcher's best efforts, 'the same theoretical explanations of a given phenomenon' may *not necessarily* be reproduced (Denzin, 2004, p. 459). This is because 'all texts are biased, reflecting the play of class, gender, race, ethnicity, and culture, suggesting that so-called objective interpretations are impossible' (Denzin, 2004, p. 458); 'all writing is interpretive' (ibid.).

Furthermore, as a qualitative grounded theorist who employs poststructural 'interpretive interactionism' (Denzin, 2004, p. 464; Corbin and Strauss, 2015, p. 52), my own 'critical and emancipatory' interpretations, begin with my 'biography and … self [as a] researcher' and focus on issues I have 'experienced and witnessed firsthand' (Denzin, 2004, p. 464).[80] As a result, my theory of spirituality concerns,

[80] See sections 1.3, 1.4, and 1.5 in Chapter 1.

> … life experiences (epiphanies) that radically alter and shape the meanings [participants] give to themselves and their life projects. In [their] epiphanies, personal character is manifested and made apparent … having had such experiences, the individual is often never quite the same again … [their] stories … [are] given in [their] language, feelings, emotions, and actions (Denzin, 2004, p. 464).

My grounded theorizing seeks to make meaning of narrative texts by honouring the uncertainties in participants' lives, rather than by 'impos[ing] theoretical frameworks on the world' (Denzin, 2004, p. 465); In essence, I am both poet and scientist (Strauss and Corbin, 1990, p. 27).

The theoretical framework which guides this thesis is also shaped by interdisciplinary theoretical epistemological collaborations, which speak personally to me, this is a hermeneutic used in the process of theological construction (Court, 2017, p. 4). More importantly, I see it grounded in the lived realities of six Canadian persons who identify as LGBTQ. In the next section, I explain the processes of coding I utilized in my methodology; then, finally, I refer to my integration of theoretical concepts in themes I uncovered in the process of this poetic theological construction.

2.4.3 Procedures for Open, Axial, and Selective Coding

2.4.3.1 Open and axial coding for interview 1

Sharlene Hesse-Biber and Patricia Leavy have introduced coding as a qualitative researcher's means of drawing conclusions from data to assist in theory building (2004, p. 410).[81] Related to this, a significant focus in my methodology was to eschew static

[81] Computer coding is a practice that is growing in favour, as it boasts of time gained in data analysis depending on a project's size, budget, and a researcher's proficiency (Basit, 2003, p. 152). Still, analysis is a part of research that is recognized as needful as early as data are available to be reviewed (ibid.). Hesse-Biber and Leavy wrote that 'close, critical coding is a fundamental part of good, strong research', despite

analyses which emphasize participants' actions; instead, I endeavoured to understand the 'multiple layers of meaning in their actions' (Charmaz, 2004, p. 504); and this required analytical thinking (Strauss and Corbin, 1990, pp. 62-66).[82] By examining 'action in relation to meaning', I was equipped to obtain 'thick descriptions' and subsequently, to develop meaningful categories (Charmaz, 2004, p. 504).

Guided by grounded theory practice, I began coding line by line, attending to words, sentences, and paragraphs, and asking questions to identify the concept or theme

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being a 'time-consuming and labor-intensive [sic] process' (Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2004, p. 411), and Deborah Court asserts that 'there is ongoing interaction, and perhaps an inseparable coupling, between the technical work of sorting and coding, and the human work of feeling, sensing, remembering, inferring, intuiting. At the very least I recommend that your first few qualitative studies be conducted in the 'old-fashioned' way' (2018, p. 68). I experienced the practices of Hesse-Biber and Leavy, Court, and Corbin and Strauss (2015), reifying these quotations on manual coding.

[82] I took this step with the data, and after a medical leave-of-absence, I examined the data again, with fresh eyes. In my records, I remarked on my interest in re-reading all of the transcripts for interviews 1, 2, and 3 for all 6 participants, as well as the written supplementary interview notes and my researcher journal. Also, I noted that both interview 2 and the supplementary interviews provided important information I would need to explore contexts, as well as conditions, related to action-interaction-consequence conditions - those which explain the subtleties of life conditions affecting the phenomenon in question – when the time came for me to begin axial coding later in the process (Corbin and Strauss, 2015, pp. 99-100). In reviewing my first attempts at coding, I noticed that some of my codes possessed a systemic, behavioural, and analytic flavour, not at all representative of the narrative, mystagogic flavour of the interviews and my researcher journal. This reflexivity supported me in moving toward theory development from a narrative lens with a focus on resiliency, rather than on 'diagnosis', that I perceive as (necessarily) judgemental. See both the transcript 'Participant 4, interview 1' in Appendix 1, and the initial coding of this interview (Table 1.4a and Table 1.4b, on page 62, and page 63), followed by my revised method (demonstrated in Table 1.5 on page 64). Changes are colour-coded, with former coding crossed out for demonstration. I noted my decision to make these changes in an email to my supervisors on Feb 3, 2020, which stated: 'I re-read all of my transcripts for interviews 1, 2, 3, for all 6 participants, as well as my written supplementary interviews and written and email researcher journal ... I realized that both interview 2 and my supplementary interviews may provide the resources I will need to explore contexts and action-interactions when I begin axial coding later on in the process. I also think they will enable me to triangulate these comments with my interview data to asses the data's reliability ... I have also reviewed my coding of interview 1 for all of my 6 participants and have begun re-coding with [participant]. In reviewing my prior coding, I noticed that some of my codes had a 'medical model' flavour to them, one that I do not prefer to use the majority of the time in my current life … my analyses in 2017 may have reflected these realities at certain times during my ethnographic study. I see this as a posture in contrast to the mystagogic and narrative flavour of most of my interviews and email journalling … I have re-coded [participant], and I plan to pursue this with other participant interviews … I feel more comfortable moving toward theory development from a narrative lens, which focuses on resiliency, rather than from a more diagnostic one … I am attaching both the transcript of the interview and the revised coding. I have highlighted changes in red and have crossed out the changes for your ease of review.'

of focus in a section (Corbin and Strauss, 1990, p. 72; Charmaz, 2004, p. 506; Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2004, p. 413). As I read, and became aware of a concept, I posed questions, to isolate it, asking this question: 'What is this (word or sentence) referring to, in actuality?' (Strauss and Corbin, 1990, pp. 62-63; Corbin and Strauss, 2015, pp. 87-94). I selected words or phrases, and recorded their locations by referring to lines and paragraphs where they were found.[83] I followed this, by colour-coding each concept I had coded, and entering them in tables varying in shades of colour, to reflect the nature of their relationships to the other concepts I had identified.[84] An example of these tables follows on the four pages which follow, starting on page 62.

Memos were an additional, important component of axial coding toward theory building (Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2004, p. 414; Corbin and Strauss, 2015, p. 117).[85] My memos involved sketching and inserting my questions and thoughts, regarding the subtleties I noticed within and between codes and categories; these increased in intricacy and precision over time, reflecting the gradual clarification and complexity involved in theory building (Corbin and Strauss, 2015, p. 107, 117). Memos serve a purpose in advancing in the analysis from code to category (Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 20014, p. 414), adding depth to my understanding of participants' experiences.

[83] See Table 1.4a, Table 1.4b, and Table 1.5 on page 62, page 63, and page 64, as related to Participant 4 Interview 1.
[84] See the variety of shades used for concepts (See Table 1.6 on page 65).
[85] See Table 1. 5 and Table 1.6, page 64, and page 65 for two examples of the final copies of my many memo's.

Table 1.4a. First trial of coding for participant 4 - interview 1.

Legend: A dot (.) = same page as above A dash (-) = same throughout segment

PAGE	PARAGRAPH	LINE	CODE
1	4	1-8	~~minimal exposure to organized Christianity and did not believe in a God~~
.	.	8-12	~~as a child felt that she did not fit in due to mixed race; racial identity confusion~~
.	5	1-2	~~aware of sexual orientation as being outside of social norms at early age~~
2	1	1	~~aware of sexual orientation as being outside of social norms at early age~~
.	3, 4	-	~~did not connect Bible with God; thought it was good to read, but did not identify as a believer in God~~ ~~Memo: [interesting that something drew her to the Christian scriptures and that she evaluated this exposure as valuable. Has she continued to separate the scriptures from a) her experience of God and b) her valuation of principles for living (ethics)?~~
.	5, 6	-	~~growing desire for peace and joy~~
.	.	-	~~impressed by peers' honesty and integrity~~
.	6	-	~~made a commitment to pursue this for herself~~
3	1-3	-	~~connected with others based on identifiers that were accepted readily by her new community – Christian principles and music not sexual identity~~ ~~[Memo: I wonder what would have happened if she had been embraced right away in a community that had accepted her sexual identity? What made her set her sexual identity to the side at this time, rather than her spirituality (which she tried to do later)? Was it a natural path, given her heightened desire to explore spirituality?]~~
.	5, 6	-	~~sought answers in order to do right by friends and organization~~;
.	.	-	~~suppressed and sought to ignore sexual orientation that was the source of marginalization [Memo: is suppression and suppression of a stigmatized trait not a common sociological phenomenon in the face of oppression? If so, what differentiates those who suppress from those who do not?~~]

Table 1.4b. First trial of coding for participant 4 - interview 1.

Legend: A dot (.) = same page as above A dash (-) = same throughout segment

PAGE	PARAGRAPH	LINE	CODE
4	1-3	-	~~need to be *herself* and suppression of *self* contributed to depression and anger/hate towards herself and disconnection from who she really was~~
.	.	-	~~disconnection from self led to or reinforced desire to be attached to God~~ [Memo: it is almost impossible to ignore the congruency of the drive to recognize the self as a separate personal entity and the drive to know the self in relationship with another who can receive the self in its entirety = The Divine. In this way the drive to *become* can be seen as psychological and spiritual (in contrast to Benner's positing of the psychological growth stage as elementary and fundamental to spiritual development) – to be explored further perhaps.
.	4-5	-	~~questioning/trying to understand organization's principle's, to respect self and other LGBTQ friends, to explore her own identity as one who had embraced a Christ principled life~~
.	6	-	~~continuing engaging with Christian philosophies outside of a Christian organizational context~~
5	1-7	-	~~struggling to own her sexual identity in a new context and to be honest with others in the face of questions and invitations to be in relationship (friendship and romantic)~~
6	3, 4	-	~~at times, her choices/responses surprise her – she was not as familiar with who she really was~~
.	5-7	-	experiencing divine reassurance regarding the progress of her spiritual journey

Table 1.5. Second trial of coding for participant 4 - interview 1.

Legend: A dot (.) = same page as above A dash (-) = same throughout segment

PAGE	PARAGRAPH	LINE	CODE
1	4	1-2	**experienced knowing** of her attraction to the same sex at a young age
	5	1-12	[**Memo**: this knowing was in contrast to an absence of knowing where her race and religious belief were concerned; despite both her knowing, and her lack thereof, *she experienced her multiple identities as existing outside of the social norms* [Hulko & Hovanes (2018)] [= possessing a **nascent distinctiveness**, which was **experienced** as discomfort/**discomfort** due to her social context – this may be used for axial coding when addressing contexts/actions/ interactions]
2	3-6	-	her spiritual journey began with an **attraction** to the Christian Scriptures as derived from her **experience** of it, and to her **desire** for the joy, hope, and integrity she witnessed around her peers and sister; did not attribute the reason/explanation for her attraction to God
3	1-6	-	the start of her Christian spirituality involved a **denial** of her sexuality
4	1-5		there were psychological and emotional consequences of the identity conflict she **tried to negotiate** without integrating these identities p. 4, 1-6: Possibly leave this for axial coding of action/interaction? [**Memo**: It is almost impossible to ignore the congruency of the drive to recognize the self as a separate personal entity and the drive to know the **self in relationship with another who can receive the self** in its entirety = The Divine. In this way perhaps the drive to ***become*** can be seen as psychological, spiritual, physical, emotional, and volitional (in contrast to Benner's position regarding the psychological growth stage as primary and fundamental to spiritual develop-ment)].
5	1-3	-	**questioning** her sexuality
	4-7	-	**practicing** spirituality in her chosen value for living with **Integrity**
6	5	1-6	has a **sense of God's reassurance** that her life will be well via her encounters with: a dream; the non-affirming stance of her former congregation; a **new desire** to **leave her life of familiarity** and become more acquainted with herself and her sexuality
.	6-8	-	.

Table 1.6. Code colour scheme - participant 4 interview 1.

Legend: A dot (.) = same page as above A dash (-) = same throughout segment

PAGE	PARAGRAPH	LINE	
PAGE-1	4	1-2	**experienced knowing** of her same-sex attraction at a young age
	5	1-12	[**Memo**: this knowing was in contrast to an absence of knowing where her race and religious belief were concerned; despite both her knowing, and her lack thereof, *she experienced her multiple identities as existing outside of social norms* [Hulko & Hovanes (2018)] [= possessing a **nascent distinctiveness**, which was **experienced** as **discomfort** due to her social context - this may be used for axial coding when addressing contexts/ actions/interactions]
PAGE-2	3-6	-	her spiritual journey began with an **attraction** to the Christian Scriptures as derived from her **experience** of it, and to her **desire** for the joy, hope, and integrity she witnessed around her peers and sister; she did not attribute the reason/explanation for her attraction to God
PAGE-3	1-6	-	the start of her Christian spirituality involved a **denial** of her sexuality
PAGE-4	1-5		there were psychological and emotional consequences of the identity-conflict she **tried to negotiate** without integrating these identities p. 4, 1-6: Possibly leave this for axial coding of action/ interaction? [**Memo**: It is almost impossible to ignore the congruency of the drive to recognize the self as a separate personal entity and the drive to know the **self in relationship with another who can receive the self** in entirety = The Divine. *In this way perhaps the drive to **become** can be seen as psychological and spiritual and physical and emotional and volitional* (in contrast to Benner's position that the psychological growth stage is elementary and fundamental to spiritual development)]
PAGE-5	1-3	-	**questioning** her sexuality
	4-7	-	**practising** spirituality in her chosen value for living with **integrity**
PAGE-6	5	1-6	has a **sense of God's reassurance** that her life will be well via her encounters with: a dream; the non-affirming stance of her former congregation; a **new desire** to **leave her life of familiarity** and to become more acquainted with herself and her sexuality

Once I had remarked that a group of concepts appeared related, I defined categories. This step involved isolating a broader description of the relationship between the codes selected. As I identified properties and dimensions of these categories, I included options for a range of qualities, organizing them in varying shades of colours, to demonstrate their conceptual nuances (Strauss and Corbin, 1990, p. 69).[86]

In the next stage in my axial coding, I grouping the categories I had created from the first interview with all participants.[87]

[86] See Table 1.7a, Table 1.7b, Table 1.7c, Table 1.7d (page 67, page 68, page 69, and page 70). I also recorded the incidence of the codes, and their corresponding categories, and cross-referenced these with the participant narratives in which they were found, a practice that was encouraged by Strauss and Corbin (1990, p. 201, point #7). The details of my progressive stages of cross-referencing are numerous, and therefore, are not included here.

[87] These Table 1.8a and Table 1.8b follow those previously mentioned, and are found on page 71, and page 72. As I reviewed them, I utilized symbols, which referred to the number of participants for whom each category was relevant. In the final stages of axial and selective coding, where I created twelve broad categories of related themes, I placed the colour-coded concepts I had interpreted according to their relationships. This provided me with totals for the incidence of each category for all participants (including the main category). Finally, I defined each category, and focused on selecting names for them based on my reflections on the literature and the lived realities of the participants as I had interpreted them. The numbering and explanation of category names are found in Table 1.11 on page 82.

Table 1.7a. List of codes and corresponding categories for interview 1 – all participants. (P = participant)

Codes	Categories and Properties Numbered by Dimensions
experienced a 'knowing' of her attraction (P4)	1a - experienced knowing/truth (P4)
accepts, affirms beauty (P1) connects via senses/objects/rites/ emotions/activities (P3) (P1) (P6)	1b – experiences/affirms connection via senses/emotions (P1) (P3) (P6)
'awareness' (sense) of the Divine (P1) (P5) no 'concept' for God/'removed'/inconsistent (P6)	1c – 'awareness' (sense) of the Divine (P1) (P5) 2a – without 'concept' for the Divine (P6)
meaninglessness catechism (P1) (P2) (P5) (P6)	1b – no connection via 'religion' (P1) (P2) (P5) (P6)
senses void/obligation/marginalization/burden/ fear/evil in 'religious'/binary proscriptions (P1) (P2) (P4) (P5) (P6)	2c – spiritual void (no connection, not life-giving) (P1) (P2) (P4) (P5) (P6)
discomfort (P4) hides truth from others/keeps truth to self (P1) hides/closets truth (P1) (P6) numbs pain (P1) follows/maintains religious practices (P2)	3a- unable to relate to context/isolated (P2) (P5) 3b - deference to heteronormative status quo (P2) 3c - hides (self-preservation)/denial (P1) (P4) (P6) 3d - follows/maintains cultural proscriptions (P2)
ignorant about sex and sexuality (P2) tries to open up discussion (P6) notes a contrast/difference/distinguishes (P1) (P2) (P5) attracted/desires/experiences/feels led/called (P4) (P6) sensitive to, affected by reality (P3) (P5) responsive/negotiates/creative with reality (P3) (P4) (P5) struggles/confusion/insecurity/fatigue (P4) (P5) (P6) petitions God to change body (P5) open/desires/inclined toward God/ newness/curious/free to explore other paths (P1) (P3) (P4) (P5) (P6) deliberates over 'coming out'/waits (P1) (P5) exercises choice in when/to whom to come out (P1) forethought in disclosing sexual identity (P1) discretion in coming out (P1) metanoia (P4)	3e - ignorant/naïve/novice (P2) 4a - aware/sensitive/attentive/inclined/struck/led (P1) (P2) (P3) (P4) (P5) (P6) 4b – attracted/open/engaged/responsive/freely explores (P1) (P2) (P3) (P4) (P6) 4c - asks/questions/examines/seeks/confronts self (P2) (P5) 4d - discomfort/conflict/confusion/fluctuation/fatigue (P2) (P4) (P5) (P6) 4e - apathy (P2) 4f - acknowledges attraction (P2) 4g – makes meaning (to best of ability) (P2) (P5) 4h - astonishment re: pervasiveness of their struggle (P2) 4i – barters with self/God (P5) 5a – waits for Divine affirmation (P4) (P5) 5b - unable to sustain inauthenticity/self-recrimination/self-deprecation (P2) (P5)

Table 1.7b. List of codes and corresponding categories for interview 1 – all participants. (P = participant)

Codes	Categories and Properties, Numbered by Dimensions
comes out (P1) (P4) (P5) strength (P1) laments/criticizes social judgment & rejection (P1)	5c – resistance to oppression (P1) (P3) (P4) (P5) 5d - faces gift/risk of embrace/support (P1) (P5)
stands up against social criticism (P1) speaks against/criticizes prejudice (P1) (P4) (P5) condemns (injustice) (P1)	6a - curious/explores/experiments/open (P1) (P2) (P5) (P6) 6b – metanoia
resists/rebels/rejects (P1) (P3) (P5) experiences tension of growth and becoming (P6)	7a - admits to challenge/tension/growth/'pushing up against' (P2) (P4) (P6) 7b - confused (P2) 7c - trying to predict/orchestrate/understand (P2)
	8a – encounters harsh realities/costs (P1) (P2) (P3) (P4) 8b – metanoia
self-protection/preservation (P1) need of home/sanctuary (P3) God as source/ground of communion for creation (P6)	9 - spiritual connection/solace/inner peace (P3) (P5) (P6) 10a - sense of home/sanctuary/where God is (P3) 10b – God as source/ground of creation/community/being (P6)
perseveres/finds a way/persistent (P3) (P1) (P5) expanding awareness (P5) (P6) growing self-trust/self-love (P6) embraces uncertainty/ceases struggling (P1) (P4) holds/accepts unknowns/trusts into Life (P3) inner peace (P5)	11a – self-respect/self-love/trusts intuition/authentic/honest (P1) (P2) (P3) (P4) (P5) (P6) 11b – accepts uncertainty/fluidity/mystery/faith seeking understanding/organicity/abandonment into Life/'unknown/ something greater/GOOD (P1) (P3) (P5)
belief in "something more" (P1) invitation into healing/rebuilding/self-hood (P4) (P6) adopting new approach/apprehending 'truth' via experience/affirms faith (P1) (P5)	12 - distinctive experience of personal 'truth' (P1) (P2) (P5) 13a – desire/experience of wholeness/integrity (= humility) (P1) (P2) (P4) (P5) (P6)
self-acceptance/accepts gender orientation (P1) P4) (P5) knowing of comfort through body (P1) embraces freedom and responsibility (P1) (P4) (P5) makes a decision (P5)	13b - heart commitment to self/God (P2) (P3) (P6) 13c – knows freedom (fulfillment of action) (P1) (P4) (P5)

Table 1.7c. List of codes and corresponding categories for interview 1 – all participants. (P = participant)

Codes	Categories and Properties, Numbered by Dimensions
asserts/convicted of identity/in God/as 'God's child' (P1) (P5) (P6)	14a – confidence/knowing child of God/belonging (P1) (P2) (P5)
	14b – priority of self-acceptance (P1) (P5)
growing confidence in understanding/ approach toward God as a loving being (P6)	14c – confidence in God's identity/entity being 'love' (P6)
recognizes own strength/faithfulness (P1)	15 - looks outside of self/progresses toward self-giving (P1)
emphasizes change in status (P1)	
expresses gratitude, contentment (P1) (P3) (P5) (P6)	16a – contentment (P5)
accepts, respects, affirms beauty (P1)	16b – accepts 'other' (as self) (P1)
discovers and enjoys their gifts (P3)	16c - finds love in the 'other' (P1) (P3) (P6)
awareness of Divine (P1) (P5)	17a - discovers self in new ways (P3)
awareness of Divine invitation (P4)	17b - experiences 'other'/God in various ways (P1) (P2) (P3) (P6)
tangible/environmental/poetic/other/ emotional experience of the Divine (P1) (P3) (P6)	18a - respects 'other' (P1) (P3)
	18b - gratitude for 'other' (P3)
experiences protection/being 'held' in the Divine (P1)	
experiences care/safety (P1)	18c - experiences connection with the 'other' (P1) (P2) (P3) (P5) (P6)
tangible/visceral experience of love (P3) (P1) (P6)	
experiences respite/encouragement/ pleasure/joy (P1) (P4)	18d – received and known by other (P2)
finds love (P3)	18e - receives love/opportunity from/welcome/ reconciliation with 'other' (P1) (P3) (P5) (P6)
experiences acceptance/cherishment (P1) (P4) (P6)	
enjoys Divine companionship (P1)	19a - faith derives from being loved (P3)
receives (P1) (P3)	19b – transformation via faith (P4) (P5)
recognizes celebration & lamentation/tension (P1) (P6)	
acknowledges reality/variety in movement/ consequences/higher plane of consciousness (P1) (P4) (P6)	20 takes pleasure/cherishes self and 'other' (P3) (P1) (P2) (P5)
accepts responsibility (P1)	
experiences transformation (P4) (P5) (P5)	21 experiences astonishment/surprise/ecstasy (P1) (P2)
embraces opportunity (P3)	

Table 1.7d. List of codes and corresponding categories for interview 1 – all participants. (P = participant)

Codes	Categories and Properties, Numbered by Dimensions
experiences surprise (P5) priority of pleasure (P1) feels awe (P1) desires intimacy (P1) takes initiative to include (P1) desires to be united with the Divine (P1) (P3) experiences unfulfilled desire (P6)	22 embraces vulnerability/tension/unsatiated desire (P1) (P2) (P4) (P5) (P6) 23 pursues love (P1) (P2) 24 resurrection (P3)
self-empathy (P1) empathy toward others (P1) (P3) graciously 'holds' others' attitudes (P6)	25 expresses love without condition (P1) (P2) (P6)
shows understanding (P1) respects/relinquishes responsibility for others (P3) (P6)	26 – desire for their love to 'reproduce' (P1) (P3) (P6)

Table 1.8a. First step of grouping of categories interview 1 - all participants. (P = participant)

1a – experience of knowing/truth	(P4)
1b – experiences/affirms connection via senses/emotions	(P1) (P3) (P6)
1c – 'awareness' (sense) of the Divine	(P1) (P5)
2a – without 'concept' for the Divine	(P6)
2b – no connection via 'religion'	(P1) (P2) (P5) (P6)
2c – spiritual void via religion/society (no connection, not life-giving)	(P1) (P2) (P4) (P5) (P6)
3a - unable to relate to context/isolated	(P2) (P5)
3b - deference to heteronormative status quo	(P2)
3c - hides (self-preservation)/denial	(P1) (P4) (P6)
3d - follows/maintains cultural proscriptions	(P2)
3e - ignorant/naïve/novice	(P2)
4a - aware/sensitive/attentive/inclined/struck/led	(P1)(P2)(P3)(P4)(P5)(P6)
4b – attracted/open/engaged/responsive/freely explores	(P1) (P2) (P3) (P4) (P6)
4c - asks/questions/examines/seeks/confronts self	(P2) (P5)
4d - discomfort/conflict/confusion/fluctuation/fatigue	(P2) (P4) (P5) (P6)
4e - apathy	(P2)
4f - acknowledges attraction	(P2)
4g – makes meaning (to best of ability)	(P2) (P5)
4h - astonishment re: pervasiveness of their struggle	(P2)
4i – barters with self/God	(P5)
5a – waits for Divine affirmation	(P4) (P5)
5b - unable to sustain inauthenticity/self-recrimination/self-deprecation	(P2) (P5)
5c – resistance to oppression	(P1) (P3) (P4) (P5)
5d - faces gift/risk of embrace/support	(P1) (P5)
6a - curious/explores/experiments/open	(P1) (P2) (P5) (WL)
6b – metanoia	(P4)
7a - admits to challenge/tension/growth/'pushing up against'	(P2) (P4) (P6)
7b - confused	(P2)
7c - trying to predict/orchestrate/understand	(P2)
8a – encounters harsh realities/costs	(P1) (P2) (P3) (P4)
8b – metanoia	(P4)
9 - spiritual connection/solace/inner peace	(P3) (P5) (P6)
10a - sense of home/sanctuary/where God is	(P3)
10b – God as source/ground of creation/community/being	(P6)
11a – self-respect/self-love/trusts intuition/authentic/honest	(P1)(P2)(P3)(P4)(P5)(P6)
11b – accepts uncertainty/fluidity/mystery/faith seeking understanding/ organicity/abandonment into Life/'unknown/something greater/ GOOD	(P1) (P3) (P5)
12 - distinctive experience of personal 'truth'	(P1) (P2) (P5)
13a – desire/experience of wholeness/integrity (= humility)	(P1) (P2) (P4) (P5) (P6)
13b - heart commitment to self/God	(P2) (P3) (P6)
13c – knows freedom (fulfillment of action)	(P1) (P4) (P5)

Table 1.8b First step of grouping of categories interview 1 - all participants. (P = participant)

14a – confidence/knowing child of God/belonging	**(P1) (P2) (P5)**
14b – priority of self-acceptance	**(P1) (P5)**
14c – confidence in God's identity/entity as one of 'love'	**(P6)**
15 - looks outside of self/progresses toward self-giving	**(P1)**
16a – contentment	**(P5)**
16b – accepts 'other' (as self)	**(P1)**
16c - finds love in the 'other'	**(P1) (P3) (P6)**
17a - discovers self in new ways	**(P3)**
17b - experiences 'other'/God in various ways	**(P1) (P2) (P3) (P6)**
18a - respects 'other'	**(P1) (P3)**
18b - gratitude for 'other'	**(P3)**
18c - experiences connection with the 'other'	**(P1) (P2) (P3) (P5) (P6)**
18d – received and known by 'other'	**(P2)**
18e - receives love/opportunity from/welcome/reconciliation with 'other'	**(P1) (P3) (P5) (P6)**
19a - faith derives from being loved	**(P3)**
19b – transformation via faith	**(P4) (P5)**
20 takes pleasure/cherishes self and 'other'	**(P3) (P1) (P2) (P5)**
21 experiences astonishment/surprise/ecstasy	**(P1) (P2) (P5)**
22 embraces vulnerability/tension/unsatiated desire	**(P1) (P2) (P4) (P5) (P6)**
23 - pursues love	**(P1) (P2)**
24 resurrection	**(P3)**
25 expresses love without condition	**(P1) (P2) (P6)**
26 – desire for their love to 'reproduce'	**(P1) (P3) (P6)**

The next stage of coding involved interview 3.

2.4.3.2 Open and axial coding for interview 3

My procedure for coding interview 3 was slightly different from interview 1; specifically, it was briefer. This was because, as I began coding words and sentences, I recognized codes and categories that I had selected while coding interview 1. A quote by Strauss and Corbin, of social scientist and professor, Paul Diesing is important here,

> Actually scientific knowledge is in large part an invention or development rather than an imitation; concepts, hypotheses, and theories are not found ready-made in reality but must be constructed … procedures are not mechanical or automatic, nor do they constitute an algorithm guaranteed to give results. They are rather to be applied flexibly according to circumstances; their order may vary, and alternatives are available at every step (Diesing, 1971, p. 14, cited in Corbin and Strauss, 1990, p. 59).

As a result of this circumstance, I began open coding, followed immediately by axial coding when approaching a narrative section (Strauss and Corbin, 1990, p. 58).[88] This reality did not result in assumptions, but rather, in verification of my initial categorizations.

As with interview 1, I began by examining a sentence, paragraph, and page, to designate codes for a narrative segment. If a word came to mind promptly, I checked whether it had been used in interview 1, either as a code, or a category. If I found a code or category that applied to the question in interview 3, I noticed whether the concept possessed the same meaning it had in interview 1. This meant that when selecting the

[88] Corbin and Strauss emphasized that the analytical process of grounded theory requires a researcher to exercise a balance of 'creativity, rigor [sic], persistence, and above all, theoretical sensitivity' (1990, p. 58). Furthermore, while they may seem to be a peculiar combination of traits, 'with enough hard work and persistence a researcher is capable of making contributions to his or her field of interest' (ibid.).

same code or category in the context of interview 3, I was also confirming that it possessed a meaning that had been confirmed in *two* interviews.[89]

I assigned codes for the concepts in interview 3 that I had selected; in cases where they varied slightly from previous ones, I developed an 'alter concept', employing a new term for the code or category.[90] In contrast with a finding of a different code, what I recognized in these cases was that the concepts either represented different dimensions of a property, or various properties of a category.[91] Thus, when I progressed to selective coding, my categories provided robust concepts with fuller explanatory power.[92] Table 1.8a, Table 1.8b (page 71, and page 72, respectively), as well as Table 1.9a, and Table 1.9b (on the next two pages), reflect this process, and include my second coding exercise, as executed with interview 1.

[89] See Table 1.8a and Table 1.8b (page 71, and page 72).
[90] Ibid. Note that headings are of slightly different shades, along with subsections, (a), (b), (c), etc.)
[91] A property of a category is the attribute it possesses, whereas a dimension refers to the property's particular location along a continuum (Strauss and Corbin, 1990, p. 61). For instance, if temperature is a property of water, its dimensions may include: frigid, cold, chilly, room temperature, warm, hot, and scalding.
[92] Also, Corbin and Strauss explain that concepts occur at different levels, and those that are of a higher-level, are composed of lower-level concepts (2015, p. 216). But if a concept is not able to subsume a number of lover-level concepts, it is unlikely to be raised to the level of a category (ibid.).

Table 1.9a. First trial of coding for participant 4 - interview 3.

Legend: P.P = participant paragraph (.) = same page as above (-) = throughout segment

PAGE	P. P.	LINE	CODE
1	1-5	-	relinquishing dependency on ideals imposed by self and
2	1-5	-	others – she moves from: 1. Lacking strong sense that sexual identity needed to change to (unsure that it was wrong) 2. Feeling she didn't need to change but needed to remain celibate (still unsure sexual identity was wrong) 3. Feeling that her sexual identity was acceptable as it was
2	5, 6	-	facing her responsibility to confront love was scary
3	1-3	-	self-acceptance leads to deeper self- and Divine-knowledge (i.e. accepting herself *freed her* to know God and herself in new ways)
4	1-4	-	feeling freedom of being "out" = herself openly [**Memo**: this reminds me of the article I wrote in 1993 entitled 'Grace in the Garden' where I commented on the story in Genesis 3 of Adam and Eve being in unhindered and intimate communion with one another in their nakedness. After they tasted the fruit, God clothed their shame with animal skins. It seems natural to 'clothe' oneself and cover up the parts of oneself of which one is ashamed when one is not comfortable with, nor has embraced who one is. Doing so repeatedly can cause an internalization of shame, and this is what P experienced. When she accepted the *self* she had left cloaked up for so long, she experienced freedom - not the tiring hypervigilance about being "found out" she had known since her teenage years. This image of nakedness is an interesting one. Is the ability to connect with self, God and other required for a full expression of humanity and of the *self* as a sexual being?]
4	6	1-3	Experiencing more detached enjoyment of others (healthy)
5	2	3-6	interpreting God's movement in lives of those she respects – [**Memo**: does she experience this type of validation differently than she did when she had been 'hiding' her truer *self?* Is being authentic allowing her to embrace validation more as a gift (than as something on which she depended to support her previously more fragile self)?

Table 1.9b. First trial of coding for participant 4 - interview 3.

Legend: P.P = participant paragraph (.) = same page as above (-) = throughout segment

PAGE	P. P.	LINE	CODE
.	3	1-6	separating *self* from others
.	.	7-12	bringing authentic *self* out in the open [**Memo:** does she view this *self* from God as something that comes from / originates from / is in - God? Does she see this *self* as a separate entity from God? Does she see it as someone God is drawing out of her as an entity or is it from God as a divine entity?]
.	.	13-14	growing in her hope in the possibility of ecumenism with the church
6	3 continued	15-17	.
7	4	-	recognizing the flux in her self-expression as a human; affirming God's cherishing of her faith/trust [**Memo:** does this shifting *self* resonate with Ben's 'wrapping' research? does it resonate with Christian mystagogic or theopoetic research?] [**Memo:** this sounds like Hutchins (2006) in 'Unconforming Becomings" where she cites Chris Weedon's expression of the shifting self this way: 'for post-structuralism, subjectivity is neither unified nor fixed … it theorizes subjectivity as a site of disunity and conflict, central to the process of political change and to preserving the status quo …. in other words, 'being' a subject no longer exists; rather one is always in the act of 'becoming' a subject: subjectivity is a process' (126).
7	5		she joins God in recognizing shifting views about life as part of a journey of Becoming
	6	2, 3, 4	she joins God in looking at this fact with grace

Table 1.10a. Second trial of coding for participant 4 - interview 3.

Legend: P.P = participant paragraph (.) = same page as above (-) = throughout segment

PAGE	P. P.	LINE	CODE
1	1-5	-	**Code: freedom, self-acceptance P4**
2	1-5	-	**Code: self-respect, self-love, authentic** **Category 10: The spirit's telos of freedom P4** ~~relinquishing dependency on ideals imposed by self and others~~ (– she moves from: 1. Lacking strong sense that sexual identity needed to change to (unsure that it was wrong) 2. Feeling she didn't need to change but needed to remain celibate (still unsure sexual identity was wrong) 3. Feeling that her sexual identity was acceptable as is
2	5, 6	-	**Code: aware, sensitive, attentive, led, trusts intuition, honest P4** **Category 6: The spirit's movement in fluidity and love *of self** P4** ~~facing her responsibility to confront love was scary~~
3	1-3	-	**Code: freedom, self-acceptance P4** **Category 10: The spirit's telos of freedom P4** (self-acceptance leads to deeper self- and Divine-knowledge (i.e. accepting herself *freed her* to know God and herself in new ways)
.	2	7	**Code: Fluctuation P4** **Category 3: The spirit's call to life, pruning, and growth**
4	1-4	-	**Code: experience of wholeness, integrity, knows freedom P4** **Category 10: the spirit's telos of freedom P4** (feeling freedom of being "out" = herself openly) [**Memo:** this reminds me of the article I wrote in 1993 entitled "Grace in the Garden" where I commented on the story in Genesis 3 of Adam and Eve being in unhindered and intimate communion with one another in their nakedness. After they tasted the fruit, God clothed their shame with animal skins. It seems natural to 'clothe' oneself and cover up the parts of oneself of which one is ashamed when one is not comfortable with, nor has embraced who one is. Doing so repeatedly can cause an internalization of shame, and this is what P experienced.

Table 1.10b. Second trial of coding for participant 4 - interview 3.

Legend: P.P = participant paragraph (.) = same page as above (-) = throughout segment

PAGE	P. P.	LINE	CODE
			When she accepted the *self* she had left cloaked up for so long, she experienced freedom - not the tiring hypervigilance about being "found out" she had known since her teenage years. This image of nakedness is an interesting one. Is the ability to connect with self, God and other required for a full expression of humanity and of the *self* as a sexual being?]

NOTE: P4 expresses this freedom here on page 4, para 2-4,

"… it … was just connecting to who I … am and WAS AUTHENTICALLY as a FULL person, not feeling like I had to HIDE parts of myself which - the interesting thing being that I don't know until I went to that Gay Christian Network Conference, I don't think, I NEVER KNEW what that feeling WAS to just BE and not have to worry about that struggle of kind of hiding myself. Because I think I had done it for so long, it just was, that was NATURAL. And I didn't think about it. And then going to that conference and experiencing what LIFE and COMMUNITY is like BEING OPEN and it not being an issue as well. And not having to be sort of ON GUARD for what potentially could be asked or brought up, yeah [pause -14 seconds]. Probably being able to let go of the shame, and realizing that I WAS OKAY was also .. really FREEING."

4	6	1-3	***Code: challenges others, growth, expresses love without condition P4** **Category 7: The spirit's experience of tension P4** ~~Experiencing more detached enjoyment of others (healthy)~~
5	1-3	-	**Code: confidence, receives opportunity, reconciliation with other, accepts uncertainty, abandonment into Life and the unknown P4** **Category: the spirit's transforming influence through love P4**
.	~~2~~		~~3-6 interpreting God's movement in lives of those she respects~~ [**Memo:** does she experience this type of validation differently than she did when she had been 'hiding' her truer *self?* Is being authentic allowing her to embrace validation more as a gift (than as something on which she depended to support her previously more fragile self)?
~~5~~ .	~~3~~ .	1-6 7-12	~~separating *self* from others~~ ~~bringing authentic *self* out in the open~~

Toward the end of axial coding, I remarked that saturation of categories was prevalent,[93] representing fullness of the themes I had selected. I had reached a stage where no additional conceptual development was transpiring.

2.4.3.3 Selective coding, diagrams, and technical literature

My coding resulted in 125 categories for interview 1, and of these, 32 were deemed as lower-level concepts; it is understood in this methodology that not every code reflects a concept that is broad enough to become a higher-level category, rather, it may serve only to provide a detail which grounds a theory (Corbin and Strauss, 2015, pp. 76-77).

Interview 3 produced 132 categories, with 30 of them recognized as extensions of the original ones; this yielded a total of 162 categories. From the tables of codes and categories I composed, I narrowed down those I judged to be the key categories; they were deemed essential because they portrayed the themes of Becoming expressed by participants in interviews 1 and 3.

Initially, coding resulted in twelve higher-level categories, each composed of sub-categories; and I identified one of these as the core category. This main category was selected, not only based on its numerical frequency, but on its ability to encompass the other categories more comprehensively than any other category; furthermore, it was repeated most often in participant narratives.[94]

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[93] This occurred, even given the slight difference in focus of Question 3 compared to Question 1. I found this to be understandable, given that the former question had its beginnings in Question 1.

[94] See Table 1.11 on page 82, and category 10, identified as the main category.

According to Corbin and Strauss, in the last stage of selective coding, a primary question concerns: 'how the concept derived during the research is the same or different from that in the literature' (2015, p. 50), that is, 'an analyst has to learn to think outside the box and get away from professionally overused concepts' (ibid.). The 'technical literature', the professional research and philosophy about a subject, serves to 'stimulate questions during the analytic process' (Corbin and Strauss, 2015, p. 51),[95] and as per grounded theory practice, it is primary because it relates to the developing theory after data analysis (Corbin and Strauss, 2015, pp. 50-51).

Reflecting on this literature helped to determine whether previous research proffered original explanations for the categories I had selected, including the core category. I consulted the theopoetic literature, which fitted well with the main theme; technical literature in the social sciences provided insights about properties and dimensions of categories. Over time, I continued to make subtle revisions to category names (Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2004, p. 412).

By the end of selective coding, I had highlighted twelve categories, reflecting the most prominent groupings of themes,[96] as illustrated in my first diagram.[97] The themes were re-ordered eventually into ten categories, with an eleventh being the main category.

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[95] Furthermore, these grounded theorists added, 'a researcher who has done a thorough job of investigating his or her topic should not feel insecure about his or her discoveries – even if they do not match what is said in the published literature. Such discrepancies can point the way to new discoveries' (Corbin and Strauss, 2015, p. 51). This reflected the importance of understanding and relying on the veracity of the data's results.
[96] See Table 1.11 on page 82. Initially I used the term, 'the spirit' to name categories. However, I recognized that labelling them as actions of 'the spirit' assumed the source of the 'movements', a rhetorical warrant that I did not intend to pursue. Thus, I abandoned this descriptive term.
[97] After I had delineated all the categories, I drew a total of 16 diagrams.I recorded the dates, and reasons for these changes in the written notes and diagrams I maintained.

In the end, I conceived of and named the categories in a way which corresponded with the initial set of twelve categories, tabulated on the next two pages.[98]

It is important at this point to explain my transition from the initial twelve to the ten broader categories which are encompassed in the main theme. I made this decision during the process of selective coding, which involved revising two independent concepts, merging them into one, thus recognizing their relatedness. Changing names of concepts while reviewing technical literature is expected (Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2004, p. 412). These particular re-conceptualizations and renaming transpired while drawing diagrams for themes to which I had referred as, 1) 'reproduction of the self in love', and 2) 'resurrection through vulnerability'. I considered these constructs to be reflective of 'reproduction' or 're-birth' of the 'self', mediated by strength of character, personal humility of heart, and acts of self-giving love.[99] The form of self-giving in participant narratives was one that appeared to me to result in propagating life and freedom.[100] In the end, I grouped the ten categories in three 'movements', subsumed in the main category.[101]

Having identified the main category, I drew diagrams to illustrate the relationships I had theorized to exist between and among categories, including the core category (Corbin and Strauss, 2015, p. 299). In the process, I drew a total of 26 diagrams, with the final ten categories reflecting my most recent conceptualizations (Strauss and Corbin, 1990, pp. 202, 203).

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[98] The first set of categories are identified in Table 1.11 and Table 1.12, (page 82, and page 85).
[99] Eventually this category was named 'surrender'.
[100] I considered this concept as key to my theological construction regarding the term, '*kenosis*'. See my definition of *kenosis* in the glossary and in Chapter 6.
[101] See Figure 6, on page 276.

Table 1.11 Groupings of Categories with their Themes for Interviews 1 and 3.

Categories (the unfolding journey of Becoming)

Category 1 – The conscious (spirit)
1a – experience of knowing/truth; 1b –experiences/affirms connection via senses/emotions; 2a – without 'concept' for the Divine.

Category 2 – The (spirit's) encounter of void
2b – no connection via 'religion'; 2c – spiritual void via religion/society (no connection, not life-giving); 3a - unable to relate to context/isolated; 3b - deference to heteronormative status quo; 3c - hides (self-preservation)/denial; 3d - follows/maintains cultural proscriptions.

Category 3 – The (spirit's) call to life, pruning, and growth
4b – attracted/open/engaged/responsive/freely explores; 4d - discomfort/conflict/confusion/fluctuation/fatigue; 4i – barters with self/God.

Category 4 – The (spirit's) resistance
5c – resistance to oppression.

Category 5 – The (spirit's) recognition of the 'self'
4c - asks/questions/examines/seeks/confronts self; 4e – apathy; 4f - acknowledges attraction; 4h - astonishment about the pervasiveness of their struggle.

Category 6 – The (spirit's) movement in fluidity and love
4a - aware/sensitive/attentive/inclined/struck/led; 6a - curious/explores/experiments/open; 2b – no connection via 'religion'; 11a – self-respect/self-love/trusts intuition/authentic/honest.

Category 7 – The (spirit's) experience of tension
7a - admits to challenge/tension/growth/'pushing up against'; 10b – God as source/ground of creation/ community/ being; 25 expresses love without condition; 26 – desire for their love to 'reproduce'.

Category 8 – The (spirit's) connection with the Divine
9 - spiritual connection/solace/inner peace; 18d – received and known by other; 18e - receives love/opportunity from/welcome/reconciliation with 'other'; 18c - experiences connection with the 'other'; 16a – contentment.

Category 9 – The (spirit's) transforming influence through love
6b – metanoia; 14a – confidence/knowing child of God/belonging; 14c – confidence in God's identity/entity as one of 'love'; 16c - finds love in the 'other'; 18e - receives love/opportunity from/welcome/reconciliation with 'other'; 11b – accepts uncertainty/fluidity/mystery/faith seeking understanding/organicity/abandonment into Life/'unknown/something greater/GOOD.

Category 10 – The (spirit's) telos of freedom
12 - distinctive experience of personal 'truth'; 13a - desire/experience of wholeness/integrity (= humility); 13b - heart commitment to self/God; 17a - discovers self in new ways; 18b - gratitude for 'other'; 18d – received and known by the other; 13c – knows freedom (fulfillment of action); 14a – confidence/knowing child of God/belonging; 19a - faith derives from being loved.

Category 11 – The (spirit's) reproduction of the 'self' through love
20 takes pleasure/cherishes self and 'other'; 15 - looks outside of self/progresses toward self-giving; 10a - sense of home/sanctuary/where God is.

Category 12 – The (spirit's) becoming in resurrection
22 embraces vulnerability/tension/unsatiated desire; 24 resurrection.

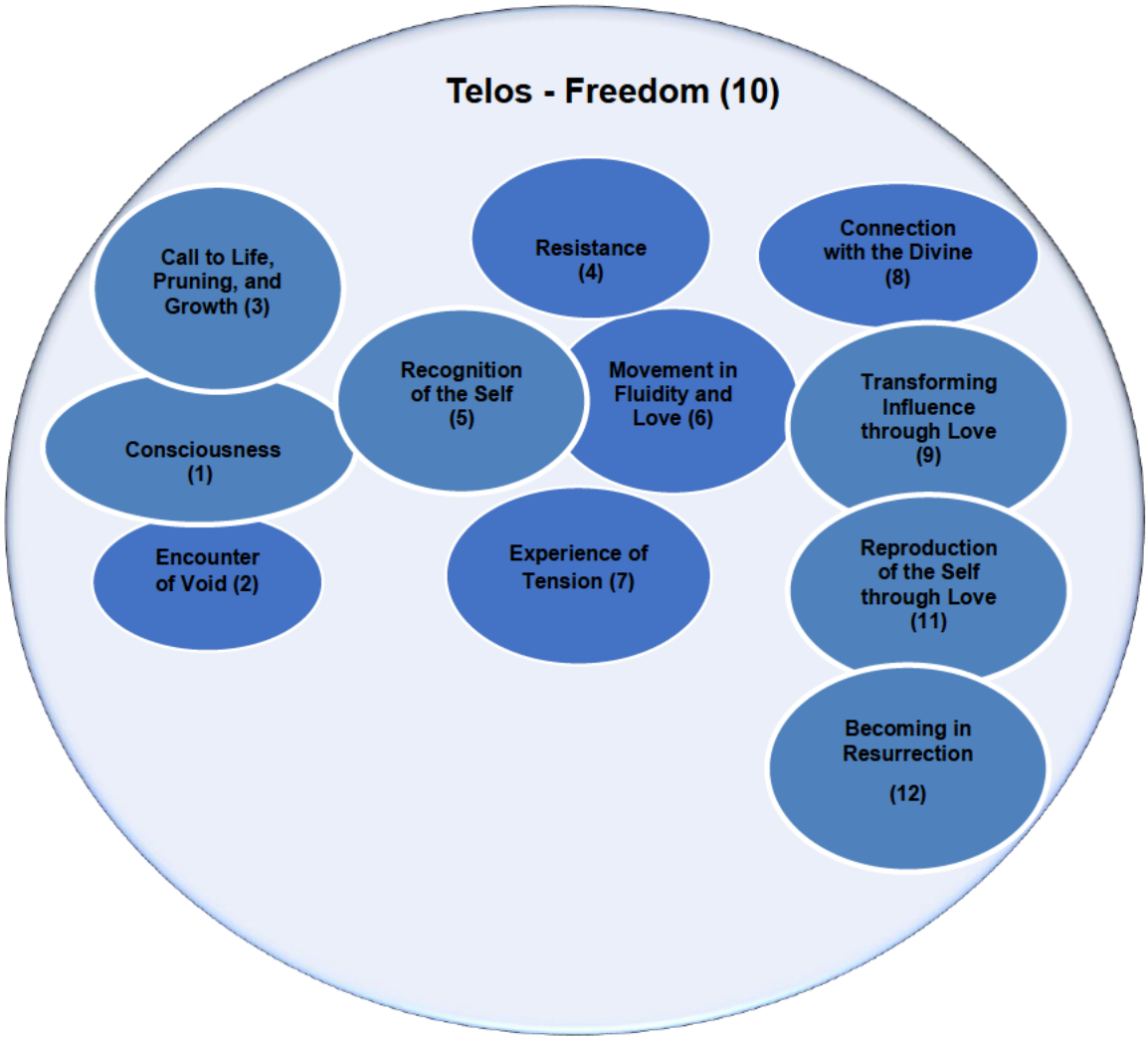


Figure 1 'First Diagram – Names of Categories/'Movements' of Becoming.'

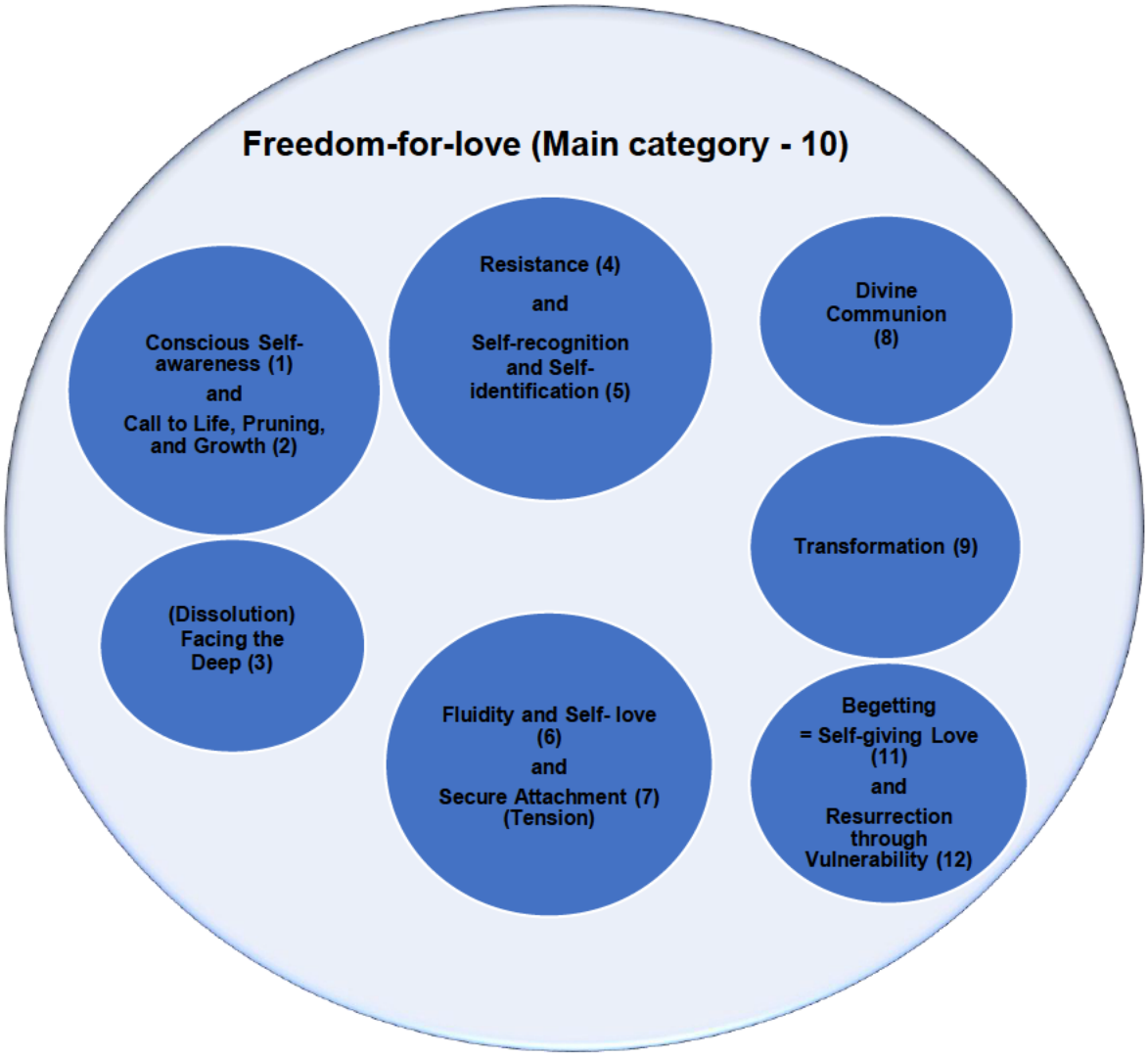


Figure 2 'Sixteenth Diagram – Names Categories/'Movements' of Becoming.'

Table 1.12 Incidence and Terms for all Categories for Interviews 1 and 3.

Category	Initial Term	Final Term and Number	Literature Source
1	Self-awareness	Conscious self-awareness (1)	Jantzen (1998) McFague (1987)
2	Encounter of void	Facing the deep (2)	Keller (2003) May (1995)
3	Call to life, pruning, and, growth	Call to life, pruning and growth (3)	Keller (2008) May (1995)
4	Resistance	Resistance (4)	McFague (1987)
5	Self-recognition and Self-identification	Self-recognition and Self-identification (5)	May (1995)
6	Movement in fluidity and love	Fluidity and self-love (6)	Rollins (2011) May (1995)
7	Tension	Secure attachment (7)	Thich (1996)
8	Connection with the Divine	Divine communion (8)	McFague (1987) Keller (2008)
9	Transformation	Transformation through love (9)	McFague (1987) Benner (2011) Waaijman (2002)
10	Reproduction of the self in love	Surrender (10)	Benner (2011)
11	Resurrection through vulnerability	Surrender (10)	Rollins (2011)
12 (Main)	Freedom	Freedom for Love (11) (Main)	Kearney (2001) Keller (2008)

2.4.4 Section Summary

This section detailed the important process of data analysis which guided this constructive theopoetic project. I began by sharing it as a distinctive approach toward meaning-making, one which derives from an approach of interpretive interactionism known to characterize grounded theory as a post-positivist methodology. I explained how my penchant as a researcher toward a qualitative approach that is considered to be 'scientific' is also coupled with my focus on the mysterious journey in which human lives are intertwined. Thus, it is, indeed, an artistic, qualitative creation.

I began by providing information and examples focusing on my processes of open, axial, and selective coding. By sharing descriptions and illustrations of my analytic procedures, I provided substantive evidence for my use of participant data in a systematic way, integrating qualitative grounded theory practice with technical literature which led to the creation of 10 thematic categories and the main category which subsumed them.

Now, I move to examine the methodological aims of ethical research, outcomes that are reliable and valid.

2.5 Validity and Reliability - Purpose and Methods

2.5.1 Introduction

Issues of validity and reliability are important topics in research, as they relate to the effectiveness of methods in measuring the phenomenon of focus. This discussion begins with my pursuit of thematic validity, and the procedures I employed to foster unbiased data collection, reporting, and triangulation of data from primary participants, with supplementary data. Here, I also discuss internal, or inter-rater reliability, that I

evaluated by soliciting comments from independent reviewers and participants; I end this section with a focus on the validity and reliability of the data as I interpreted them, indicators of the effectiveness of the research methods and procedures employed.

2.5.2 Validity

Writing on the question of validity in research, qualitative researcher and professor, Deborah Court suggests that researchers think of themselves as valuable 'instruments', which gather information on their research question (2018, p. 30). In Court's view, a critical issue is whether a researcher's method of examining and representing their findings about a cultural group of interest has provided a sound, or 'true' reflection of them (2018, p. 31); she suggests practices which enable researchers to 'see beyond' subjectivity that is characteristic of qualitative inquiry (Court, 2018, p. 33). These include: 1) triangulating data to offer several perspectives on the issue in question;[102] 2) seeking saturation of concepts, by taking as much time as possible to gather data onsite; 3) minimizing undue bias, by reflecting critically on procedures and assumptions; 4) sharing developing ideas and findings with other researchers and participants; and 5) being open to 'member checks', to add objectivity and credibility to data summaries (Court, 2018, p. 31).

Corbin and Strauss suggest the same points, and add other practices: 1) challenging assumptions by constantly referring to the data; 2) comparing individual cases; 3) producing an analysis which includes all of the cases; and 4) studying anomalies

[102] Triangulation involves collecting data about a phenomenon from three points of multiple understandings (Court, 2018, p. 31). It involves verifying how different sources measure the concept in question.

discovered among the cases (Corbin and Strauss, 2015, pp. 342-343).[103] They suggest other means of strengthening the 'trustworthiness' of findings to make them believable representations of participants' realities, such as: 5) using 'rich and thick descriptions' of participants' contexts; 6) including participants' quotations in the theory;[104] 7) sharing perspectives on the developing theoretical concepts and the criteria used in selecting or rejecting them; and 8) integrating the literature into categories developed (Corbin and Strauss, 2015, pp. 343, 345).[105] Creswell's suggestions are comparable with these, and include the importance of findings which offer contrasting perspectives to themes discovered, for this provides a balanced, more believable argument (Creswell, 2014, p. 201-203).[106] Referring to my procedure checklist, I found that my practices reflected all these features.

My goal of validity was supported by triangulation, a procedure I applied to evaluate the data from interview 2 and supplementary interviews.

2.5.3 Triangulating Interview 2

Added to the twelve mystagogic interviews with primary participants, were six mystagogic interviews with 'guests' as mystès. I asked each 'guest' to share how the spirituality of the primary participant had affected them.[107] This strategy of inviting an

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[103] In my memos, I reflected on novel concepts and anomalies often, a practice Corbin and Strauss suggest to be a significant component of axial coding, toward selection of the main category (2015, pp. 116, 117).
[104] Participant quotations are located throughout Chapters 4, 5, 6, and 7.
[105] In Chapters 4 through 6, where I discuss each of the categories and utilize my heuristic, I integrate literature to interpret the themes.
[106] I addressed contrasting perspectives in my memos during axial coding. In my concluding chapter, section 8.3.3.2, I comment on one outcome of this, which is different concepts of the Divine as metaphysical and non-metaphysical in participants' narratives.
[107] For the interview schedule, see section 1.6, question 2, as well as Appendix 6.

individual to participate in a mystagogic interview was distinctive, one I developed after reading sociologist Martin Kohli's chapter, 'Biography: Account, Text, Method'.[108] Kohli's writing on the significance of subjectivity as a matter of focus in the social sciences in the early 20th Century resonated with my aims for this theopoetic study,

> The life structure, as it unfolds in the autobiography, is relevant as a structure of experience, of meaning … the autobiography … is the basis on which *his life can best be understood by others* … the autobiography is thus not only the methodological method for the (hermeneutic) understanding of individual lives, but also the *privileged way to historical, or social reality* … the autobiographical form presupposes a developed individuality, a self-conscious 'I' being able to grasp itself as the organizer of its own life history and as distinct from its social world … the construction of a life history is the mode by which the individual represents those aspects of his past which are relevant to the present situation … life histories are thus not a collection of all the events of the individual's life course, but rather 'structural self-images'. This comes close to some notions of 'identity' (1981, pp. 63-65; emphasis mine).

I planned to include a guest mystès in the second interview to explore the compatibility between participants' subjective perceptions of their spirituality, and those of their friends and/or family members - that is, how 'his [her/their] life [was] … best … understood by others' (Kohli, 1981, pp. 63-65). Inviting the latter to share their subjective experiences of the 'structural self-images' of my primary participants was one way to attain it, thus providing a measure of internal validity of participants' autobiographical accounts (ibid.).

When I conducted interview 2, 'guests' offered comments in response to the question from their distinct vantage point. Given this variation, I did not follow the same

[108] Kohli's chapter is found in Daniel Bertaux's edited book, *Biography and Society: The Life History Approach in the Social Sciences* (1981).

process of coding this interview as I had done with the first and third mystagogic interviews; I reserved my analysis of interview 2 until I had completed axial coding of the others. When I approached interview 2, I began looking for any repetitions of the categories I had created in my analyses of interviews one and three. All of the categories I had created in coding interviews 1 and 3 were present, thus, I concluded that guest participants' subjective social realities had been shaped by the lives of LGBTQ participants (Kohli, 1981, p. 64); furthermore, I judged that the categories I detected in interview 2 were a fair indicator of the reliability of the themes concerning Becoming. I sought theoretical density, as well as internal validation of categories, so my next source of examination were the data I recorded in supplementary interviews (Court, 2018, p. 34).

2.5.4 Triangulating Supplementary Data

Part of data collection involved conversations with eleven supplementary interviewees, whom LGBTQ persons had recommended. Because the questions I posed to them had arisen from my mystagogic interviews with primary participants, the responses from each supplementary participant were particular to them. These interviewees supplied information about matters of grounded theory, known as the contexts, conditions, and consequences of the phenomenon of study (Strauss and Corbin, 1990, pp. 114-115); it also provided a background to their relationship with the LGBTQ person. I made written notes of their comments. Since I had held these interviews for the purpose of theoretical sampling, I anticipated that some of the themes I had uncovered in axial coding would be reified (Corbin and Strauss, 2015, p. 343); when I consulted these data, I repeated the process I had followed with the transcripts for interview 2. I recognized

seven of the twelve thematic categories of spirituality among the quotations I had recorded. Given the highly-specific, peculiar contextual information I had solicited in these meetings, I judged this finding to be a fair, *not insignificant* indicator that the 'movements' of spirituality in LGBTQ participants' lives had been witnessed by a variety of persons.

2.5.5 Participant Validation

In addition to the aforementioned sources of internal validity, I was interested in acquiring participant feedback (Court, 2018, p. 31). I had experienced an unforeseen delay in soliciting their responses; still, I sent two chapters of a draft of the discussion section of my dissertation to my six primary participants.[109] One person responded. They recognized their quotations in the thesis, identified some of their lived experiences in the movements of the theory, and found the chapter to be a 'fine' piece of writing.

2.5.6 Internal (Inter-rater) Reliability

Reliability is a critical measure of research. It assesses the researcher's ability to move beyond their subjectivity, to arrive at an assessment of the phenomenon they are investigating (Court, 2018, p. 33). Internal reliability is a reflection of the degree to which a researcher's analysis of the findings is shared by others who review them (Court, 2018, p. 33). While the same researcher may on subsequent analyses, interpret their data in different ways, their interpretation of the findings is an indicator of the consistency and rigour with which they have conducted their analysis (ibid.). This is strengthened by

[109] This delay was due to unforeseen interruptions in my work, due to medical leaves of absence after surgery for cancer and complications of the same. As a result of this, I emailed participants these chapters for review, 20 months after I had initially planned to do so. In view of my observation of participants' prior responsiveness, I attributed this response to my request for feedback to its late arrival and the decrease in our email communications, although it is possible that other factors might have been at play.

submitting data to the perspectives of other researchers, and others, whose review of the data corroborate the researcher's tentative summaries or suggest areas of refinement. In this way, internal reliability contributes to a study's validity (Court, 2018, p. 33).

This means that, when compared with others' perceptions of the same data, a researcher's appraisals can be evaluated objectively. Creswell highlights qualitative practices which strengthen reliability. One involves verifying interview transcripts during the early stage of data collection (Creswell 2014, p. 203). A second is to ensure that attention is paid to consistent use of codes (ibid.); by constantly referring back and forth, between the data and codes, and writing memos concerning them (Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2004, p. 414; Creswell, 2014, p. 203), the researcher maintains a practice of checking, ongoing analysis, and self-examination, a signal of consistency in their procedure (Creswell, 2014, p. 203). Corbin and Strauss mention priorities such as 'methodological coherence', and 'investigator responsiveness', as practices which allow a researcher's findings to stand up to the comparisons and scrutiny of others (2015, p. 343). I applied the practices mentioned by Creswell, and by Corbin and Strauss in my methodology. In particular, participants checked my typed transcripts for accuracy within one month of my concluding their three interviews. Furthermore, my transcription, coding, and categorization were reviewed by my supervisors as I completed each interview; hence, my methods were transparent and open, and these practices provided feedback on my reproduction and interpretation of the data.

Third, and just as critical, was my solicitation of feedback from three independent reviewers, who examined the same interview transcripts after I had completed my data analysis. I provided each person with the same three anonymized transcripts, including

the question with which each interview began, and they were asked to give their assessment of themes concerning spirituality that they noticed in the transcript.[110] The reviewers' experience of the transcripts, and their methods of interpreting and organizing their comments were varied. Nevertheless, among their comments were themes similar to the eleven I had categorized. Furthermore, all of the reviewers identified the main category, and offered variations on the categories I used for several other themes.[111] The process demonstrated that my interpretations of the data were consistent with those of these three reviewers, thus supporting the study's reliability (Court, 2018, p. 33).

2.5.7 Section Summary

It was important to evaluate both the methods and the results of my assessments of validity and reliability. This is a marker of the effectiveness of the research procedures, from recruitment, to data collection, and analysis. I evaluated the benefits of different practices, which determined the validity and reliability of my grounded theory. To verify validity I engaged in: 1) participant checks of interview transcripts after interviews; 2) minimizing the degree of researcher bias and assumptions; and 3) triangulating themes found in the data from mystagogic interviews with primary participants with data from interview 2, and supplementary interviews.

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[110] These persons were two doctoral researchers in other departments in the College of Arts and Law Graduate School at the University of Birmingham; the third was a retired professor of theology in the U.S.A. Two of my reviewers were members of a Christian faith community, and one was familiar with the Christian tradition, but not an adherent to any religious faith.

[111] Finally, one individual, who offered a critique of the responses of one participant, interpreted them as questioning, changing, and circuitous. She interpreted this person's comments as reflective of a perspective that was not fixed, but questioning, and fluid. Her insights validate the distinctiveness of one of the categories I had interpreted, 'fluidity', a quality of Becoming, mentioned in Chapter 5, sections 5.2.1.3, and 5.2.2.3.

In determining the theory's reliability, I found it critical to receive feedback from my supervisors about my methodological process and interpretation. I also solicited three external reviewers to corroborate the research themes I had selected, and shared interview transcripts, and the results of my developing theory with primary participants. My research practice was open to feedback and critique, which was found to promote its validity and reliability.

The narratives from the mystagogic interviews contained rich offerings for theory development. Across these three interviews, I discovered commonalities and uniquenesses across codes and categories, and noted variations. I saw potential in their application in the lives of contemporary LGBTQ persons. In a related way, when introducing the seven themes that are the focus of her book on process theology, constructive theologian, Catherine Keller explains that while she writes on themes which represent familiar Christian doctrines and symbols, her writing unfolds in a distinct way. In a poetic style, she expresses my feelings concerning my qualitative project: 'Different themes could have been chosen, another number would have been possible. But these are the themes that called to me, sometimes gently, sometimes urgently. Writing … is a mysterious process, too' (Keller, 2008, p. xiii). I experienced this mystery, realizing that while I might have categorized and named themes of spirituality differently during my analysis, those I selected were the ones which resonated with me from my position in this process. After considerable thought, my representation of the narratives of my six participants, with limited identifying demographic details resonated with my desire to be faithful to their narratives and the theory which lay beneath them. The next section completes my discussion of my qualitative research method.

2.6 Participant Narratives

2.6.1 Introduction

In the reporting of my grounded theopoiesis, my selection of narratives meets two aims. One, is to respect the anonymity of my participants; the second, to represent with creativity, the variety and distinctiveness of the themes uncovered in these data. The purpose of this section is to explain my representation of the grounded theory I have used to enliven their experiences. I begin by sharing participants demographic details, then, I detail the heuristic I developed to create the theory reflective of their spirituality.

2.6.2 Rationale for Participant Representation

I benefited much from the communal nature of my recruitment and advertising. Yet, the collaboration and openness of my approach was one which could lead to unwanted outcomes. These included the possibility that someone who knew of my research might have either: 1) assisted in referring persons who participated in my study, or 2) learned of the locations in which I conducted it. Hence, if they read my dissertation, they would have access to participants' personal details; and if motivated, could piece together the identities of my participants. Given some of my challenges in preserving anonymity, and my desire to share the study's learnings as widely as possible, I determined a way in which only participants and I would recognize their verbal quotations and personal details shared in the narratives.

To reiterate, one of the distinctive qualities of my grounded *theopoiesis*, versus that an ethnography which does not involve theoretical construction, is to endeavour to be true to themes discovered in narrative data, while enfleshing them in a theory. Of interest to

me was the overall pattern woven into the fabric of my research narratives, not *only* the descriptions of the threads used in their weaving by which lived experiences come alive to readers (Corbin and Strauss, 2015, p. 12).

Therefore, in the next section, I furnish details on participants' backgrounds. Following this, I describe the three 'movements' reflecting the themes of spirituality I created, encompassing the main theme of this grounded theory; this section ends with the theological heuristic I employed to construct the theory of human Becoming in their stories.

2.6.2.1 Social and communal contexts

In addition to participant demographics shared in Table 1.2 and Table1.3, lived experiences of participants were shaped by social contexts in which the following ethnic and religious origins were dominant: 1) Latin American; 2) British; 3) Western European-Scottish; 4) Acadian-Mi'kmaq (Métis); 5) Asian-European; 6) Eastern European; 7) Roman Catholic; 8) Anglican; 9) Lutheran; 10) United Church; 11) Christian non-denominational-fundamentalist; 12) Agnostic-liberal-non-theistic.

While I elaborate on some of these details in the Discussion chapters, my intention is to share the grounded theopoiesis deriving from participants' stories in a meaningful way; therefore, I present their stories in the context of three major groupings of categories I constructed, discussed in the next section on 'thematic categories'.

2.6.2.2 Thematic categories

My aim in representing participants' narratives is to highlight complexities *and* to provide glimpses of their variegated realities, even the less common among them (McElhinney and Kennedy, 2022, pp. 222, 223); I also seek to avoid oversimplified

versions of predominant themes while ignoring unique ones altogether (Willis, 2019, p. 478).[112] The stories of Becoming for the LGBTQ persons in my study were complex, and deserve to be acknowledged as such. For me, it is critical to support future research by encouraging qualitative researchers to consider issues raised in these data, and for them to attend to how these matters furnish new interpretations worth pursuing in their own communities; this motivation is one I share with qualitative researchers who may employ novel methods to protect participant identities (McElhinney and Kennedy, 2022, p. 222).

The first theme on which I elaborate is one to which I refer as 'beginning', it is a combination of categories which signifies the genesis of Becoming.[113] 'Beginning' consists of the groupings of categories I have named as, 1) 'conscious self-awareness' and 2) 'call to life, pruning and growth';[114] and 3) 'facing the deep'.

I have named a second grouping of categories, 'homesteading',[115] to represent a theme of progress, an ongoing process of making room or a home for the 'self'. These

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[112] Although qualitative researchers such as Rebecca Willis (2018a; 2018b; 2019), Zöe McElhinney and Catherine Kennedy (2022), created 'fictional' or composite characters with stories that were based on their participants' realities, like them, my intention is to be true to participants' experiences (McElhinney and Kennedy, 2022, p. 222), despite not employ composites. My theory has developed into a general statement about human Becoming culled from the results as a whole, and in the end, participants will identify their quoted words, regardless of the absence of identifying demographics (Corbin and Strauss, 2015, p. 199).

[113] To reiterate, in grounded theory, the process of data analysis involves the creation of codes, which are grouped subsequently into broader thematic categories. These categories coalesce into a main category, or theme, outlined in section 2.4. In this thesis, my definition of 'beginning' incorporates the work of Catherine Keller, who defines 'beginning' as an event of 'opening out', an ongoing process of Becoming (2008, p. 46; 2003, pp. ix, 9). I have elaborated on this further in my discussion of this theme in section 4.3.1.

[114] The grouping of categories I entitle 'beginning' is composed of three categories, each one created from multiple categories. Refer to Table 1.8a and Table 1.8b for the multiple categories from which major groupings were created, and Table 1.12 for the final list of categories from which the three primary groupings of this grounded theory derive. These groupings are discussed in detail in Chapters 4 through 6.

[115] The Aboriginal Mi'kmaq word, aja'sit (also a personal name), means 'to move over' or 'to make room' (University of Prince Edward Island, 2023). This is suitable to accompany theologian, Catherine Keller's description of the creative face of the Divine, the *Eros*, a compelling quality of Divinity, which *leaves room* for humankind to choose among possibilities, like thriving, goodness, responsibility, and freedom (2008, pp. 88-91, 95, 99). Figure 4 illustrates the grouping of 'movements' I name as, 'homesteading'.

categories include the following motifs: 1) ‘self-recognition’ and ‘self-identification’; and 2) ‘resistance’; as well as, 3) ‘fluidity’ and ‘self-love’; and 4) ‘secure attachment’.

The third grouping of categories signify a theme of ‘re-creation’, and encompasses these categories: 1) ‘Divine communion’; 2) ‘transformation’; and 3) ‘surrender’.

In working with these categories, I gained insights from the style of theological construction used by Sallie McFague, in her metaphorical theology; McFague employed this method in her construction of new models of God. Using her example, I follow a unique heuristic of my own creation, to construct a theory of human Becoming based on the data as I interpreted them. It is a theory to which I refer as a ‘*grounded theopoeisis’*.[116]

2.6.2.3 My constructive heuristic

My heuristic involves an examination of three questions in the context of relevant theological literature, and similar to McFague’s use of a heuristic in her theological construction, I develop my theory by responding to three questions for each of the three groupings of movements. These questions are the following: 1) what is the nature of human Becoming suggested in the categories of [theme]? 2) what type of Divine-human involvement is implied in the narratives describing the categories of [theme]? and 3) what does this ‘*grounded theopoiesis’* on [theme] propose for human Becoming in the context of Mystery in the contemporary world?[117] I engage these issues in **Chapters 4** through **6**.

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[116] I have coined this term to convey a theological hermeneutic deriving from a poetic qualitative methodology. See section 3.5.6.3 for a more comprehensive definition of *theopoiesis*.

[117] For me to try to stipulate paths of causality in the relationships between metaphors in these categories would be disregard for the mystery of Becoming and the dynamic of encounter I am proposing it to be. Nonetheless, as the methodology I use is a qualitative one, I am committed to a social scientific method to explain the interaction between concepts which concern lived realities (Creswell, 2014, p. 64). At this time, within the methodological context I have selected, they represent my best effort to intimate interactions between the concepts I have constructed. Thus, for the sake of argument, I propose them as related. The

2.6.3 Section Summary

The purpose of this section was to introduce the rationale and method I adopted to represent participants' stories, and to demonstrate my choice as appropriate. I provided details regarding the familial and social backgrounds which shaped participants lives, and the three groupings of categories I have used to organize their stories. These comprise the main category, and are named: 1) 'beginning'; 2) homesteading; and 3) re-creation. I ended with a description of three questions in the heuristic I employed to explain the interrelatedness of these categories and the theory of Becoming they convey; it is a theory I have coined, a '*grounded theopoiesis'*.

2.7 Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I explained the methods I used to conduct research on LGBTQ spirituality.

Beginning with a description of the qualitative research approaches of ethnography and grounded theory, I outlined the procedures employed to recruit participants and to prepare for mystagogic interviews. Highlighting the purpose of mystagogic accompaniment, and its potential as an interview method from which a grounded theory might be culled, I demonstrated it as an appropriate tool for research on human Becoming.

Then, I shared details concerning interview settings, questions, and processes, elaborating on participant and researcher roles, and their related responsibilities of

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movements I have conceived are a means toward a better understanding of participants' lived realities, and at the same time, I do not assume that the spiritual path of human Becoming is simple, uniform, or expressible.

interest; these included the realities of power and ethics. After sharing my reflections, I ended by highlighting the transformative nature of this research, and how I concluded it.

I then provided details of my data analysis in the section following a description of my grounded theory procedures. Beginning with my qualitative analytical approach, 'interpretive interactionism', I explained what I consider to be integral - its mutual priorities of producing research that is both 'scientific' *and* reflective of Divine-human 'mystery'. I proceeded, describing and illustrating procedures for open, axial, and selective coding employed; they yielded the codes and categories from which I culled theoretical constructs and the main theme of the theory I uncovered. I ended the section with a list of the themes.

Both the methods I applied, and the ethical research practice, contributed to the study's validity and reliability, important features of qualitative research. I discussed my evaluation of these, mentioning triangulation and the inter-rater method of external reviewers. In addition to these priorities, it was important to disseminate this research in a way which maintained participant anonymity, without which, research is unethical and irrelevant. I ended the chapter by demonstrating the utility of arranging participants' stories according to the primary groupings of categories created in the data analysis, a method of organization which promised representation of narratives in complexity and fullness, while honouring persons' anonymity. I invented a heuristic to create what I coined as, a '*grounded theopoiesis'* on LGBTQ spirituality.

Chapters 4 through **6** which follow, involve my discussion of the research findings for the three primary groupings of categories. Then, in **Chapter 7** I discuss the main category, as it relates to each grouping of categories and in terms of how it appears in contemporary scholarship. However, to engage with these results, comprehensively, and

in a way which ‘enfleshes’ participants’ narratives with profundity and liveliness, I first provide the literary theoretical context which inspires the analysis which follows. Thus, in **Chapter 3**, I trace my progress toward a *‘grounded theopoiesis’* of human Becoming, the focus of my review of technical literature related to the research questions posed (Corbin and Strauss, 2015, pp. 31, 32).

CHAPTER 3

TOWARD A GROUNDED THEOPOIESIS ON HUMAN BECOMING

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I argue that the field of constructive theology is the domain within which this research lies and makes its distinctive mark. Hence, my focus here, is to provide support for this claim, reviewing scholarship in theology, religion, and philosophy, thus, using multidisciplinary evidence of relevant knowledges that exist on the themes of human Becoming found in participants' narratives.

In the section following this introduction, I provide a rationale for my approach to engaging with literature in a way which focuses on multidisciplinary epistemologies, applying a framework supported by Catherine Keller's construct, the *tehom*, or cosmic chaos. I refer to her term, '*tehomaphilia*', which signifies an appreciation of chaos, as having always existed with God; it reflects my theopoetic priority of looking to pluralistic knowledges in an original exploration of the mystery of human experience and meaning-making in this context. This section includes my reflections on some challenges inherent in engaging with literature that I recognize as representative of opposing philosophical positions, especially where the nature of the 'self', and the potential for human flourishing are concerned; I engage with this issue in various places within this chapter, substantiating it as a theme in postmodern contemporary human life, citing examples of this perspective

in the research of counsellor, David Hart, psychoanalytic psychotherapist, Aaron Balick, and Gestalt therapist, R. Elliott Ingersoll.

Hence, as a move toward the construction of a grounded *theopoiesis* on Becoming, I devote each subsequent section of this chapter to an issue which relates to this human phenomenon in participants' narratives.

The first body of literature to which I attend is located in a section related to scholarship on spirituality, by theologians Sandra Schneiders and Kees Waaijman; it leads into my exploration of spirituality in a theopoetic, rather than a primarily intellectual manner. Then, I review psychology's offerings, with a focus on the purview of David Benner; I also integrate Peter Rollins' applications of psychoanalytic constructs to the former concepts. My purpose here is to explain human ego-centricism as a tendency that is related to the human sensation of loss, motivating persons toward transformation and specifically, flourishing.

Next, the focus of constructive theologies, explained by Marion Grau and Jason Wyman, define my priorities for theologizing about the Divine, and human Becoming; these apply to experiences of marginalized voices, that have always already been there.

A select body of writing from constructive theologians with which I engage affirm spirituality as significant for discussions on issues that are critical for human persons. I review their writings in the sections which follow, in the context of selected themes of human Becoming in contemporary research, progressing in order of these motifs: 1) the wisdoms of the body and its gifts of personal presence (Melanie May); 2) non-heteronormative sexualities, and their offerings for sexual intimacy and justice (Robert Goss); 3) Jesus as a model of One who embraces their humanity, whose priority includes

vulnerability and grace (Marcella Althaus-Reid and Lisa Isherwood); 4) human love as a self-giving act of justice (Jennie Barnsley); and 5) human participation with God in a process of creation that is ongoing, and 'opening out' (Catherine Keller).

Furthermore, the knowledges of philosophers of religion, who have interacted with religious and postmodern continental thinkers, lead to my focus on: 6) the marginalizing, paternalistic Western religious symbolic which heightens sensitivity for a new feminist symbolic, which proffers themes of natality and flourishing as signposts of Becoming for all persons (Grace Jantzen); and 7) an eschatological view of Becoming, a distinct, non-metaphysical theory of God who 'becomes' in relationship with human persons, thus, leading to reflections on the opportunities available to human persons who desire to live with possibility in mind (Richard Kearney). Finally, I end my epistemological move toward a grounded *theopoiesis* on Becoming with my description of a heuristic that is based on, 8) metaphorical-ecological theology (Sallie McFague). In the context of my heuristic, I engage with the aforementioned epistemologies in my pursuit of theological construction which supports LGBTQ persons on a journey of Becoming today. Before I begin, I explain the framework which supports my distinctive approach to reviewing literature, as a move toward a grounded *theopoiesis*.

3.2 Rationale for a Distinctive Engagement with Literature

3.2.1 Introduction

In this section, I argue that my selection of an interdisciplinary epistemological framework is consistent with the focus of theopoetics, and with Catherine Keller's

explanation of human Becoming in the context of the *tehom* (chaos, an aspect of the cosmos); thus, I contend that my epistemology is an appropriate tool for theological construction of a poetic grounded theory on LGBTQ Becoming; by referring to research in psychology, psychoanalysis, and theology, I demonstrate how contradictory literatures can be combined in this exercise.

3.2.2 The *Tehom* - A Conceptual Tool for Theopoetic Construction

Referring to the creation myth of Genesis 1, Catherine Keller expands on 'the waters of 'the deep' … the mysterious imagery of a bottomless chaos', as co-existing with God (2008, p. 46); specifically, Keller proposes, the 'primal chaos represents an infinity of unformed, unfathomable potentiality' (2008, p. 50). Her reading of German philosophy and Jewish mystical writings led to this process theologian's conception of 'the deep' as a profound, 'unruly' space that postmodern science is discovering (2003, p. 180),[118] one which sits in contrast with a conventional orthodox belief in original cosmic emptiness and singularity (Keller, 2003, pp. 180-181). Keller's ideas point, rather, to multiplicity and possibility (ibid.).

As a result of her historical analysis, Keller concludes that a 'third way' toward appreciating 'beginning' is needful – one which recognizes the [continuing] presence of the *tehom* (2003, p. 86). This collective dynamism of *tehom* and the Divine represents a space of collaboration (Keller, 2003, pp. xvii, 3, 6), which permits multiplicity, and allows

[118] In regards to this, Keller references the work of Friedrich von Schelling, *The Ages of the World* and *Of Human Freedom* (1936, p. 33). She explains that von Schelling's philosophy includes the 'depth' of chaos as the location of God's 'becoming' or begetting, which is influenced significantly in its Jewish and Christian forms by Kabbalah, an ancient Jewish mysticism (2003, p. 180).

for nondominant subaltern createds to be recognized as belonging as participants in a cosmic process of Becoming. Moreover, applying tehomic collective dynamism to my theoretical construction, Keller's process theology supports a move toward scholarship which might 'generate our own plurisingular inter-subjectivities – out of the multiples of elemental energies, codes, socialities, ecologies that any moment constellate our cosmoi' (Keller, 2003, p. 181); it is a sign of 'the creator, creating, becom[ing]. In singular plurality' (Keller, 2003, p. 182).

My preferred way of theological construction is also one that literary theologian, Heather Walton would recognize as part of, 'the challenge, change and creative making', that is located in theopoetics (2019b, p. 229). Walton recognizes in theopoetics 'a contemporary movement that is open noisy, and extremely diverse – but always passionate in its attention to ecology, embodiment and the exclusion which separates human persons (2019b, p. 229). However, when One seeks to create room for the transformative political and cultural in the process of creative-making, walls come down, thus, Walton writes of Keller's advocacy of 'breaching … the God boundary which separates the discourses of faith from developments in scientific, philosophical, artistic, and political thinking (2019b, p. 230). If Keller's cosmology allows her to argue that, 'to love is also to be mixed up in a chaos that involves hostility, pain, and darkness' (Kearney and Keller, 2015, p. 49, cited in Walton, 2019a, p. 339), one implication of prizing the *tehom* in a qualitative project such as this, is that philosophies will be married that are not expected to exist in partnership.[119] In effect, there is no limitation placed on the theories

[119] This practice is consistent with Heather Walton's literary *poiesis*, which she describes as follows: 'in my own work I have combined some of these understandings and used the image of *bricolage* to describe

the constructive theologian employs in their creative venture, they vary according to their sensibilities, vocational call, and political passion; thus, for this constructive theopoetic, comparative, integrative work, the opinion of the Jungian analyst and clinical psychologist, David Sedgwick, rings true,

> Synthesizing theories is a creative endeavour, although it might seem like merely an academic one; it is a creative process that focuses specifically on pre-existing theories. We stand on the shoulders of giants, as they say, and there may be not one but several giants involved. Integrating anything is a complex process, whether 'integration' is referring to analysis, theory, or politics and social justice. The root of the word is informative … it comes from the Latin *integrare*, which can be translated not only as 'to make whole' but also 'to renew' or 'to refresh' … more importantly, synthesizing theories means changing theories, so any integration, or even an attempt at one, is an act of 'individuation – individuation in the traditional Jungian sense of coming to one's so-called true self (as embodied in a theoretical position) ... It is also an act that may be resisted, by self or others' (Sedgwick, 2015, p. 541).[120]

theopoetic work' (2020, p. 161). Applying Bruno Latour's (2013) term, *bricolage* to describe the work of such scholars, artists, and scholars, Walton applauds them, for they 'accept the brokenness of contemporary theology … who take this as their starting point', and embrace the 'challenge … to seize again this world of wonders *and horrors* – quite differently' (2020, p. 160). A pungent example of what Walton explains concerning *poiesis* in the artistic world, is the work of art by Andres Serrano, entitled, 'Piss Christ', about which, poet, Andrew Hudgins writes (2000). In vivid prose, Hudgins' images Christ's lived experience, starting with his birth, 'between the urine and the feces … skidding into this world as we do on a tide of blood and urine … what the fallen world is made of, and what we make' (2000). Hudgin's interpretation of Serrano's art expresses the awesome reality, the 'beauty' and 'horror' of Christ's life, death, and resurrection, and his point, like Walton's, is that, 'we have grown used to beauty without horror' (Hudgins, 2000), despite the fact that the two experiences remain married during persons' lifetimes, a point that Althaus-Reid and Isherwood state with equal forthrightness (2007, p. 310).

[120] See section 1.3 for an example of my learnings, which have played a part in shaping this thesis, which discovers resonances in theoreticians such as Rollins (Lacan), Benner, Jantzen, and Althaus-Reid, the latter feminist Queer theologian, having argued for utilizing psychoanalytic concepts in research (Althaus-Reid, 2000, p. 30).

Sedgwick's words fit squarely with the tenor of claims in the era of proto-constructive theology;[121] and they capture theopoetic ventures, to which scholars, such as Keller, speak today.

3.2.3 Overview of Literature of Interest

This grounded theory research introduces some original and innovative categories in the fields of theology and religion. Additionally, it represents a first in the use of a poetic form of qualitative interviewing to explore Becoming as a human phenomenon, and to construct a poetic, theological grounded theory. My focus in this chapter is to recognize scholarship in disciplines in the arts and social sciences from which my research has benefited, and that it has extended.

This format is needful because, while the term, 'becoming', appears in some areas in theology and religion (Jantzen, 1998, p. 7; Kearney, 2001, p. 5; Keller, 2003, p. xvii; Hutchins, 2006, p. 120),[122] where its form in human persons is concerned, there is scant qualitative and quantitative research which investigates this phenomenon in detail (Waaijman, 2002, p. 6; Horn et al., 2005, p. 82; Halkitis et al., 2009, p. 251; Hart, 2015, pp. 49, 220; Smallwood, 2015, p. 79).[123] In addition to this, my employment of the term

[121] See section 3.4.2, and related notes on the arguments of theologians, such as Newman Smyth and James Ten Broeke, who argued for the advancement of theology through interdisciplinary engagement with 'natural' sciences.

[122] These writers use a lower-case letter 'b' in the word 'becoming', in these ways: 1) Grace Jantzen writes of what is involved in the aim of 'becoming divine'; 2) Richard Kearney refers to 'self-forfeiture of divine becoming; 3) Catherine Keller describes genesis as 'a beginning-in-process, an unorganized and endless process of becoming'; 4) Christina Hutchins is concerned with appreciating identity as a 'process of becoming', one which promises new potentials for humanity's and Christianity's futures.

[123] Spirituality is explored by these researchers with these foci: 1) Waaijman asserted that 'a phenomenological approach, combined with the practise of dialogic thinking, provides us with the most appropriate methodology for the investigation of the spirituality phenomenon'; 2) Horn et al. argue that 'sexuality is neither incidental nor detrimental to spirituality, but an important and integrated dimension'; 3) Halkitis and colleagues engage with LGBTQ persons of various religious traditions, many of whom

Becoming, as I treat it, is less common in theological literature. I am concerned with Becoming as a 'spiritual' concept with psychological implications (Benner, 2011).[124]

Still, while the term 'spirituality' enjoys use in the contemporary vernacular, there are a few studies that have actually investigated its various forms (Waaijman, 2003, pp. 1, 2; Halkitis et al., 2009, pp. 254-258; Swinton and Pattison, 2010, pp. 230-234; Hart, 2015, pp. 78-79). Because the construction of a grounded *theopoiesis* regarding the phenomenon of spirituality is without parallel, this project represents an original contribution to scholarship. In this chapter, my engagement with literature serves another distinct purpose, for, in line with grounded theory practice, the research I discuss assists in the theological construction of a theory of Becoming based on themes from the narrative data I gathered.[125] Thus, the writings I review are the foundation for a definition of spirituality, which recognizes bodily, sexual, spiritual, psychological/psychoanalytic experiences deemed integral to this human experience. The literature relating to my thesis arises from multiple, and related fields: spirituality; Liberation theology; practical theology; process theology; Queer theology; philosophy of religion; psychoanalysis; psychology; sociology; mystagogy; and theopoetics.

A discipline which encompasses some of this scholarship is constructive theology, that constructive theologian, Jason Wyman notes arose within the context of 'emergent

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describe themselves as 'spiritual', versus 'religious', however specific trends are not examined in detail; Explored form the perspective of a cultural identifier, Hart found spirituality to be related to a number of outcomes, such as 'freedom' to be authentic, 'an inclination toward meaningful relationships', 'serenity, peace, and calm behaviour', and 'courage' to live with honesty and integrity; Smallwood approaches spirituality as an identity construct, one that LGBTQ students felt a need to integrate with their religious sexualities.

[124] A description of the psychological/analytic concepts as they relate to Becoming is discussed in section 3.3.4.

[125] See description of grounded theory, in section 2.2.3.

crises in theology and in the world' (Wyman, 2020, p 9).[126] As a result, the sections I include in this chapter focus on key issues related to human spirituality as I have defined it, relevant for my interpretation and discussion of the research findings in the chapters which follow. Last, because of the unique concepts I have constructed, I provide substantive detail on the theories of select scholars. This assists in comprehending my later analysis, offering a review, defined not simply by its breadth, but by its depth. It appreciates how contemporary scholarship on this topic relates to the realities of LGBTQ persons in a practical theological way today. In the end, I demonstrate that the contributions of these scholars assume a legitimate place in this chapter, and that this topic merits recognition within theology and religion.

3.2.4 Section Summary

This section began with an explanation of my distinct approach to engaging with a varied body of literature, from which I have constructed this grounded *theopoiesis*. I applied Catherine Keller's process theological insights on cosmic chaos - the *tehom* posited as accompanying God in 'the beginning' – and I referred to it as that which sets the stage for the framework I have adopted in this chapter, signifying my 'move toward' a poetic grounded theory.

I added the thoughts of literary theologian, Heather Walton to Keller's theorizing, affirming the significance of a theopoetic approach to engaging with literature which offers an epistemology of pluralistic truths, in addition to some that appear divergent. I

[126] In this writing, liberation theology, process theology, Queer/indecent theology, and theopoetics fall under the rubric of constructive theology.

ended the section with an overview of the literature with which this *theopoiesis* engages.

3.3 Scholarship on Spirituality

3.3.1 Introduction

Theopoetic scholar and theologian, Sandra Schneiders, explains the distinction between biblical theology and biblical spirituality. I start with Schneiders' explanation of spirituality as theopoetics, providing a backdrop for my qualitative research methodology and my interdisciplinary epistemological interpretation of its results. The achievement of Kees Waaijman, theologian and professor of spirituality, is an apt piece to complement Schneider's own, emphasizing 'measurements' of the 'soul's' progression in relationship with its Creator, in order to become like God.

David Benner's psychological and spiritual research, and Peter Rollins' psychoanalytically-informed theopoetic philosophy, also share this focus. They speak of spirituality as a journey of the 'self' who is desiring to live fully into their humanity. Now I expand on the reason why approaching spirituality as theopoetics is key to examining 'movements' of Divinity in the lives of the six Canadians who identify as LGBTQ.

3.3.2 Spirituality as Theopoetics

For Sandra Schneiders, biblical spirituality involves persons' *expressions* of faith in response to their *lived experiences* of God as Mystery (2016, p. 418). Schneiders explains biblical narratives as descriptions of human persons' responses to their understandings of Divinity in life contexts in ancient times (ibid.). Accordingly, Christian spirituality prioritizes biblical scriptures as texts of divine revelation, reflected in the way persons integrate biblical messages into quotidian life; also, creative 'performances' of scripture

make the biblical text alive as a site of Divine-human interaction, such that scriptures foster persons' intimate experiences of the Divine (Schneiders, 2016, pp. 422, 424, 426).[127] Hence, the spirituality of the six persons with whom I engaged in this research, is *their response* to their understandings of God as interpreted in their quotidian lives (ibid.). Theopoetics explores understandings and experiences of God in the aesthetic form, a focus, not on the intellect, but on the mysterious landscape of interaction between the human imagination and the Divine (ibid.).

Schneiders also explains that while both biblical theology and biblical spirituality are grounded in the biblical text, the purview of theology is textual study (Schneiders, 2016, p. 420). This is one reason why theology seeks to understand details and characteristics of the Bible as comprehensively and explicitly as possible, and focuses on matters such as: the language in which texts were written; the genre of the texts; and the historical context of the writings (Schneiders, 2016, pp. 420-421).[128] Hence, the goal of biblical theology is to *inform* the experience of people of faith by contributing to their understanding of *the tradition* from which the Christian faith derives (Schneiders, 2016, pp. 420, 421). It is understandable then, that Schneiders describes spirituality as a *transformative* experience, with an aim of *doing* or *living* biblical scripture, and not merely *hearing* it (Schneiders, 2016, pp. 422, 424, 426); her research suggests that it is One's *experience* of the biblical text which effects personal change. Still, the difference between

[127] These sites include: preaching; contemplative *lectio Divina* (a form of contemplative prayer); musical or artistic creations; and acts of service.

[128] Biblical theology also addresses topics like: contemporary hermeneutical questions; social factors contributing to the interpretation of texts, and the controversies surrounding them (Schneiders, 2016, pp. 418, 420).

theology and spirituality has contributed to confusion, distress, and oppression for LGBTQ persons in religious contexts, particularly Western Christianity. One reason for this is because many within the tradition argue that a role of the biblical text is to judge human conduct, particularly as expressed by persons whose sexual orientation is other than heterosexual.[129] This point is controversial.

I, however, esteem the purpose and utility of the biblical text as distinct from *policing* or *coercing* human persons' compliance with the contents of its diverse narratives, especially where spirituality is concerned. This is because, as researcher on spirituality, Kees Waaijman, recognized, I argue that this phenomenon 'touches the core of our human existence: our relation to the Absolute', and furthermore, as 'latently present as a quiet force in the background, an inspiration and an orientation … [which] sometimes … forces its way into our consciousness as an inescapable Presence … [it] demands shaping and thorough reflection' (2002, p. 1). I am arguing in this thesis that spirituality hinges on multiple 'movements' of transformation of the human 'self'. In relation to this, theologian, Kees Waaijman has recognized the significance of spirituality as a subject of research which holds benefit for the *ecclesia*, arguing that spirituality plays an important role in conversations between Christian denominations, as well as between denominations and religious traditions in the global world (2002, p. 1). His extensive scholarship on spirituality has influenced both the *form* of this theopoetic experiment, and my appreciation for its relevance for the *ecclesia* and those who participate in communities other than Christian.

[129] For more information on this argument, a contrasting thesis, and a challenge to engage in it with openness and discernment, refer to Grenz (1998, pp. 35-62, 81-100), Long (2006, pp. 1-18), and Johnson (2002, pp. 367-372), respectively.

3.3.3 Mystagogy - A Method for Spirituality Research

Waaijman's work examined *forms* of spirituality across religious traditions.[130] One chapter in his book focuses on mystagogic research, and isolates the phenomenon of spiritual transformation in the lives of Christian ancients and figures in the history of this religious tradition (Waaijman, 2002, pp. 895-911). As he analyzed the autobiographies of five renowned persons, he asked the following questions: 1) 'How does lived spirituality present itself in its multiformity?' 2) 'How can the 'spirituality phenomenon' be defined?' 3) 'What methodology has to be developed in order for us to examine this area of reality thus documented and conceptualized?' (Waaijman, 2002, pp. 2-3). The following motifs described the spirituality of the lives he examined: 1) 'transformation-in-creation'; 2) 'transformation-in-reformation'; 3) 'transformation-in-conformity'; 4) 'transformation-in-love'; and finally, 5) 'transformation-in-glory';[131] This question of transformation is related to human Becoming.

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[130] The name of Waaijman's comprehensive book is *Spirituality: Forms, Foundations, Methods* (2002).

[131] 1) 'transformation-in-creation', was seen in St. Augustine, as he experienced a process of growing conscious of the creative power of God in him (pp. 895-898); 2) 'transformation-in-reformation', referred to Thomas Merton's ongoing conversion from what he called, a 'self-centred' person, to One whose life purpose was altered from self-interest (pp. 895, 898-902); 3) 'transformation-in-conformity', described Paul the Apostle's experience of conformity to a 'way', rather than an 'end' (pp. 895, 902-904); 4) 'transformation-in-love', was the term for Catherine of Siena's experience of her soul being transformed into a 'divine I', growing progressively in deepening love for God; and 5) 'transformation-in-glory', described the experience of Thérèse of Lisieux, who knew transformation only after experiencing a 'night of nothingness', when all joy and anticipation of God had disappeared. Thérèse's focus on sorrow was transformed into a desire to love, 'to the point of dying love' (Waaijman, 2002, pp. 895, 911; pp. 907-911).Waaijman's research intended to provide analysis which stood up to academic scrutiny, while respecting the needs of a global religious community which engaged with spirituality of different forms. In a chapter on 'countermovements' of spirituality, he referred to John Fortunato's 1984 publication, *Embracing the Exile: Healing Journeys of Gay Christians* among others. Waaijman mentioned the spiritualities of LGBTQ persons in the contemporary context, but, briefly. Also, he did not reflect on the processes by which LGBTQ persons pass through what he described as the transformative 'crisis experience' by which individuals exercise faith in 'body, nature, cosmos, and God' (Waaijman, 2002, p. 219). This is a needful area of investigation missing from Waaijman's comprehensive work.

3.3.3.1 Becoming as process - the soul's 'transformation'

Waaijman's analysis included transformation of the construct he named the 'soul', or the 'core of life' (2002, p. 440). He commented that in the Hebrew language, the 'soul', referred to as *nephesh*, had a meaning of 'the power to germinate', 'growth', and 'spontaneity', thus, depicting movement (Waaijman, 2002, p. 440); and in humans who inhabit a body, *nephesh* is sustained by breath and blood (Waaijman, 2002, p. 440). Waaijman suggested that the soul's 'personal self-manifestation', or the 'I' (i.e. the *essence* of the individual), displays outward characteristics, thus reflecting its inner state (Waaijman, 2002, p. 441). One example of this is the 'I's' potential to 'Become the answer-for-the-other', as it can be responsible, displacing its tendency toward 'self-centredness and egoism' (Waaijman, 2002, p. 889); therefore, he propounded, the 'soul', 'becoming' through transformation, is the home of the 'I',[132] as the two relate as a unit (Waaijman, 2002, p. 441), seeking companionship with God, the soul is 'God's covenant partner' (Waaijman, 2002, pp. 444, 478).

Attributing the role of Creator to God, Waaijman interpreted Gen 1:26 as an attestation of the creative act, 'Let us make the earthling as our *tselem* (adumbration), into our likeness' (2002, p. 447). He described God as 'the sculptor', and human persons as the 'sculpted', intimating humankind's relationship of dependency with God; being a 'shadow' of God, without whom/which they would have no purpose for being, he theorizes that persons would disappear into nothingness (Waaijman, 2002, pp. 447, 448).

[132] Waiijman adds furthermore, that the 'soul' may choose to develop its strengths, and respond to wise counsel, but, may also react in antagonism, thus injuring the 'soul' (2002, p. 441).

In the field of psychology, psychologist and spiritual director, David Benner, also contends that the aim of spirituality is transformation, and he argues that its *telos* is full human personhood (2011, pp. 33-37). He claims that psychological features of 'becoming' are hinged on persons' resolution of psychic features which pertain to the core identity of the 'self', my point of focus now.

3.3.4 Spirituality as Holistic Becoming

3.3.4.1 Contributions of psychology and psychoanalysis

Benner proposes that psychology and religion are both preoccupied with the human experience of life, which is a journey of 'becoming', or 'becoming fully human',[133] and for a follower of the Western Christian tradition, he claims, a fulsome humanity is supported by a robust Christian spirituality (2011, p. xii). While a religious context for spirituality can provide a transcendent referential for meaningful living, non-religious spiritualities are sought with a similar aim of fostering connection with a reality greater than the 'self' (Benner, 2011, pp. 54, 65, 72).[134]

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[133] Historically, Benner reminds, religion and spirituality have been 'intrinsically connected', religion has served as 'the container' in which spirituality operates, despite misunderstandings of a role such as this (2011, p. 67). While 'institutional religion' includes traditions, practices, and creeds, which can foster connection with the Divine, Benner argues that it can also be pursued in a 'soulless' way, without deep connection to anything apart from the 'self' (2011, p. 67).

[134] A reality greater than the 'self' is not necessarily a reference to an Ultimate Being, as many describe God or the Divine. For instance, in an eastern Canadian study on the way eleven women identifying as LGBTQ reconfigured their spirituality and sexual/gender identity, spirituality was defined loosely, in terms of individuals' relationship to the 'self, the sacred, transcendence, wholeness' (Hattie and Beagan, 2013, p. 261). Participants reported having been involved in Christian churches, but in order to experience spiritual wholeness which did not require the denial of their sexual and gender identity, their journeys of Becoming led most of them to disengage with religion (Hattie and Beagan, 2013, pp. 262, 263). One participant defined her spirituality in these words: 'It's a feeling of connection to something bigger, it's a part of a wholeness' (Hattie and Beagan, 2013, p. 261). This finding is consistent with Benner's view of spirituality as including various forms of connection with a reality greater than one 'self' (Benner, 2011, pp. 54, 65). For instance, Benner elaborates on factors such as loving relationships, having a sense of belonging that is deep, and being committed to something ultimately meaningful (Benner, 2011, p. 72).

Benner expands on psychology's concern with the formation of individuals' *Ego* identity, a sense of 'self', that is both primitive, and externally-focused (2011, pp. 56-57).[135] The *Ego* is theorized to develop through differentiation, a process of separation, which commences after birth, and marks the disruption of the union an infant enjoyed with the mother (Benner, 2011, p. 58). Infants gain a sense of the 'I' by separating the 'self' from the Other at about 18 months of age, and Benner refers to this as the time of 'psychological birth' (2011, p. 59); subsequently, separation continues with all which surrounds and interacts with the *Ego* (ibid.). Another important part of this theorizing is that the egoic 'self' also relates with its authentic version, the 'Self', and other persons about it. But, because the *Ego* is very susceptible to thoughts, images, and messages, both internal and external to it, it is inevitable that the sense of 'I' it has developed, is a false one, requiring realignment (Benner, 2011, p. 59). This realignment is the re-establishment of *belonging to someone or something which transcends* the 'Self', replacing what was initially lost in the individual's union with the mother (Benner, 2011, p. 59). *Ego* formation moves through a series of developmental stages, into adulthood, and Benner explains that although some people progress toward maturity, not everyone enjoys this, and, they lack a sense of identity and security (2011, p. 58).

Theopoetic philosopher of religion, Peter Rollins, adopts another perspective, applying psychoanalytic theory to what he, too, describes as psychic trauma experienced by an infant. Drawing on the insights of psychoanalyst, Jacques Lacan, Rollins locates human dissatisfaction in a loss with origins at birth, one he refers to as a 'primordial

[135] In my writing, the capitalized word, 'Self' here, is Benner's term for the authentic version of the 'self' that is not dictated by the whims of the *Ego*. All other references to the 'self' begin with a lower-case 's'.

separation' from the true 'Self'.[136] In the Western Christian tradition, Rollins clarifies this 'lack' as being connected to the concept of 'Original Sin' (Rollins, 2012, pp. 87, 88). What Lacan described as a traumatic event is a form of psychological alarm, arrest, or confusion, perpetrated by an encounter with an event that is incomprehensible,[137] and he referred to the trauma as 'the Real' (Rollins, 2011, pp. 21-23).[138]

From this psychoanalytic purview, Rollins posits that, when as infants, individuals begin to gain experience of the world, a conscious sense of selfhood (i.e. self-consciousness) begins, and along with it, is a sense of 'that which is 'not I' ' (2012, pp. 13, 14). However, he explains, because infants did not possess a sense of 'self' prior to this time, the loss they feel is actually, an illusion; nonetheless, their sense of 'primordial separation' remains, and what develops from this, is a human tendency to seek ways to fill this 'gap'.[139] Moreover, separation from who they appreciate their 'self' to be, results in persons constructing 'Idols', to which they turn in an attempt to satisfy themselves (Rollins, 2012, pp. 47-49); as this false image, or representation of who they are, is embraced, they become separated from their 'Self', increasingly (Rollins, 2012, pp. 54, 57, 58).

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[136] As I have done in referring to the authentic version of a person, the 'Self' that Benner has described, I employ the same practice citing the opinion of Rollins. Here, I also capitalize the noun, 'Self'.

[137] The trauma, as theorized by Lacan, is comparable to Benner's description of the disruption of the infant's separation from the mother.

[138] Senior Lecturer, Sean Homer provides detailed teaching on 'the Real' in his book on Jacques Lacan, where he explains this Lacanian construct more fully (2005, p. 83). The construct of 'the Real' is applied to the life of Sophie, in section 5.2.2.4.

[139] The 'gap', referring to a 'primal separation', has been understood in the past, using the term, 'Original Sin'; thus, Rollins argues, the Christian Church has contributed to persons' impressions of what this 'gap' entails, its proscriptions concerning spirituality, and related 'products' endeavour to fill this 'gap', 'products' including God and Jesus (2012, pp. 14, 20, 22, 43, 49).

3.3.4.2 Reconnecting the Ego with the 'Self'

However, when, as conscious beings, individuals face their innate tendency to construct 'Idols' for themselves, Rollins explains that they are, in essence, confronting the *Ego*; this invites the *Ego* to encounter truth, an absence of falsity, that was in operation in the life of Jesus (2012, p. 87).[140] Confronting truth is an opportunity for transformation, a process Rollins interprets, arises as individuals face the 'gap', and as they choose to live *in Christ* in a way which 'obliterates' this 'gap', they may progress toward freedom from the need to pursue 'Idols'. Rollins refers to this alteration as a way, 'beyond slavery to the Idol' (2012, p. 49). It requires persons to attend to who they are, apart from their egotistic suppositions; relinquishing this dependency while being open to receive the *gift of grace*, 'offers a much deeper and richer form of joy' (Rollins, 2012, p. 86), and the philosopher describes this as 'open[ing] up the possibility of a salvation' that is distinct from other understandings of it (Rollins, 2012, p. 92). Sacrificing false gods, and embracing the potential to live into One's true 'Self' leads to self-knowing, and thus, individuals relinquish what Rollins defines as *in-humanity* or *pre-humanity* (Rollins, 2012, p. 134-135).[141]

In Benner's analysis, however, the journey of spirituality unfolds subsequent to *Ego* formation and maturity; [142] as the *Ego* is transcended, One's connection with the

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[140] Western Christian religious tradition teaches that in his humanity, Jesus did not engender an attachment to an 'Idol'. He lived as an authentic 'Self' facing 'the Real', depending on God to meet his daily needs.

[141] Rollins posits that as persons confront 'the Real', the journey toward 'freedom' progresses (Rollins, 2012, pp. 86, 87), although he does not use the term 'spirituality' to describe it.

[142] While I recognize the usefulness of Benner's propositions concerning spirituality, regarding the *Ego* and spirituality, I have not arrived at the same conclusion as he, namely, that spirituality is dependent on persons' psychological growth, the maturing of the *Ego*; without which, there is no 'self' (2011, p. 59); furthermore, there is no potential to exercise judgement and interpersonal relations (Benner, 2011, p. 64), or the hope, that, he claims, is a 'spiritual posture' (Benner, 2011, p. 54). Not only do such conclusions marginalize human persons with challenged cognitive capacities, whose egoic tendencies cannot always be expressed, or determined by an Other, Benner's corollaries exclude these unique Ones from the possibility of growth in the way of spirituality; his argument is unlikely to be embraced by scholars and professionals who live

authentic ‘Self’ establishes psychic union by an inward re-turning, making interpersonal connection and complementarity possible (Benner, 2011, p. 54, 59, 65).

3.3.4.3 The body - the ground of the ‘self’ and Becoming

In addition to experiencing union with One’s ‘Self’, in Benner’s purview, spirituality involves sensitivity to the body, the home of the ‘Self’. Because alienation from One’s body breeds a lack of being at home with One’s ‘Self’ (Benner, 2011, p. 79),[143] significant psychological and behavioural consequences result when One is not sensitive to their somatic realities; compartmentalization ensues from poor bodily awareness and integration, resulting in efforts to replace a grounding in the body with attachments to things, persons, activities, or beliefs (Benner, 2011, p. 79).

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and work with persons experiencing developmental and cognitive disabilities (McKanan, 2020, p. 15). Dan McKanan is a Senior Lecturer in religious and spiritual movements for social transformation. He is one of the voices in the field of social change and environmental activism who offers insight into philosophies which can marginalize human persons, and that are insidious. In his overview of the community of Camphill, McKanan describes it as a movement that is ‘suffused with intentionality’, and ‘shaped by a distinctive spirituality’ (2020, p. 1). This researcher describes the history and appearance of Camphill communities across the world (2020, pp. 3, 6-8), where many persons described as intellectually or developmentally challenged by society at-large, reside alongside persons whose work involves cultivating a setting characterized by the ‘anthroposophical’ spirituality, developed by its founder, Rudolf Steiner (1861-1925) (McKanan, 2020, p. 2). The term ‘anthroposophical’ refers to the founder’s precept of anthroposophy, ‘a path of knowledge aiming to guide the spiritual element in the human being to the spiritual in the universe’ (Steiner, R., 1973, complete edition 26, translated by George and Mary Adams, cited in McKanan, 2020, p. 9). McKanan views the core of this unique spiritual way as focused on ‘balance: balance between the human and the cosmic, between spiritual traditions of East and West, between ancient wisdom and the scientific research methods of the modern West’, a priority that is evident in the Waldorf education system derived from it, for the purpose of nurturing the ‘spirit, soul, and body’ of children (2020, p. 9). Another historical leader in the Camphill movement was Karl König, who contested that ‘disablement’ was ‘endemic to all materialist societies and that the antidote was a renewal of spirituality’ (McKanan, 2020, p. 15). The marginalization of human persons in the name of religion and spirituality is a matter which runs counter the theme of ‘freedom-*for*-love in this research, as well as to the Camphill movement’s value of all persons contributing to ‘a cosmic destiny’ (ibid.). Any further comment on theories pertaining to disability studies and spirituality, and to Benner’s psychological understandings, are beyond the purview of this thesis.

[143] The limitations human persons experience on the journey of Becoming are those about which Benner and Rollins can only conjecture. From his purview, Benner posits that Becoming does not transpire fully until after reconnection with the authentic ‘Self’ has occurred - at death, the final stage of life (2011, p. 54).

However, a significant way persons may give their physical 'being' to their 'Self',[144] Others, and God, is through sexuality. Sexuality as an important way to express One's spirituality because of its focus on pleasure, affection, care for the Other, and its release of psychic tension (Benner, 2011, p. 86). Being in touch with One's 'Self', aloneness, and desire for the Other, while being free to relinquish control, allows an individual to enjoy sexuality with those they love, and this is a significant quality of spirituality (Benner, 2011, pp. 86, 87).[145] Sexuality offers release of human tendencies of control, thus, its integration with spirituality is distinct,[146] for the intimacy to which sexuality points transforms human persons. It is the intimacy of love (ibid.).

3.3.5 Spirituality – Psychological/Theological, Objective/Subjective Tensions

Benner's psychological framework differs in some ways from Lacan's psychoanalytic one, still, the two share the modern, systemic tendency of approaching human experience from a structural point of reference; they proffer fixed, comprehensible paths of development, rather than more nebulous, enigmatic, unpredictable appreciations

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[144] I acknowledge that where a human's relationship to their person is concerned, my current insight into the distinction between the 'self' and the 'Self' continues to develop. While it deserves attention, providing more evidence to support such a claim is beyond the scope of my present work.

[145] Ultimately, sexuality speaks of the human desire to be one with divine Mystery, and this is why human sex remains limited in its potential to fulfill the human longing for intimacy with cosmic Mystery (Benner, 2011, pp. 88, 89). Hence, Benner shares that Sufi sexuality and spirituality values human groundedness in bodily 'union with God that is love' (Benner, 2011, p. 89).

[146] According to Benner, the conflict persons experience when they ignore their bodies' knowledges, is a consequence of dissociating their bodily sensations from other parts of their 'self' (e.g. the emotions); this results in more vulnerability to seek persons, things, or activities to achieve a sense of being at home in the 'self' (Benner, 2011, p. 79). This matter is of significance for nonbinary persons, for they are often advised that their bodily sensations warrant a feeling of shame, they feel compelled to reject, or to repent of them. As a group, they have attended to, and sometimes internalized, societal messages that their bodily awarenesses are errant or sinful. An example of this belief appears in the narrative of Andy, section 4.3.2.3, and in Note 238 in the same section.

of lived experiences postulated by postmodern theorists.

In fact, in terms of theories of psychotherapy and counselling, David Hart's commentary on the therapeutic modality of Gestalt Therapy, presents this as a practice involving mindfulness, a focus on the 'present-moment', which 'afford individuals the psychic space required to gain insight into their spiritual nature - we are more than the sum of our parts' (2015, p. 39). Hart explains a critical part of both spirituality and Gestalt therapy as: an 'understanding the nature of internal polarities and the function of non-duality' (ibid.). His understanding demonstrates the tension I have recognized in separating the spiritual from psychological, subjective from objective facets of Becoming, supporting my thesis concerning the need for a pluralistic, constructive theopoetic framework with which to explore LGBTQ spirituality.[147]

To be specific, in his writing on LGBTQ spirituality, Hart draws on R. Elliott Ingersoll (2005), professor of counsellor education, who discusses the dialectical relationship between Gestalt therapy and spirituality. Ingersoll refers to his discovery, alongside Ansel Woldt, ten years previous, of two tools on which they could draw to 'operationalize constructs': the Taoist Tai Ji symbols of 'yin/yang' (Ingersoll, 2005, p. 134). The former, 'yin' language refers to 'the language of subjective or interior experience', while 'yang'

[147] Gestalt therapy was a term that originated in the practice of German psychiatrist, psychoanalyst, and psychotherapist Friedrich (Fritz) Perls (1893-1970). The term, 'gestalt' refers to a 'form, configuration, or totality that, as a unified whole, has properties that cannot be derived by summation from the parts … because it is supple and flowing, so that the relationships between the parts and the environment constantly change ... with the formation of any gestalt, one is faced with the same problem of representation that we faced in trying to represent spirit with fixed, linear symbols' (Ingersoll, 2005, p. 138). Also, Gestalt therapy is a modality which practices 'a trust in nature', express[ed] in a 'trust of the organism of the person and a reverence for that organism's natural processes'. (Ingersoll, 2015, p. 139). As a therapeutic modality, it is compatible with themes of fluidity, chaos, and the acceptance of seemingly disparate, polar opposites. It is understandable then, as Ingersoll raises two questions concerning life which often lead people onto a path of spirituality: 1) 'Is life basically safe?' and 2) 'Can it be trusted?' (ibid.).These are issues of trust of life and its experiences, and the people One encounters in the course of life (ibid).

language refers to words used to operationalize the behavioural, outward manifestations of personal realities (ibid.). In fact, even 30 years ago, Ingersoll wondered, 'how can one define as a construct what is the apex of human development and one of the most meaningful lines of human development [spirituality]?' (2005, p. 134).

Aaron Balick, researcher and integrative psychoanalytic psychotherapist, introduces a perceptive caution on this topic. He argues against researchers applying postmodern theories - such as queer theory - to therapeutic processes; this is because individuals' subjectivities are not the source of postmodern thinking - that originated from theories related to social structure, not human subjectivity, that is the concern of psychotherapy (2011, p. 17). Hence, when recommending an *approach* to psychotherapy with LGBTQ persons, Balick's suggestions include 'the relational approach', a 'theoretical innovation', that he recognizes as 'cross-theoretical and integrative, offering a non-dogmatic, yet theoretically concise view of the therapeutic relationship' (ibid.). Thus, he considers the 'relational approach' to be a 'metatheory, a *framework* or *schema* which provides the necessary structure with which to go on building coherent and comprehensive … theories' (Aron and Harris, 2005, p. xviii, cited in Balick, 2011, p. 17).

This is an apt way to conclude this discussion of the tension between the psychological and theological, and the subjective and objective aspects of spirituality. For Balick's reference to a 'metatheory' can be compared to this grounded *theopoiesis*, that is, in view of his reasons, epistemologically, the theory grounded in participants' narratives does not function like a 'scientific' 'theory', perse (2011, p. 17); by using it, I seek neither conclude, nor predict, but rather, to offer a frame, a guide with which to appreciate the subjective mysteries discovered in the data which follow in subsequent

chapters,[148] for spirituality demonstrates a dialogical tension, an essence that is psychological *and* theological, subjective in experience, *with* objective evidence.

3.3.6 Section Summary

In this section, I introduced literature on spirituality as theopoetics, and the teaching of Sandra Schneiders, who explains the distinction between spirituality and theology, a matter misunderstood regularly in the Western Christian tradition. Schneiders demonstrates subjective *experience* as the domain of biblical spirituality, while biblical theology informs the Church about the biblical text, and the history and traditions which inform persons' faith. Kees Waaijman's mystagogic research referred to spirituality as transformation of the human 'soul', the home of the 'I', which seeks union with the Creator.

Next I focused on David Benner's writing on psychology and spirituality, which also appreciated the significance of personal transformation, and its connection to the mature 'Self', which includes the sexuate 'self', shared with the Other. I applied Peter Rollins'

[148] Recognizing that the language of Gestalt therapy, which focuses on subjective or inner experience does not carry much weight in modern culture (ibid.), Ingersoll could not deny that spirituality does not lend itself to 'yang' language, for, as some have commented, 'trying to capture the concept is almost antithetical to the idea itself' (2005, p. 135). Actually, spirituality is more often related to 'one's search for meaning, belonging, and the core values that influence one's behaviour … interconnectedness, self-transcendence, and integrity' (ibid.). This is something that has been voiced by philosopher, Ken Wilber, in language similar to theologian, Paul Tillich: spirituality is 'that line of development in which the subject holds its ultimate concern' (Wilber, 1997, p. 221, cited in Ingersoll, 2005, p. 136). Thus, Hart recommends approaching spirituality from a meta-theoretical approach in the context of counselling, for, spirituality is a part of persons' cultural identity, it influences their sense of 'self' (2015, p. 49). Therefore, I conclude that because of the plurality of human experience, no one body of knowledge (i.e. discipline) or knowledge of a particular cultural origin (i.e. language, ethnicity, race, sexuality, gender, or other quality) is sufficient to define spirituality, a process I believe is endemic to human life (Ingersoll, 2005, p. 135). It requires multiple understandings, various theological constructions, to approach it respectfully as a cosmic reality of mystery. As Swinton and Pattison conclude, it is a 'thin', 'vague' subjective reality, evident in retrospect, in the actions of human persons (2010, p. 233).

theopoetics to contribute unique Lacanian psychoanalytic insights, describing human transformation by way of the ‘ self’s ’ psychic confrontation of ‘the Real’, a traumatic encounter of human dependency with natal origins. I emphasized how, in this process, persons learn the embrace of vulnerability, forgo ‘slavery to their ‘Idols’, and in freedom, learn dependence on God. I ended with comments on the priority of bodily awareness and Becoming.

Before leaving this key section, I addressed the dialectical tensions inherent in grasping spirituality as a phenomenon that is both theological/psychological and subjective/objective. I drew on multiple epistemological knowledges, both modern and postmodern, including those of David Hart (psychology and counselling), R. Elliott Ingersoll (Gestalt Therapy), Aaron Balick (psychoanalysis), David Benner (psychology), and finally, John Swinton and Stephen Pattison (practical theology, spirituality).

The type of personal ‘knowing’ of which spirituality speaks - the investment of the ‘self’ into Self, Other, and the Divine - is a process of transformation that occurs through ‘knowing’ and being ‘known’. Queer theologians are constructive theologians, and some have described theology as concerning ‘a loving style of relationship’ (Althaus-Reid and Isherwood 2007, p. 303), positioning theology within the context of Divine love and the incarnation.[149] They write about the human encounter, of ‘new curiosities and challenges’, where persons are ‘draw[n] into more of ourselves as we spiral in the human/divine dance’ (Althaus-Reid and Isherwood, 2007, p. 309). While these narratives have not been the primary focus of Western Christianity, the stories of those who are marginalized have

[149] Incarnation is the subject of an upcoming section, 3.5.3.1.

always already been there. Constructive theology seeks to make them known.[150]

3.4 Constructive Theology – Stages, Progression, Defining Values

3.4.1 Introduction

This section outlines constructive theology, as introduced by constructive theologians, Jason Wyman and Marion Grau. I provide a summary of three stages of this theological trend since its appearance on the Western Christian landscape. It is defined by: 1) proto-constructive theology; 2) prolegomena; and 3) The Workgroup on Constructive Theology. I share a definition of constructive theology, while recognizing an issue that has been ongoing throughout its existence.

3.4.2 Proto-constructive Theology

The stage of proto-constructive theology was the beginning of the creative, liberal trend in theological construction in the Western world in the early 20th Century (Wyman, 2020, p. 9).[151] The first publication of a book, described as constructive theology, was produced by a group of Oxford tutors, as early as 1902 (Wyman, 2020, p. 11);[152] Jason Wyman summarized this shift in theological thinking in these words: 'What these books do show is the rising use of the word 'constructive' and its legitimacy in theology, how it begins to unsettle established ways of doing theology, and some of the characteristics that would come to be definitive for constructive theology in its mature form' (Wyman,

[150] Constructive theologian Marion Grau explains that 'constructive theologians are concerned with writing '*a more reflective account of narrations of the sacred*' (2020, p. 54; italics mine). With this in mind, refer to the writing of: Goss (2002, p. 22); Althaus-Reid (2003, p. 148); Robinson (2010, p. 115); Schneider & Roncolato (2012, p. 10); Barnsley (2013, p. 19); Peckruhn (2020, p. 77); and Wyman (2020, pp. 26-27).
[151] The prefix 'proto', means 'first', 'foremost', or 'earliest form of'.
[152] These included Hastings Rashdall, and William Sanday, the latter academic being the first to employ the term 'constructive theology' in describing his work (Wyman, 2020, pp. 11).

2020, p. 15). The writing of some lesser-known theologians in North America demonstrated a similar, growing displacement of systematic and dogmatic theologies by scholars on this continent, reflected in the words of Newman Smyth in 1913: 'We should seek to understand anew what the Spirit hath to say to the churches … spoils of natural sciences wait to be utilized by a new natural theology … the reconstruction of systematic theology, which is desirable, requires a broad and deeply laid foundation in natural theology' (Smyth, 1913, p. 32, cited in Grau and Wyman, 2020, pp. 15-16).[153] Less conspicuous, but important figures such as Smyth, remained in the background, and their goal was to construct theology which would serve the people (Wyman, 2020. p. 11). In the 1960's, the newly-recognized scholarship of Black Liberation theologians, such as James Cone, and other non-White scholars (Wyman, 2018, pp. 5-6), joined the conversation, theologizing on social issues of concern to them, and sharing values of ecumenism, unity, and justice (Wyman, 2020, p. 11; Wyman, 2017, pp. 315, 319).[154]

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[153] Smyth's words here reflect the constructive theologian's acceptance of the legitimacy of discerning truths available in the world, in nature's multiple forms. Indeed, he saw no difference in One's appreciation of truth via natural science and theology's various forms. Accompanying Smyth's arguments were those of scholars such as James Ten Broeke, known as a gifted teacher at McMaster University, in Canada, and who was of the opinion that Christianity was not a system of unquestionable thought, but should be critiqued continually (Grau and Wyman, 2020, p. 17).Wyman quotes these words of Ten Broeke: 'Shall we simply continue to pull down the old house without being sure that we are able to build a better? Or shall we make not too radical changes and live in the hold [sic] house still? … In the present condition of things, it is to be expected that a good working hypothesis serviceable in the conduct of the individual and social religious life is about all that can be obtained without becoming dogmatic … the present affords much that is favourable to the construction of a theological view that will serve the religious life of the present' (Ten Broeke, 1914, pp. 248-249, cited in Grau and Wyman, 2020, p. 17). Theologian, Bernard Eugene Meland, of Chicago Divinity School, was another theologian, known for his insistence on capturing theology's 'imaginative' nature through myth, and who, in North America, was the first to use the word 'constructive' (Wyman, 2020, pp. 11, 12, 18, 19).

[154] Separately, in Latin America, theological construction was embraced as necessary for recognizing the missing theological insights of Latin American persons in the field. Theologian Gustavo Gutierrez, published *A Theology of Liberation*, in 1971, a ground-breaking work which highlighted the need for theology which speaks to the lived realities of the poor. Subsequently, Argentinian-born theologian, Marcella Althaus-Reid, became known for her critique of the Liberation Theology movement from her book, *Indecent Theology* (2000), emphasizing sexual stories of non-heteronormative persons as additional sources for theologizing.

3.4.3 Prolegomena

By the mid-1970's, a second wave arose. Key figures, known as 'prolegomena', followed their proto-constructive predecessors, and were recognized as persons who, 'both precede it and [are] adamantly a part of it' (Wyman, 2020, p. 19).[155] An example was Gordon Kaufman, of Harvard Divinity School, who spoke unabashedly about 'the damage bad theology does in the world', insisting that theologians be called to task for enabling travesties of justice, including the potential for nuclear destruction (Wyman, 2020, pp. 19-20). David Tracy, a Catholic contributor, shared sensibilities shaped by this tradition, valuing the riches of ecumenism, believing that theologians should detail their constructive methodologies with clarity and carry them out with transparency, to enable colleagues to critique and refine their theological constructions (Wyman, 2020, p. 21). Edward Farley, of Vanderbilt Divinity School, known for arguing that Christian structures were 'ultimately inaccessible to cognition', contended that theologians needed to look to other disciplines of learning, to employ them in the deconstruction and reconstruction of theology (Wyman, 2020, p. 20); Sallie McFague's interest in literary theory, language, and metaphor, led her to approach Christian scripture as a wellspring of knowledges, underlying which, lay images and metaphors, awaiting discovery (Wyman, 2020, pp. 22-23).

3.4.4 The Workgroup on Constructive Theology

In 1975, a change in leadership in a North American university instigated the third hallmark in this genre of theological conversation in academic circles of influence (Wyman,

[155] Newman Smyth, and James Ten Broeke, lesser-known theologians, belong here, and while outspoken in their beliefs, they remained in the background of the burgeoning field.

2017, p. 313). The Workgroup on Constructive Theology began holding annual meetings at Vanderbilt Divinity School (Wyman, 2020, pp. 22), and aimed to be a community which would express the beauty of theological truths *as the lived experience* of the Christian faith (Wyman, 2020, pp. 27-28). But there were others, marginalized, among them: Liberation theologies which prioritized the lived experiences and knowledges of the poor; Black Liberation theologies; feminist theologies; and Queer theologies, representing the concerns of individuals identifying as non-binary in gender and sexual orientation (Wyman, 2020, p. 1).[156]

3.4.5 Defining Values

Today, an ecumenical body of constructive theologians strives toward the following values and orientations: 1) plurality; 2) theological expression through justice and activism; 3) being highly 'dialogical'; 4) being process-oriented (versus systematically-oriented); 5) 'building upon and departing from other modes of theology'; 6) welcoming a wide range of epistemologies, including interdisciplinary ones; and 7) acknowledging the gift of multiple perspectives and methods for approaching human, ecological, and universal questions related to the Divine (Grau and Wyman, pp. 2-3, 23). These theologians do not value one model over another, but recognize multiple contexts and cultures which have shaped their sensibilities, and represent innumerable starting points from which to engage theories of God (Grau, 2020, p. 58; Wyman, 2017, pp. 312-314).

[156] To varying degrees, the Workgroup attracted the attention of notable minority leaders, who included James Cone, Dorothee Söelle, and Sallie McFague, however not all who were invited chose to be involved in a significant way (Wyman, 2020, pp. 26-28). Still, in its gatherings and publications, the Workgroup appeared to be tethered to the very theological systematizations it criticized (Wyman, 2020, pp. 24-27).

3.4.6 Section Summary

In this section, I shared Grau's and Wyman's reviews on the appearance of constructive theology in the Western world, a liberal, ecumenical, approach to theoretical construction at the dawn of the 20th Century. Providing a summary of its stages, and the progression of its values and practices, I noted that this gathering of theological minds held to lofty aspirations, while still, unable to overcome the sensitive nature of challenges in recognizing multiplicity in diversity.

In the next section, I leave this broad domain, to enter the specificity of the theories of some of its scholars. Certain ones describe themselves as engaged in a vocation of constructive theology, while Others employ different terms to explain their contributions to theological construction. They are the ground of my constructive theologizing.

3.5 Constructive Theologies Shaping this Grounded Theory

3.5.1 Introduction

I begin this section with the theopoetic work of Melanie May. May's encounters with 'death and resurrection' led to her awarenesses and understandings of the human body's knowledges. I follow May's contributions with teaching from theologians in 'indecent' and Queer theology,[157] works by Marcella Althaus-Reid, Lisa Isherwood, Robert Goss, and Jennie Barnsley, which speak of additional gifts of the corporeal body, including sexual intimacy, loving responses of justice, and theological constructions concerning the Divine. Catherine Keller's process theology completes this set, with distinct concepts of the

[157] I define and discuss 'indecent' theology in section 3.5.3.1, which follows.

'becoming' of God and createds, opening out of the *tehom* of 'the deep'.

3.5.2 Theopoetics – Experience of the Body, Personal Presence, and God

Christian minister and theopoetic writer, Melanie May, argued that persons' encounter with their body is a primal location for theological knowledge (May, 1995, p. 23). She claimed that in their humanity, individuals are capable of offering their presence to the 'self', the Divine, and other createds (May, 1995, p. 70). Moreover, the most significant of encounters that persons know is presence to their bodies, the womb of the 'self', where God reveals Godself (May, 1995, p. 103). Referring to John A.T. Robinson's writing on the 'Hebraic sense of the 'body' … as connectedness', May recognized the body as the source of connection One has with every other living creature, the cosmos, and the history of the world (ibid.). Furthermore, by being 'alive and real', in encounters with Others, One enables Others 'to come alive' in a way which does not occur when One is estranged from 'self' or Other (May, 1995, p. 88). Thus, for May, honouring presence signifies persons' prerogative to live authentically as they are created, to express the truth of their creaturely life as a revelation concerning God (May, 1995, p. 90); for human persons, she stated, this is tantamount to 'claiming our birthright' (May, 1995, p. 91).[158] Also, May argued that Divinity expresses Godself through multiplicity, thus, together, the whole of humanity represents the body of Christ (May, 1995, p. 85). Consequently, because God is present in and with all of creation, denying the sacredness of *all* bodies is tantamount to disrespecting the glory of God (May, 1995, p. 85). May's theological

[158] Referring to the teachings of Irenaeus, May expressed that, human bodies, fully alive, are sacred, 'doxologies concerning the glory of God', and this is how human persons are '*imago Dei*' (1995, pp. 24).

construction, thus, situates God *in* the human *body*, providing a rationale for respecting and valuing every One.

Among the theological sensibilities that have arisen to promote the inclusion of diverse bodies, genders, and sexual orientations in theologizing are those of Queer and 'Indecent' theology. Writing on the emergence of Queer theologies in Christian theology, Laurel Schneider and Carolyn Roncolato reviewed Queer theology's roots in Liberation theology (2012), extending Liberation theology's critiques from racial and socioeconomic marginalization, to those experienced by LGBTQ persons. They reminded readers of the impossibility of constructing a Queer theology which represents the full diversity of lived realities within the broad spectrum of Queer identities and realities (Schneider and Roncolato, 2012, p. 8); their existence makes ecumenical dialogue more critical, and queering theology, a task for the future (Schneider and Roncolato, 2012, pp. 9, 10). I start with the contributions of Marcella Althaus-Reid and Lisa Isherwood.

3.5.3 Human Lived Experience in Queer and 'Indecent' Theology

Introducing their perspective on theology, Queer theologians, Marcella Althaus-Reid and Lisa Isherwood expressed the daunting task of talking theology evocatively:

> To talk theology is to talk about a loving style of relationship. Theological themes are themes of love, even if perhaps this has been obscured by centuries of using a terminology which may have lost its original transparency … It is in this frame that we would like to present queer theology as a radical form of the 'love-talk of theology', that is a theology which introduces a profound questioning into the ways of love in our lives as individuals and as society; and the things love can do in our world. Queering theology provides us with more than a reflection: it is a Christian praxis which aims to rethink

> alternative and radical ways of transformation in our present world so shaken by the contradictions of globalization (Althaus-Reid and Isherwood, 2004, pp. 2, 3).[159]

They argued that because the Western Christian Church has been overrun by its own idolization of select images of human ideals where race, gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, ability, language, and other qualities are concerned, the Church has failed to carry out theology's call to love (Althaus-Reid and Isherwood, 2004, p. 2). Consequently, it has created God and theology in its own narrow image - one which reflects its preferred culture, and excludes theological knowledges of Others, whose ways of life are unknown; the result has been a narrow, unquestioned theological praxis, irrelevant to the lived experiences of a large global populous (ibid.). Thus, these queer theologians highlighted the significance of Queer theology as a theological venture, which poses a critical question regarding the meaning of being human in a contemporary context of globalization, which disregards the human prerogative of flourishing (Althaus-Reid and Isherwood, 2004, pp. 7, 8). Queer theology's duty, therefore, is to perform justice for global citizens in a plural world (Althaus-Reid and Isherwood, 2004, p. 3).

Marcella Althaus-Reid is also remembered for her unique project of 'indecenting' theology - opening up a path of 'questioning the traditional liberationist context of doing theology' by 'disrupting' it (2000, p. 5).[160] This scholar impressed on

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[159] This research discusses journeys of human Becoming in six persons whose lives were transformed through loving encounters with self, Others, and the Divine. I present these journeys as encompassed in ten themes, related, under an overarching theme of freedom.

[160] Althaus-Reid employed sexual language metaphorically, expressing theological truths in a poetically evocative, arresting manner, for the purpose of continuing Liberation theology's exercising of 'doubt' in

the academy that the traditions of North Atlantic theology and Latin American Liberation theology, which had shaped her academic career, failed to represent the lived realities of the poor, women, and persons of alternate sexualities – individuals whose lives had not fallen in line with the proscriptions of heteronormative Christian religious orthodoxy and orthopraxy (Althaus-Reid, 2004a, p. 48). The quotidian lives of nonbinary persons had been a missing focus in Western Christian biblical hermeneutics and praxis, and as a result, theology had become impoverished, irrelevant to many LGBTQ persons (Althaus-Reid, 2004a, p. 99; Althaus-Reid, 2000, pp. 4, 5, 6). Because 'people are the source of theology', Althaus-Reid contended, 'the everyday lives of people always provide us with a starting point for a process of doing a contextual theology without exclusion' (Althaus-Reid, 2004a, p. 76; Althaus-Reid 2000, p. 4). Thus, her practice of 'indecent' theology affirmed difference, aiming to make room in the Western Christian Church for the multiplicity of persons who reflect a God, one who, like they, is both marginalized, and Queer (Althaus-Reid, 2004a, pp. 102, 175). Her project of 'indecenting' theology, pursuing a task of 'questioning the traditional liberationist context of doing theology' by 'disrupting' it (Althaus-Reid, 2000, p. 5), employed provocative sexual vocabulary and imagery,

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theology (2000, p. 5). 'Indecenting' theology was the practice of 'questioning' 'hermeneutical principles which led liberationists to be indifferent to the reality of the lemon vendors', persons who were poor, victims of 'androcentric methodologies' of Liberation theologians, and whose truths from the margins were being overrun by Eurocentric theological methodologies (Althaus-Reid, 2000, p. 5). Her 'indecent' theology reflected a passion to inspire persons to reflect on the social constructions of gender and sexuality, and what they reveal to us about God (Althaus-Reid, 2000, p. 179), and her theological reflections were grounded in the quotidian lived realities of persons of varied genders, sexualities, races, economic and social strata, spurring theologians on, to consider 'what justice, what equality, and what liberty are at the core of the theological reflection on globalisation processes' (Althaus-Reid, 2000, p. 180). In doing this, Althaus-Reid anticipated the birth of global transformation of an 'indecent' form, one which would reflect persons' multiple confrontations with the 'decent' Western Christian heterosexual hegemony (2000, p. 193).

thus, engaging the academy to consider the unexpected potentials of doing a theology which includes varied sexual, gendered, and racial lives.[161]

3.5.3.1 Jesus - a beacon of Becoming through incarnation

Along with Queer theologian, Lisa Isherwood, Althaus-Reid insisted,

> That the divine immersed itself in flesh and that flesh is now divine is Queer theology at its peak. There can be no sanitization here or something of the divine essence will be lost – it is not the genetically modified, metaphysical son of god that declares the divine human conjunction but the screaming baby born amidst the cow shit and fleas, covered in his birthing blood and received into the uncertain arms of his child/mother that declares salvation for all … the divine is earthy, messy and partial and is to be found there in all its glory, not in splendid doctrine stripped of all humanness (Althaus-Reid and Isherwood, 2007, p. 310).

The reality of flesh as divine, demands a human encounter with messiness - especially where the object of One's attention is the human child. Writing on the significance of

[161] Althaus-Reid's theology criticized practices of Western theological formation and analysis, that she claimed was involved in a 'production line of theology', which controlled the privileged nature of theological training models and reflection (2000, p. 28). Among these practices were the prescription of education in languages such as English and German, and the marginalization of the voices of Latin American theological thinkers (ibid.). Furthermore, there was the selection of discourse deemed worthy of theological reflection, which did not include poverty. The 'indecent' theologian highlighted the surreptitious establishment of a theological 'economy', which supported the proliferation of a market resulting in women and the poor becoming dependent consumers, rather than partners who could advance thoughtful theological reflection (Althaus-Reid, 2000, pp. 28, 29). She championed social science and qualitative research methods, applications, and reflections which could expand theological learnings based on the experiences of the poor, and racial and sexual minority persons, potentiating 'indecent' reflections in a challenge of the typical heteronormative, patriarchal, capitalist, and classist preoccupations (Althaus-Reid, 2000, pp. 30-35, 64). Also, Althaus-Reid's treatment of the human quality of 'lust' - a pejorative and avoided construct in western Christian heterosexual theological discourse, relative to persons of multiple classes, races, genders, and sexual orientations - was a significant act of 'indecent' theological reflection (2000, p. 73), as she prioritized the legitimacy of human desire and pleasure as inseparable from love, reifying it as a reflection of Divine becoming (Althaus-Reid, 2000, pp. 49, 70). She expressed the value of sharing stories about persons' sexual relations, stating, 'God is desire', and affirming desire's 'social process', one she describes as fueling human life (2000, p. 147). Esteeming yearning as an integral feature of these emotional and relational experiences, she averred, ' the resurrection of Christ can only be understood as part of Christ's unsettledness, this 'wonderlust' which cannot be confined to a tomb, not even to the tombs/tomes of heterosexual Systematic Theology. Christ's resurrected presence can only be seen then as a craving, an enthusiastic passion for life and justice' (Althaus-Reid, 2000, p. 123).

Jesus' incarnation for human Becoming, Isherwood and Althaus-Reid argued that Incarnation involved embodiment, and Jesus' embrace of life as human *and* Divine, reflected the fluid, and queer nature of God (ibid.). Thus, they argued that in his quotidian life, Jesus welcomed the unknown over metaphysical stasis (ibid.); as the unknown unfolded, every moment into the next, his life embraced death eventually too, as part of the course of life.

Hence, incarnation is key to a theology of Becoming for these Queer theologians, for, if Jesus the Christ was to be a legitimate model of human Becoming for persons, he could only be God, incarnated - *in carne* – God in human flesh. It is the Divine-human relationship that is the priority for the Queer theologian, the bed of true theologizing (Althaus-Reid, 2003, p. 114), for, in the absence of the [Divine-]human relationship, theologizing is irrelevant (Althaus-Reid, 2003, p. 94). It follows, that, in their writing, both Althaus-Reid and Isherwood touched on the matter of Jesus' Becoming as a human journey which involved a life of transformation (Althaus-Reid, 2000, pp. 32, 33; Althaus-Reid and Isherwood, 2007, p. 305), a process referred to as 'conscientization', where the former claimed, 'the birth of Christ is the coming of the God-who-is-community … Jesus *became* a messiah walking with poor women, in *a dialogical process* of popular conscientization' (Althaus-Reid, 2004a, p. 25; emphasis mine). In this way, Jesus submitted himself to a process of transformation, where his spirituality represented being a messiah 'in process', one where the roles are reversed, and it is the poor people and the suffering women who teach him (Althaus-Reid, 2004a, p. 25). Reflecting on the words of Uruguayan theologian, Juan Luis Segundo, the Queer theologians interpreted Jesus' conscientization as a path that involved his submission to dialogue with God and

humankind, to a life of faith, which ushered in the possibility for the liberation of Others (Althaus-Reid and Isherwood, 2007, pp. 302, 304). This suggests that in incarnation, in coming face-to-face with limitations in the context of living interdependently alongside human persons and systems (Althaus-Reid, 2004a, pp. 48, 80), Jesus' life as a human speaks hope to his contemporary followers, who, also seek authentic Becoming, living in relationship with God and Others. There is also an inspiring corollary to this: as individuals persevere through their own times of trial and tribulation, in experiences of oppression today, Christ continues Becoming in them (Althaus-Reid & Isherwood, 2007, p. 313), as they engage in prophetic dialogue in the world (ibid.).

By living into the fullness of the body (i.e. *carne*), Becoming is seen in the account of former priest and contemporary Queer theologian, Robert Goss. Goss' focus on the body provided a memorable example of the spiritually transformative power of embracing One's body and sexuality, with justice as an outcome, and pastoral leader, Jim Mitulski recognized Goss' description of his personal journey as something rarely expressed with such transparency and honesty, even by mystics of Western Christianity (Mitulski, 2002, ix).[162] It also deserves attention now, for the purposes of this thesis.

3.5.3.2 The gift of the body and sexuality

Robert Goss had been ordained as a Jesuit priest, and elaborated on the doctrines and traditions, the rites and practises of the Catholic church; these encouraged the negation of bodily appetites and pleasures in the pursuit of a holier,

[162] Mitulski praised Goss' singular achievement of articulating Christianity's failure to integrate the body, sexuality, and spirituality in praxis (Mitulski, 2002, p. ix). Goss' work reflected theological construction.

ascetic life (2002, pp. 10 - 13). Goss shared about the progress of his spiritual journey - one I have termed as 'Becoming' - as that of 'look[ing] back at my life with its currents, eddies, and streams to find traces of God's imprint and directionality' (2002, p. 3). Despite sensing the presence of the Divine, from the days of his childhood and youth, Goss reported struggling 'against the current', for he countered the prohibitions which whispered that bodies were unclean, and that sexuality, and feelings of arousal were sinful (2002, pp. 4, 5). He also 'floated with the current', closeting his male-attraction, confessing his thoughts and sexual activities to God, and petitioning for these desires to be removed (Goss, 2002, pp. 6, 7).

Goss felt that he made progress when he joined other Jesuits who were rebelling surreptitiously against the Church's extreme practise of asceticism.[163] As a group, these men explored their bodies as gifts of presence, by which, sexuality mediated God's goodness to them (Goss, 2002, pp. 12, 15). Then, a deep sense of being loved by God developed within him, and his lived experiences of bodily desires as good challenged Gnostic dualism.[164] Goss noted, 'I took God's incarnation seriously: 'And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth (John 1:14)' … the body was …

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[163] In their chapter on 'God', constructive theologians, Ellen Armour, Paul Capetz, Don Compier, and Laurel Schneider (2005) explain the genesis of ideas concerning God in the Christian tradition. They remark that the Gnostic, dualist idea of material creation, referred to creation's association with the 'god' who created the world (i.e. the 'material principle'). This 'god' acted in opposition to the 'god', who sent his son, Jesus (i.e. the spiritual 'principle') into the world, and these theologians explain that the Gnostic belief in matter as 'evil', and spirit as 'good', represents a conflict which continues to play havoc today, seen in the extremist affection within Christian traditions, which turn to spiritual disciplines as exercises to attain union with God. These practices disregard bodily desires (seen as base) in favour of mystical insights (seen as spiritual, and good) (Armour et al., 2005, pp. 30, 34, cited in Jones and Lakeland, 2005, pp. 19-76).

[164] In the opinion of theologian, Jennie Barnsley, an experience such as Goss' is significant, in contrast to 'apophatic mysticisms', which have been categorized as self-indulgent and irrelevant to life experienced in the body (2013, p. 271). Barnsley contends that one pitfall of the extreme mystic priority of bodily negation is the act of renunciation, which is self-deprecating, rather than transformative (ibid.). In effect, she adds, persons' physical bodies are the vehicles through which God expresses Godself (Barnsley, 2013, p. 276).

a vehicle to connect with God' (Goss, 2002, pp. 14, 16).[165] His decision to come out to Christ, and to Others, was a hallmark on his Becoming journey (Goss, 2002, pp. 18,19, 20), and 'coming out' changed his life significantly.[166] Then, an unexpected event, subsequent to his ordination to the Jesuit order; his appreciation of a call to marry the man he loved led to a period to which he referred as 'exile'. It was a call to justice.

3.5.4 Becoming and the Call to Justice

The sensibility to this vocation developed through what Goss described as Jesus' invitation to him: 'Follow me into exile; become both priest and lover. I will lead you to places never imagined' (Goss, 2002, p. 21). As he accompanied his spouse and others, who lived 'at the margins of society and not in the church', a new understanding of suffering grew within him.[167] Goss experienced pain, discrimination, and marginalization, which were part of the walk of many with AIDS; consequently, he came to know new forms

[165] Reading accounts of medieval mystics who enjoyed sexual pleasure during times of spiritual intimacy with Christ, Goss was affirmed in his experience of coming to know Jesus as his lover. He read accounts of homoerotic spirituality in the Middle Ages in the writings of scholar, John Boswell, which concerned the Cistercian abbot, Aelred of Rievaulx (2002, pp. 125 - 128). He speaks of Aelred's personal accounts providing evidence of homoerotic desires, and struggles to exercise control over them in various ways. What impressed Goss, was that Aelred's account spoke to him of translating desires in the process of meditative prayer, and thus, Aelred, too, experienced Christ in his sexual encounters with other monks, defying the traditions of celibacy and intimate friendships of his day. While Aelred's story bears witness to stories of Becoming almost a millennium earlier in relation to Goss, Goss contrasts it with the apostle Paul, believed to be a homosexual by Pauline scholars who interpret Paul's New Testament writings as evidence of his struggle to integrate his spirituality with his sexuality and accept himself as a gay man (Goss, 2002, pp. 123 – 125). However, Goss interpreted Paul's writing in Gal 2:30 as reflecting Paul's translation of his homoerotic desires into deep mystical union with Christ. While, it may be seen as a covert self-identification, it is a movement of Becoming, nonetheless.

[166] Goss' comment resonates with the claims of Althaus-Reid (2000, p. 88) and Queer theologian, Margaret Robinson (2010, p. 111), who remarked that closeting operates in a way that is antithetical to life as a Queer person. Furthermore, feminist theologian, Angela Pears, joins Robinson in affirming that rather than being located in heteronormative agendas, Queer theology locates authority in lived human experience, in all of its fluid expressions (Pears, 2004, p. 135; Robinson, 2010, p. 115). Thus, in the face of hostility, having self-acceptance and self-respect for their bodies is a gift LGBTQ persons offer themselves, and God the Creator.

[167] In contrast with extreme asceticism, what Goss experienced was like 'decreation' - the renunciation of personal attachments which lead to imbalance (Barnsley, 2013, p. 67), and the freedom to love others which

of religious, political, and social oppression (Goss, 2002, pp. 22, 25). These opportunities gave him a unique sense of conscientization – of knowing Christ *in each person* in their suffering. Through solidarity with them, he described experiencing the passion of Christ, appreciating categorically that, 'if theology is not strategically and practically oriented toward human liberation, it is a waste of time and energy' (Goss, 2002, p. 25). From Goss' perspective, there were a plethora of vehicles which oppressed persons in whom Christ awaited to be seen. Their liberation was to be realized, and Queer theology had a role in elevating these *imago dei* in the cosmos, affirming justice as evidence of Becoming.

The priority of Queer theologians has also been reframed as one of bringing 'strangers' together, something more than simple 'gender-talk' (Althaus-Reid, 2004, p. 105). Hence, including the stories of LGBTQ persons living in a loving Way in the context of Mystery, is an important matter of theological praxis which elevates justice. The love of God, the seed from which Becoming germinates, is the subject of 'decreation', expressed by Queer theologian, Jennie Barnsley (2013, p. 64); her theological construction completes this section on Queer theology and Becoming.

3.5.5 Grounding Theology in Non-Heteronormative Lives

Jennie Barnsley engages the work of social constructivist theorists for theologizing on the Divine through the lens of the complexities of gender. Like the sentiments of the aforementioned Queer theologians, Barnsley argues that, in marginalizing persons whose gendered lives do not reflect the Western binary hegemony, Christian theology stymies

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results from such renunciation (Goss, 2002, pp. 19, 20). Barnsley describes 'decreation' in the life of Jewish mystic, Simone Weil (2013, p. 67), discussed in section 3.5.5.1.

potential knowledges about the Divine (2013, pp. 19-20). Therefore, initiating a distinct theological study, she adopts the qualitative social science methodology of grounded theory, and explores the lived experiences of transgender persons for the 'thealogical' insights they furnish.[168] She names her approach to 'theological' construction, 'grounded theology' (Barnsley, 2013, pp. 80, 102).[169]

Barnsley's methodology and theologizing is relevant to my research for a number of reasons. The first, is the shared priority of constructive theology. As a researcher, in the words of the Quaker, George Fox, I, too, seek 'that of God in every one'.[170] I am of the opinion that if this descriptor continues to be restricted to persons whose lives represent heteronormative and patriarchal standards of spirituality, contemporary Western Christian understandings of Becoming will be poorer for it. Like other Queer theologians, I argue that it is time to investigate theological truths from varied, nonbinary sources, for Western Christian models of heteronormativity are a poor misrepresentation of cosmic realities. *Transgressing* such models is an act of justice.

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[168] In her writing, Barnsley refers to the progress of 'thealogies', a feminist practice with a focus of reflecting divine realties, by using the realities of women in theological construction which in previous times, drew primarily on attributes characteristically assigned to males (2013, pp. 56-57). However, she acknowledges, simply replacing female identifiers for God is a superficial, an equally problematic practice (ibid.).

[169] While Barnsley does not set out to explore what I name as Becoming, I perceive her open-ended research question as an invitation to her transgender participants to share their spiritual journeys, regardless of how they defined a spiritual path. Her invitation to participate was composed as follows: 'You and God? I'd love to hear your story. I'm researching the spiritual stories of transexed and transgendered people. I'm a PhD student at Woodbrooke Quaker Study Centre (affiliated to the University of Birmingham). If you'd like to participate in this project, please get in touch' (Barnsley, 2013, p. 124). At the start of their meeting, Barnsley's instructions were simple: 'tell me what you think I need to know about your story' (2013, p. 125). Then, she sat in a frame of being 'minimally interventionist and deeply attentive listener' as participants shared their story (Barnsley, 2013, p. 115).

[170] Barnsley reports that this phrase was coined by the historical Quaker figure, George Fox, who proposed that all persons reflect the image or likeness of God, from the moment of their creation (2013, p. 19).

Second, Barnsley's project was motivated by the reality that 'few thea/logians make use of qualitative ethnographic research methods in collecting and analyzing the data of experience' (2013, pp. 96, 97). This oversight is especially true of LGBTQ persons, whose stories have been marginalized in Western Christian theology.[171] Despite any inclusive intentions in the academy, formal models of conceptualizing gender continue to exist, and these shape theological theories, suggesting a need to formulate new concepts with which to understand gender, without returning to binary forms (Barnsley, 2013, p. 52). Barnsley's aim to construct a theory which would advance theology, using new 'metaphorical models of Divine-human relationship', is significant, and distinct (Barnsley, 2013, abstract). Third, a point of congruence with my research is the theologian's methodological use of attentive 'presence' as a novel qualitative interview method (Barnsley, 2013, p. 104). Her use of 'silent waiting' affirms my advancement of interviewing which offers participants a poetic encounter with God in the process of sharing their narratives.[172] Finally, another contribution of Barnsley's theologizing is one of the philosophies with which she engages, which arose in the life of the historical French mystic, Simone Weil. It refers to a notable aspect of Becoming.

3.5.5.1 Simone Weil and 'decreation'

Simone Weil (1909 – 1943), was a French activist mystic and negative theologian of secular Jewish ancestry, who was living in France during the Second World War (Barnsley, 2013, p. 65). Barnsley's research examined, and applied Weil's philosophy and

[171] See more detailed comments from Althaus-Reid on this issue in research (2000, p. 30).
[172] The method of mystagogic accompaniment I used, is a spiritual practice in which I engage personally, and which I have also practised in professional service with Others.

practice of ‘decreation’ as an interpretive tool, and she explains Weil’s personal ethic as follows: ‘in the practice of renunciation we unsay our attachment to self in favour of submission to something greater, a purpose that transcends our small, personal concerns’ (Barnsley, 2013, p. 64). Weil believed that God relinquished all God was in the act of creation; likewise, as God’s creation, human persons should renounce all they are in the course of their acts of creation – that is, in their love of the world (Barnsley, 2013, p. 68). Love is marked by self-giving renunciation, it involves relinquishing One’s desires, and freeing One’s ‘self’ from attachments to what One knows, leaving room for grace to provide for One’s needs (Barnsley, 2013, p. 70).

As a way of living, which embodies self-giving surrender for purposes of love, ‘decreation’ is not self-destruction (Barnsley, 2013, p. 67). Embracing risk, ‘decreation’ inspires individuals to rid themselves of unnecessary attachments, to persons, things, and outcomes (Barnsley, 2013, p. 70); surrendering the ‘self’ *to the purposes of the Divine* uncreated, it allows an individual to be available for re-creation in God (Barnsley, 2013, pp. 67, 68, 69). During the Second World War, when the country of France was being occupied, and the French people’s daily physical and material needs were not being met, Weil declined the ‘bed-rest and hypernutrition’ offered to treat her tuberculosis, for she did not desire to partake of more [food] than the people of ‘Marseilles’ at the time (Barnsley, 2013, p. 65). The fruit of her solidarity and political action was holiness and freedom for Weil (Barnsley, 2013, pp. 71, 72, 75); although the consequence was her death at the young age of 34, ‘decreation’ empowered her to live out her days, in authenticity and vulnerability (Barnsley, 2013, pp. 65, 69, 70, 75).

Barnsley's constructive theology extends her field by employing qualitative methods which give voice to the instability of gendered categories used to understand the unknowable (Barnsley, 2013, pp. 77, 78). Her research is a reminder that theological constructions are ephemeral tools, to help individuals make meaning of spirituality as engagement in life with Mystery (Barnsley, 2013, pp. 83, 240). The fluid constructs of Barnsley's grounded theology allude to divine echoes of the eternal rhythms of the cosmos from which Becoming arises.[173] This is the theme of Keller's process theology.

3.5.6 Process Theology and Cosmology

Constructive theologian, Catherine Keller, articulates her thesis in process theology with some arresting words: '*What if beginning* – the beginning, any beginning, The Beginning – *does not lie back, like an origin, but rather opens out*?' (2003, p. xv; emphasis mine). Here, Keller is not speaking of the familiar '*creatio ex nihilo'*, creation out of nothing pre-existing, from which, Western Christian thought presumes all createds appeared. In fact, drawing on theologian, Gerhard May's historical study of *creatio ex nihilo*, Keller notes that, as a theory, the concept of *ex nihilo* was questioned as early as the Second Century, by philosopher, Justin Martyr (2003, p. 15). Even St. Aurelius Augustine documented his personal struggles with this concept of divine omnipotence and the compatibility of *ex nihilo*, which, by the Fourth Century when he lived, was a firmly espoused doctrine of the Christian tradition (Keller, 2003, pp. xix, 16).[174] Then, almost two millennia after Justin Martyr, and Augustine, theologian Jürgen Moltmann proffered a

[173] See Keller's theology in her book (2003, p. 220), and section 3.5.6.
[174] However, eventually, St. Augustine chose to defer to the safe, binary confines of familiar orthodoxies, denying his *avantgarde* postmodern inklings (Keller, 2003, pp. xix, 17, 69-71, 81-82).

description of Divinity who created everything out of nothing, revealing a progressive tendency among theologians to repress inconsistencies concerning Mystery (Keller, 2003, p. 17). By the Third Century, Christian theology had replaced the unknown 'face of the deep' of Genesis 1:2, with arguments and doctrines promulgating an infinite, sovereign, and omnipotent God; and as a result, God had no need to relate to an unrecognized Other, such as 'the deep', but created the universe, in coherence with patriarchal human systems of rule and social control (Keller, 2003, p. xix). As a result, the concept of *creatio ex nihilo* has begotten surface constructions of 'God', as predictable and omnipotent personal entity, rather than Mystery (Keller, 2003, p. xvi).[175] Keller's demonstration that the concept of 'beginning', accepted since the late Second Century, is an ill-equipped base on which to build a model of Becoming today, leads to my application of the biblical creation story of Genesis 1 in a 'beginning' that is part of cosmic chaos (Keller, 2003, pp. xvii, xviii, 7, 15). This '*creatio ex profundis*', creation on 'the face of the deep',[176] is a 'beginning' that 'opens out', of potentiality, difference, and multiple movements of Mystery (Keller, 2003, p. xviii), the basis for Keller's 'theology of becoming', a 'beginning' which sets the stage for a deeper understanding of spirituality on which my theory of Becoming unfolds.

[175] Of import here is not a debate concerning the *reality* of God, or the Mystery of the cosmos. For human members of the cosmos, the crux of the matter concerns persons' *orientation* toward their experiences and decisions concerning these debates, *in the face of* life as they experience it. Regardless of scientific or philosophical arguments concerning the veracity of their subjective human knowledges, the reality is, that persons approach this issue in *some* way, revealing their preferences and priorities, and that these preferences are constructed by social, historical events. In the end, persons' choices are a matter of choice.
[176] *The Face of the Deep: A Theology of Becoming* (2003) is the title of Keller's book.

3.5.6.1 'Becoming' out of 'the deep'

Keller contends that the watery, oceanic chaos, the 'tehomic' deep, which speaks of *creatio ex profundis*, does not belong to a distinct event in time;[177] it is like the 'womb of the world', out of which, Divinity and all createds come forth (Keller, 2008, pp. 50, 58, 100, 106); furthermore, Keller posits that in their own unique way, each creature is called into being by the lure of *Eros* on the 'face of the deep' (2008, pp. 99-100).[178] The *impersonal infinity* encounters finite creatures 'surfacing on the face of the deep' (ibid.), where human beings are involved in a *process* of creation that is always ongoing, an 'open-ended', *creatio continua* (Keller, 2008, p. 48; emphasis mine).

Referring to the 'postmodern' flavour of this theology of 'becoming',[179] Keller asserts, 'in the primal waters is hidden … a key not just to what we are but to who we are becoming' (2008, p. 46),

> We may read the premodern poetry of Genesis as though it contains the intuitive germ of a postmodern science. We can read here, for instance, an inspiration for a chaos theory of creation. For it is in the chaos math and science of the last several decades that the West has begun to realize the meaning of 'chaos' – of an iterative nonlinear process, not

[177] See also section 3.2.2.

[178] The term, 'lure' is one Keller uses to understand the concept of 'God', and the 'depth' of God (i.e. the womb) is an *impersonal infinity*, 'the creative womb of all that is' (2008, pp. 99-100).

[179] To expand on my description in my glossary, I use the term 'postmodern', referring to the historical era after the modern age, which proceeded out of the Western Enlightenment (McFague, 1987, p. x). The era is defined as a period when preferences for 'facts' and 'givens', as taken-for-granted, 'value-free' 'truths', began to be questioned with logic and argument. Systematic, sufficient explanations for seemingly 'natural' phenomena and identity categories, were recognized as tied to power structures (Balick, 2011, p. 17). Postmodernism signaled the advent of a deconstruction of assumptions underlying these givens, recognizing that human ideologies are socially constructed, and that subjectivity was involved in knowing (Belsey, 2002, p. 104). Social construction means that there is no objectivity involved in the impartation of knowledges, but that knowledges are created by those who stand apart from them, this recognizes them as social (or meta) narratives (Belsey, 2002, p. 73; Keller, 2003, p. 7). Postmodernism is known for privileging of questions, and suspicion of answers (Belsey, 2002, p. 107). Catherine Belsey provides an accessible, more comprehensive discussion on postmodernism and Jean-François Lyotard (1924-1998), who defined postmodern as, 'incredulity toward metanarratives' (2002, pp. 72-107).

> of pure disorder but rather of an alternative order, a process unfolding unpredictably and yet with organization … the iteration of a fractal algorithm depicts not a predictable continuity of sameness, but a rhythm of repetition with a difference (Keller, 2008, p. 50).[180]

Relative to 'postmodern' chaos theory, the concept, 'the deep' introduces an alternative reality, not of disorder, but a non-linear beginning.

3.5.6.2 The 'becoming' of God

In addition to the 'becoming' of createds, Christian scriptures reinforce God's relationship *with* creation; this causes Keller to conclude that, 'because all that becomes, *becomes within God* – as part of God – God is also becoming' (2003, pp. 180, 181). This is significant, in that 'becoming' involves finite createds offering Infinite God potential to be shaped (expanded *and* limited) by them. This introduces possibility into the cosmos, God being defined by a relationship with ongoing, multiple, finite instances of creation. Thus, in a fresh way, the fruitful chaos of 'the deep', is a shared space of Divine-human generativity and potentiality, one which was 'always already there' (Keller, 2003, pp. xix, 9). Hence, Genesis, as 'beginning-in-process, is an unoriginated, endless process of becoming' (Keller, 2003, p. 3), a creative process of things becoming new, other than what they were before (Keller, 2003, p. xvii).[181]

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[180] Keller refers to an appreciation of the chaos of *tehom*, as '*tehomophilia*' (2008, p. 58).

[181] This contrasts with the traditional, autonomous construct which dominated historical Christian hermeneutics (Keller, 2003, pp. 5, 103). For instance, Keller cites examples where the *tehom*, the Other, which biblical scriptures describe as existing with God before the beginning, was rationalized, dismissed as evil, ridiculed by theological thinkers, and replaced by the 'logos'. These individuals included: the gnostic teacher Basilides; Justin Martyr; philosophical theologian Hermogenes; Aurelius Augustine; Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyons; Karl Barth; and Rudolph Bultmann; thus, in Keller's opinion, this demonstrates the threat the 'other' represented to patriarchal Christian theology which reinforces the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* (Keller, 2003, pp. 46, 47).

Finally, drawing on theologian, Mayra Rivera, Keller concludes that 'becoming' is the transfiguration of God's glory in createds of the cosmos, who, as they respond to love, are enveloped into Godself until all 'become parables of an infinite becoming' (Keller, 2008, p.152). John Thatamanil writes on themes of divine incarnation and transfiguration, while attending to Keller's theology of 'becoming'.

3.5.6.3 'Becoming' - theopoetic sensibilities

Reflecting on Catherine Keller's writing, theologian, John Thatamanil (2020), refers to Keller's application of Athanasius' epithet on the incarnation, 'God through the incarnation is engaged in God-making (*theo-poiesis*)',[182] and elevates its implications,

> The term theopoetics finds its ancestor in the ancient Greek *theopoiesis*. As *poiesis* means making or creation, so *theopoiesis* gets rendered as 'God-making' or 'becoming divine'. *Theopoiesis* appears in the first centuries [sic] of Hellenistic Christianity, often and then later consistently in its contracted form *theosis*, normally translated as 'deification'. The term *theopoiesis* retains the fuller sense of 'making divine', 'making God'. Clement in the third century [sic] defines *theopoiesis* as 'assimilation to God as far as possible' (Keller, 2017, Kindle locations 2186-93, cited in Thatamanil, 2020, p. 38).

Here, the theologian welcomes Keller's notion of 'human becomings', his thoughts progressing in this way: 'Word being made flesh not only in Jesus, but in human beings generally' (Thatamanil, 2020, p. 38). Thus, he views individuals' mystical experiences as 'mysticism of participation' with the Divine, affirming *both* the Divine's 'unknowability' *and* the intimate presence experienced by human persons (ibid.).

[182] Athanasius is known for his epithet, that Divinity became human so that human persons might become divine (Athanasius, De Incarnatione, 54, in Early Christian Fathers, 293, cited in Grenz, 2000, p. 59).

Additionally, he recognizes the distinct *experiential* nature of encounter with God, of *knowing* which extends beyond cognition,

> As theology becomes more attuned to the mystery of God, of God's nature as exceeding all language and thought, the more we intuit that theology must of necessity aspire to be vocative and not, primarily, descriptive. Speech about God is always a multipurpose activity, and activity that is meant to make God present, felt, and experienced. Theological language *invokes and evokes, and that work is not* performed by appeal to univocal conceptual language (Thatamanil, 2020, p. 39).

Thus, Thatamanil appreciates the mystery and inexpressibility of divine encounter, the reality that theology *cannot* know the Divine through solely conceptual methods. It is an experiential meeting which leads to transformation, to Becoming.[183]

3.5.7 Section Summary

In this section, I provided an overview of salient features in the constructive theologies and philosophies utilized in this grounded theory. I began with Melanie May's theopoetic writing on the body's knowledges, followed by the work of Marcella Althaus-Reid and Lisa Isherwood, who introduced the provocative, transgressive vocation of the 'indecent' and Queer theologian, a call to justice, which affirms the

[183] Thatamanil's words relate to my project in two ways, capturing both the mystagogic interview and the qualitative grounded theory method I employed. First, Thatamanil's perspective would conceive of the interview method of mystagogic accompaniment as, 'first-order theology … such God-talk is understood as God speaking *to* us and our responsive speaking *to* God … *theopoiesis*' (Thatamanil, 2020, p. 39). Second, the grounded theorizing in which I engaged, categorizing movements of the Divine in participants lives, would fit with his description of, 'second-order theology [which] follows upon and attends to the entailments of first-order *theopoiesis,* … [and] seeks to excavate the meanings of first-order theological becoming and bespeaking' (ibid.). Consequently, my constructive theological task is *both* a grounded theory *and* my *poiesis* concerning LGBTQ Becoming. As theologian Sandra Schneiders insists, theology must be able to invite persons to meet God through the imagination, something to which Thatamanil refers as invocation (Schneiders, 2016, p. 429).

everyday lives of people, and rejects the Western Christian practice of separating sexuality from sites of divine encounter and theologizing. A specific example of this is found in the autobiographical writing of Queer theologian, Robert Goss. In another way, Jennie Barnsley's grounded theology contributes uniquely to theologizing based on transgender lives, it makes space for alternate concepts of the Divine, and introduces the philosophical concept of 'decreation', a form of self-giving which I see as integral to Becoming. I ended this section with Catherine Keller's concept of creation which 'opens out' into an ongoing process of 'becoming', referring to her theopoetic comfort with chaos as an example of the boundless potentiality with which this thesis on human Becoming is concerned.

The theologians with whom I have engaged argue for the transformation of the 'self', reconstructing understandings of God and human Becoming for societies today. Adding a measure of diversity to this, I include the work of philosopher, Grace Jantzen, who touches on the history of psychoanalytic thought, which has overshadowed Western theology of religion, and undermined human potential for 'becoming divine'. I end my review of literature with the writing of philosopher, Richard Kearney, for few have engaged the question of Becoming related to Divinity experienced as onto-theological versus process while conceiving of 'becoming' in an eschatological frame, unbound by limits of time, conceptualized by humankind.

3.6 'Becoming' as a Philosophical Phenomenon

3.6.1 Introduction

In this section, I engage with the scholarship of philosophers of religion, Grace Jantzen and Richard Kearney, which features the human 'self' as subject, but in distinct ways. I begin with Jantzen's critique of the Western cultural psychoanalytic symbolic, which marginalizes all but a minority of persons, and demonstrates the need for a *telos* of 'becoming' to which all people are entitled. Then, I add Kearney's thesis, which I consider a Becoming journey which approaches the matter of God as non-metaphysical. Kearney's concept of 'the God who may be' relates to his claims concerning the 'becoming' of God, Jesus, and human persons; therefore in comparison with Benner, his philosophical views add to a notion of Becoming as one that is not focused on human growth, but on a broader, eschatological view of an endless path of Becoming, with God.

3.6.2 A Feminist Symbolic for 'Becoming'

The ancient meaning of the word, philosophy, 'the love of wisdom', refers both to the female, and the divine (Jantzen, 1998, p. 2), and for Grace Jantzen, this linguistic detail was significant. Despite this detail related to the Greek word, *sophia*, the patriarchal focus of Western religious philosophical discourse is characterized by 'violence, sacrifice, and death, built upon mortality not only as a human fact but as a fundamental philosophical category' (Jantzen, 1998, p. 2).[184] As a result, Jantzen studied Western continental philosophies of religion, psychoanalytic theories, and medieval and

[184] I treat Jantzen's comments about the field of philosophy of religion as subsuming the field of theology. I base this on her descriptions of the aims, focus, and history of Greco-Roman philosophy as it has shaped Christianity, the Bible, and its history of hermeneutics, particularly, as they relate to subaltern persons.

contemporary thinkers, searching for a feminist symbolic for 'becoming divine' (Jantzen, 1998, p. 6).[185]

3.6.2.1 The Western religious symbolic of a 'disembodied' male 'self'

Luce Irigaray, the psychoanalyst and poststructuralist philosopher, was a significant figure in shaping Jantzen's philosophical ideal. Irigaray's influence led to Jantzen's contention that, 'the task of philosophy of religion must be to enable … 'becoming', or else it is ultimately useless' (1998, p. 6). The work and legacy of renowned psychoanalysts, Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan, led Jantzen to reject the paternalistic psychoanalytic focus on, 'the perils and dangers of becoming a human subject' (Jantzen, 1998, p. 8);[186] this included their assumptions of 'woman' as representative of 'lack' and her consequent inability to become a 'subject' (Jantzen, 1998, p. 10). For Jantzen, the 'Western imaginary' as a source of 'ideal likeness', was, 'saturated with images, values and symbols derived from the Judeo-Christian heritage' (1998, pp. 14, 15).[187] Even Irigaray's reference to Jesus, as One who could be 'understood in a way which would enable the divine Becoming of women', caused Jantzen to argue that:

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[185] Jantzen refers to Lacan's use of the construct, 'symbolic', as a pattern of being in the private world, or civilization at-large, which, eventually, is evident in self-expression through language, art, religion, and other rituals (1998, pp. 9-10).

[186] Jantzen thought it critical to utilize knowledges concerning the human 'self' as subject in constructing a philosophy of 'becoming divine'. On this point, her persuasion is shared by scholars in theology, religion, and psychoanalysis about whom I have written previously (May, 1995, p. 68; Benner, 2001, p. 59; Waaijman, 2002, p. 441; Rollins, 2012, pp. 92-95). For all of them, understanding the essence of what it is to be human is key to a theology or philosophy of flourishing in the context of cosmic Mystery. In contrast, Lacan's focus can be recognized as resting on overcoming human 'perils and dangers', rather than flourishing. Still, I contend that his constructs, such as 'the Real', and '*jouissance',* are utile in treating persons' movements toward Becoming. This is the heart of theopoetics as 'creativity at the edge of chaos', which art critic, Siri Hustvedt insists, challenges persons to 'abandon hygiene', 'clean borders and sharp edges that delineate difference' (Hustvedt, 2005, p. 118, cited in Walton, 2019a, p. 351).

[187] Jantzen referred to the term, 'imaginary', as 'a way of conceiving and being' (1998, p. 12).

1) ‘maleness’ did not express the whole of humanity; 2) Jesus represented only a ‘partial incarnation’; and thus, that, 3) ‘other incarnations, other trinities, other sexualities’ must be involved in a new symbolic for humankind (Jantzen, 1998, pp. 16, 17).[188] More importantly, if that which is divine is, ‘a mirror of, ‘that of God in everyone’, that ideal likeness we may both project and reflect’, Jantzen argued that assertions concerning human selfhood must be applicable to all persons, regardless of race, gender, sex, creed, religion, national origin, social status, ability, and sexual orientation (Jantzen, 1998, p. 13).

3.6.2.2 New natal themes of ‘becoming’

Western Christianity’s failure to support the claim of ‘that of God in everyone’, without intentionally marginalizing a significant portion of humankind, was, and continues to be problematic. Because of the tradition’s focus on a ‘disembodied’ male self, Jantzen contended that a novel type of human *selfhood* must be an essential component of a new symbolic of Becoming (Jantzen, 1998, p. 27).[189] Furthermore, in the dominant hegemony, ‘becoming’ is not a natural human progression, but is unnatural, requiring extraordinary reparation (Jantzen, 1998, p. 9).[190] On the other hand, the ‘destabilized self’, created an

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[188] In addition to this point, the assumption that God, toward whose image human persons aspire to Become, is a gendered personal entity, complicates matters. For, unless Jesus’ incarnation was a partial one, and God is considered as encompassing the nonbinary, the ideal that human persons are to become like God, is contradictory (Jantzen, 1998, p. 17) Thus, it remains something women cannot achieve.

[189] The term, ‘disembodied’ highlights Jantzen’s remarks on the Western philosophical and theological practice of ignoring the ‘self’ as a ‘body’, and insisting on the ‘self’ as an entity of binary existences which never coalesce during One’s lifetime on earth (1998, pp. 27 - 31).

[190] To explain her point, Jantzen expounds on Lacan’s theory of the ‘Mirror Stage’, which highlighted his thinking on the formation of the individual subject, ‘*the I*’. This is explained in comparable detail in the writing of the social scientist, Sean Homer (2005, pp. 24-26), and in the collection of Lacan’s works (Lacan, 2006, pp. 93-100). The dominant position Lacan assigned to the paternal, male figure has had a significant bearing on the Western religious symbolic. Still, Western Christianity has failed to recognize the impact of this psychoanalytic influence on their theological assumptions about God and human persons. Specifically, what Jantzen noted was that Lacanian theory theorized that, subsequent to an infant’s full identification with their mother after birth, the infant progresses to the stage of developing a sense of their

opening for Jantzen's theological construction, and she explored the potential for a 'self' who is *imago dei*, not driven by 'lack', but lured by a natal call to *flourishing* (Jantzen, 1998, p. 38).[191] I interpret this as what I refer to as a call toward Becoming.

Now, rejecting the problematic of the Western religious symbolic, introduces possibility, and life, into human experience; in contrast with the psychoanalytic image of the unruly unconscious, Jantzen posited the imagination as the ground from which Becoming would grow: 'Flourishing can then provide the resources … to restructure the religious symbolic in ways that reconfigure the divine horizon, the goal which draws us forward in *becoming divine for and with one another*. This must be the work of many: women and men together' (Jantzen, 1998, p.p. 98-99; emphasis mine). Jantzen's natal themes were personal attributes and qualities, including: 1) 'love'; 2) 'longing or desire';

'self' as a subject who must function in the world (Jantzen, 1998, p. 34). This concept of 'self' is shaped by an 'ego ideal', or an image of their face that they first saw reflected in a mirror. Progressing through this stage enables the infant to conceive of their 'self' as a 'unified' being. But the infant experiences ambivalence and frustration in trying to discover their 'self' as a whole person because the 'unified' image they see does not correspond to what they *feel*. So attaining a sense of 'unity' involves a 'cost' to the self. This cost is an experience of alienation, along with a felt absence from, and anger toward the mother, from whom they had previously derived a sense of identity and security, but who no longer provides this (Jantzen, 1998, pp. 34-35). The fragile sense of the 'self' poses a problem for the child who enters the world, in addition to the false sense of independence and 'mastery' they develop as they seek to function in the social world (ibid.). Lacan viewed language as the child's tool of control for expressing their needs in the world, representing the child's entry into the world's symbolic (Jantzen, 1998, p. 36). However, because the child is unable to satisfy their needs consistently and fully, the impossibility of fulfilled desire both requires and results in conscious repression of their experience of maternal loss. Jantzen explained this as a loss of the possibility of 'absolute love, goodness, and certainty' (ibid.). In order to function in the world, then, the child learns to embrace 'The Name of the Father' or the 'Law', in an effort to replace the mother as the source of their language (Jantzen, 1998, pp. 38, 39). But, operating according to this symbolic, and the authority it represents, is unpredictable. The frustration it evokes, Jantzen explains, remains 'the very stuff of the unconscious' (1998, pp. 36, 40).

[191] The adjective, 'natal' qualifies something as 'pertaining to birth'. In this writing, unfortunately, Jantzen did not offer a psychoanalytic exposé about an alternative process by which the unconscious might make this transition, that is, a shift from the domination of the patriarchal symbolic to a feminist one. While this would have been helpful, she does allude to the role of the imagination in this process (Jantzen, 1998, p. 95). While her cursory mention, is a nod to a construct I mention later, in section 8.3.3.3, which is *jouissance*, I cannot conclude this. Such a solution may have been outside the purview of her writing on the problematic of the symbolic.

3) ‘sensitivity and attentiveness’; 4) ‘intuition and discernment’; 5) ‘creative imagination’; and 6) ‘lateral thinking’ (Jantzen, 1998, pp. 65, 69),[192] and in addition to these, among those she proposed were concepts reflective of collaborative, interdependent, and characteristically-female ways of relating (1998, pp. 69-71). Eventually, her term, ‘divine horizon’ represented her view of the source of ‘the deepest and best of human desires’, paving the way to ‘becoming divine’ (Jantzen 1998, pp. 91, 92). Still, ‘becoming for the other’, was not something she proposed to be restricted to humankind; for her, it extended to the material world – the world’s ecosystems, and all createds within it (Jantzen, 1998, p. 151). Jantzen’s concept of ‘becoming divine’ involved making One’s home, fully, as an embodied being, where the ‘self’ is, in the present world (Jantzen, 1998, p. 152).[193]

Like Jantzen, Richard Kearney’s philosophy of ‘becoming’ is unique. His construct of Divinity reflects a postmodern concept, influenced by continental philosophy (Kearney, 2001, p. 3);[194] and his hermeneutics and philosophy stem from his realization, ‘God is not a dead letter but a vibrant concern for our time’ (2001, p. 3).

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[192] These qualities contrast with concepts like, ‘belief’ and ‘critical reasoning’, which represent, ‘right thinking’ (Jantzen, 1998, pp. 65, 69).

[193] A similar value was expressed by Melanie May. She defined the essence of divinity as appreciating the gift of *embracing* One’s material limitations and vulnerabilities, in order to *truly* live, and *truly* love the world in the quotidian (May, 1995, pp. 101, 102). This is a sign of transformation, one with psychological implications of emotional resilience, *and* also reveals the theological concept of a person who is *imago dei.*

[194] Kearney’s thinking was influenced by a group of French philosophers and continental thinkers of a mixture of cultural, ethnic, and educational backgrounds. These individuals included Emmanuel Levinas (1906-1995), Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961), Paul Ricoeur (1913-2005), Jacques Derrida (1930-2004), and Julia Kristeva. His doctoral academic formation in Paris in the 1970’s provided opportunities to know and work with some of them (Kearney, 2001, pp. 2). While these philosophers’ works had a significant influence on him, they will not be addressed in this thesis, for to do so would extend my discussion further than I intend. I focus instead, on how the ideas of these theorists impacted Kearney’s philosophy of religion.

3.6.3 'Becoming' - Metaphysical and Non-Metaphysical

3.6.3.1 God who 'becomes' through relationship, passion, possibility

Once again, the concept of Divine 'becoming' arises for a postmodern thinker,[195] theological construction that is a by-product of Kearney's engagement with Jewish commentary scholars,

> the Exodic act of [God's] disclosure signals an inextricable communion between God and humans, a radically new sense … of fraternity, responsibility, and commitment to a shared history of 'becoming', beginning with emancipation from bondage in Egypt. God may henceforth be recognized as someone who *becomes with us*, someone as dependent on us as we are on him' (Kearney, 2001, pp. 29-30).

In the biblical Exodic event, Divinity approached intimate disclosure of Godself to Moses discretely (Kearney, 2001, p. 31); Kearney interpreted this relationship as one where Divinity, 'persuades rather than coerces, invites rather than imposes, asks rather than impels'.[196] This account of Divinity's *pursuit* of relationship suggested to Kearney that, 'this God of Mosaic manifestation cannot be God without relating to his other –

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[195] Kearney explains his involvement at the Villanova conferences of 1997 and 1999, on 'Postmodernity and Religion', where this question arose for him: 'what kind of divinity comes after metaphysics?' (Kearney, 2001, pp. 2-3).

[196] 'To become' or 'to be able' was more important to the Hebrews than concepts related to the 'ontological' and the 'permanent' (Kearney, 2001, p. 31). This thinking also shaped the mind of Liberation theologian, Dorothee Söelle, who, based on her interpretation of the New Testament scriptures, made a similar observation, and explained the activity of God as a descriptor of the nature of God, stating: 'In the narratives of the New Testament God *happens*. If we tell stories of God and are concerned about the narrative method, we are telling what God does or how God conceals himself, how God *acts*. And in prayer we ask God *to do* something worth telling of, to appear, to show power for good, to change us. In these two linguistic forms we talk of God more as *an event* than as a substance. We speak from and to God, instead of 'about' him … We should really ask 'Do you *live out* God?' that would be in keeping with the reality of the experience (Soëlle, 1990, p. 186; emphasis mine).

humanity' (2001, p. 30); and accordingly, Kearney's interpretation followed: 'God is what he *will* be when he becomes his Kingdom and his Kingdom comes on earth. At the eschaton, God promises to be God' (Kearney, 2001, pp. 30). Thus, *Divinity is in process, 'becoming', while awaiting* an unfolding future to be enjoyed with humankind, and the result for Kearney, is that, 'Divinity is constantly waiting' (Kearney, 2001, p. 37). Thusly, Kearney introduced desire, a marker of the intimate relationship in which Divine and human 'becoming' unfold.[197]

Still, there is another critical quality of 'becoming' which relates to desire and passion. It is belief in possibility. 'Possibility', or *dunamis-posse*, in Greek, has been interpreted in the invocation by Jesus in Mark 10:27: 'For humans it is impossible, but not for God; because for God everything is possible' (Kearney, 2001, p. 80), and Kearney explained this as a reference to occasions when persons' finite abilities 'reach their ultimate limit, an infinite *dunamis* takes over, *transfiguring … incapacity* into a new kind of *capacity*' (Kearney, 2001, pp. 80-81; emphasis mine).[198] Significantly, the progression from 'incapacity' to 'capacity' provides a new category of 'eschatological filiality' in Kearney's phenomenology, promulgating *dunamis* as something 'pro-created from *the future* rather than causally engendered by the past' (Kearney, 2001, p. 81; emphasis mine).[199] *Dunamis* is the potentate underlying the incarnation of Christ, 'Word becoming

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[197] This theme of anticipation touches on Divinity's *passion*, a key facet of 'waiting', for, anticipation stems *from* desire (Kearney, 2001, p. 37). Passion describes God's affection for humankind, and humankind's affection for God. Consequently, desire has a role in God's 'becoming', and in the Becoming of humankind.

[198] The invocation in Mark 10:27 is Christ's response to the disciples' recognition of their human limitations, and this resultant question: 'Who, therefore, can enter God's kingdom?'

[199] The reference to *dunamis* here, is the same as its allusion in John 1:12-13, concerning empowerment available for humans to become God's children. It reads: 'Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God – children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born *of God*'(NIV).

flesh' (John 1:1, 18) (Kearney, 2001, p. 81; emphasis mine); it is a *gift* of grace, power greater than human and Divine alone, greater than temporal reality, a marriage of present and future (Kearney, 2001, pp. 97-98).

Therefore, the possibility of living, *both* in the present, *and into* eschatological realities, is not a figment of illusion, rather, it is a demonstration of faith; this form of faith beckons One to live *into* a kingdom *they choose to engage as already existing* in the present, while looking forward to its arrival *at the eschaton*; faith invites them to 'give thanks that the kingdom has already come and continues to come' (Kearney, 2001 p. 82). This confidence *rests into the liminal beyond of the present moment*, anticipating that the actions of yesterday will be propagated into forever by what has been done today. It is an embrace of the perpetual, and fluid nature of Becoming.

3.6.3.2 Persona of Christ - the 'becoming' 'self' as prosopon-persona

Kearney's reference to Christ's transfiguration in Luke 9:29-31 helps to explain the effect of possibility as it pertains to the 'becoming' of God. He stated, 'here, the person of Jesus is metamorphosed before the eyes of his disciples into the *persona* of Christ. The alteration – from one to the other – is *Christ's coming into his own*, fully assuming his messianic calling' (Kearney, 2001, p. 39; emphasis mine). As *persona* is the 'infinite God in the finite person before me' (Kearney, 2001, p. 17), the *persona* of God was, 'the sign of God' in the human Jesus, in that moment (Kearney, 2001, p. 18). Moreover, in the course of Jesus' 'coming into his own', it was his 'face', his 'figure', that was transfigured, enabling it 'to shine forth' (Kearney, 2001, pp. 39-41). In that moment, Kearney proposed that Jesus remained the human person he was, but, his *revelation* of the Divine, latent

within him, *assumed a distinct form*. Thus, 'the transfiguration reminds us that when it comes to the *persona* of God – *marking the unique thisness … of each person* – it is a question of the old enigma: now you have him, now you don't. One moment there, one moment gone' (Kearney, 2001, p. 42). Hence, the hope of humankind is the following: 'Christ as the possibility of all humans becoming 'sons of God' … by being transfigured into their own unique *personas* … Christ is held out to us as a promise … in the long prophetic path pointing toward the coming kingdom' (Kearney, 2001, p. 43).

However, an important remark follows that, 'the transfigured Christ is a *way* … a *figure of the end* but not the end itself … never as fait accompli' (ibid.). This means each human being embodies the potential to transfigure Divinity, and that transfiguration is an ever-evolving process, pointing to an end that is yet to come. The words of medieval Father of the Orthodox church, John Damascene, suggested to Kearney that transfiguration is a *sign* of the eschaton - an echo of Christ's return in the world *today*, 'a … mission includ[ing] all who seek justice-to-come' (Kearney, 2001, p. 46), open to all who image the eschaton's presence today and arrival in tomorrow, regardless of belief or spiritual path (Kearney, 2001, pp. 46-47).[200] Moreover, *persona* is, 'all that in others exceeds my searching gaze' (Kearney, 2001, pp. 9, 10), it is, 'not to be understood as some impersonal anonymous presence … nor is it to be taken as a merely formal condition of possibility … the *persona* is there to remind us that there is always something more to flesh and blood than flesh and blood' (Kearney, 2001, pp. 10, 13).

[200] Levinas, a Jewish continental philosopher, admitted that when he conceives of *prosopon*, he prefers to imagine what he considers the face of Jesus to be like (Kearney, 2001, p. 47).

The Greek word *prosopon* is another term which expounds on the concept of *persona*, and, translated into English means, a theatrical 'poetic personification, impersonation, or embodiment of some other self' (Kearney, 2001, p. 18). *Prosopon* also carries with it an element of 'being-for-the-other', such that, *'prosopon-persona* can never really exist on its own … but emerges in ethical relationship to others' (Kearney, 2001, pp. 15, 18). For Kearney, this is a reminder that every act of caring for the Other in relational perichoresis signals One's readiness for justice to arrive at any possible moment, thus, he posited, 'the God-who-may-be offers us the possibility of realizing a promised kingdom by *opening ourselves to the transfiguring power of transcendence* … this capacity … to receive and respond to the divine invitation I call *persona* … it is, paradoxically, by first recognizing our own powerlessness … that we find ourselves empowered … to make the potential Word flesh' (2001, p. 2; emphasis mine).[201] This reiterates the aim of *prosopon-persona* for justice, for Becoming to flourish by grace (Kearney, 2001, p. 15).

3.6.4 Section Summary

This section discussed the philosophies of religion of feminist philosopher, Grace Jantzen, and continental philosopher, Richard Kearney, demonstrating how human Becoming has been a theme traced in the writing of non-Christian and Jewish theologians, as well as continental philosophers. I began with Jantzen's critique of psychoanalytic theory, and its definition of a Western religious symbolic which shapes much of contemporary discourse in religion and spirituality. Her argument demonstrated how this

[201] As a result of this view, Kearney stated, 'I proffer the alternative view that it is divinity's very potentiality-to-be that is the most divine thing about it' (2001, p. 2).

symbolic casts a shadow over human aspirations for ‘becoming divine’, especially the hopes of persons who have been marginalized by the Western, White, male, heterosexual world. Thus, Jantzen argued for a new symbolic, with which all human persons would be entitled to engage. Then, I turned to Kearney’s thesis of ‘the God who may be’, providing examples of his theorizing on the ‘becoming’ of God; and of God incarnated in Christ and human persons. Kearney’s non-metaphysical emphasis of ‘becoming’ was seen as a significant option for humankind to engage with an eschatological telos of flourishing by trusting into the present.

Among constructive theology’s *prolegomena* who shared the priorities of diversity, inclusivity, and justice, was a proponent of the world’s ecosystems, Sallie McFague. McFague drew her colleagues’ attention to the Divine in ways that were unique to her sensibilities, including the use of metaphor, and the care of creation as part of God’s body. Her message of the call to love challenged persons to extend hospitality, compassion, and care of the Other in new ways, all evidence of what I term, Becoming. Her constructive theological methods guided my advancement of a constructive theology on this theme.

3.7 A Model for a Constructive Theopoeisis

3.7.1 Introduction

I complete this chapter on scholarship contributing to my grounded theory with the work of constructive theologian, Sallie McFague. This section reviews McFague’s two known theological areas of interest and provides an example of her heuristic for constructing new models of God for a contemporary, postmodern era. At the end of the

section, I share my application of McFague's constructive process in order to create a heuristic of my own, with which, I composed a grounded *theopoiesis.*

3.7.2 Metaphorical and Ecological Theologies

Sallie McFague is recognized by Grau and Wyman as a constructive theologian whose theological reflection evinced her cultural and professional sensibilities (Grau, 2020, p. 58; Wyman, 2020, pp. 22-23). She was known for at least two areas of focus in contemporary theological re-construction: 'eco-theology' and 'metaphorical theology'. McFague developed 'eco-theology', as she recognized that by hijacking theology in multiple, subversive ways, the global systems of patriarchy, heteronormativity, and capitalism, effected innumerable marginalizations and injustices on creaturely life (McFague, 2008, pp. 43-45).[202] In fact, reflecting on the meditations of 19th Century theologian and Jesuit priest, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, McFague was struck by Teilhard de Chardin's appreciation for the interconnectivity of all created matter.[203] This led to her engagement in constructive theologizing from an ecological frame of reference (McFague, 1987, p. 7), asserting, 'the evolutionary, ecological perspective insists that we are … not our own: we belong from the cells of our bodies to the finest creation of our minds, to the intricate, constantly changing cosmos … the rocks and waters, atmosphere and soil,

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[202] This global reality encouraged McFague to approach justice from a perspective which was not only concerned with humans, but also, non-human createds. In her book, *Blessed Are the Consumers: Climate Change and the Practice of Restraint*, McFague opens by describing herself as a theologian who explores how religion is connected to ecology and economics - a descriptor she found resulted in puzzled expressions from inquirers (2013, p. ix).

[203] McFague alludes to Teilhard de Chardin's writing in his book, *Writings in Time of War* (trans. René Hague, 1968), as the source of her inspirations. Teilhard de Chardin's description of his conscious meditative descent into the depths of his being shared his conclusion that his existence was ' 'one with the immensity of all that is and all that is in the process of becoming' '; it was his interpretation of interconnectivity which impressed McFague, and about which, she later wrote (1987, p. 7).

plants, animals, and human beings interact in dynamic, mutually supportive ways that make all talk of atomistic individualism indefensible' (McFague, 1987, pp. 7-8; emphasis mine). Thus, McFague argued that human beings are defined fundamentally, by their relationships with all createds, and with all forms of matter from which they draw life, and/or benefit (McFague, 1987, p. 8; McFague, 2008, p. 32); moreover, theology should respect this interdependence (McFague, 1987, p. 9; McFague, 2008, pp. 46-48). Her second sphere of influence, 'metaphorical theology', provided new 'models of God' for her field (McFague, 1987, p. 10), where McFague's focus was on metaphors individuals employ to express their experiences. Acknowledging that human experience can be prone to fault, she contended that experience remains the only basis from which persons draw, to express their subjective realities (Grau, 2020, p. 58). Consequently, McFague focused on persons' use of metaphor to explain their experiences, including experiences of God (McFague, 1987, p. ix; Grau, 2020, p. 58). Of significance, was her sensibility concerning, 'patriarchal', 'imperialist', and 'triumphalist' metaphors, which she viewed as false misrepresentations of the Divine, offering what had contributed to humanity's abdication of their responsibility to steward earth and life (McFague, 1987, ix). Consequently, McFague believed theology could play a meaningful and necessary role when applied by those concerned for planetary flourishing (McFague, 2008, pp. 96, 97).

3.7.3 McFague's Theological Heuristic and Models of God

In constructing new models of God, McFague prefaced her heuristic experiment by addressing challenges inherent in theological construction, including limitations of modern and postmodern models of God. One important issue concerned her belief in theology's

function of 'remythologizing', depicting meaningful imagistic and conceptual metaphors of God for human persons (McFague, 1987, pp. 32); this historical account on the function of metaphors was utile, teaching that, 'from Aristotle until recently, a metaphor has been used as a poetic device to embellish or decorate' (McFague, 1987, p. 33). McFague explained that metaphors are concerned with expressing both what 'is' and what 'is not', and using them appropriately requires understanding that they are merely attempts to convey the *quality* of a thing, not to *equate* the metaphor with the *thing* itself - because no actual representation of the *thing* exists (McFague, 1987, pp. 32-34). Furthermore, she demonstrated how errors occur when One attempts to equate the metaphor with its referent – e.g. *equating* God with a father or mother, instead of appreciating male and female qualities as *images of* the Divine's nature.[204]

McFague approached theology as *a metaphor for human concepts* concerning the Divine, concepts which themselves, also derive from metaphors. Thus, from her purview, to a large degree, theology is '*fiction*', and consequently, theological statements cannot be proffered as truths, only as approximations which might rule out *what is* (McFague, 1987, p. xi). Referring to these approximations as, 'is nots' or 'cracks', McFague named her approach 'metaphorical' or 'heuristic' (ibid.),[205] with a purpose of demonstrating that

[204] This was identified as one of the shortcomings of Christianity's use of the 'father' metaphor for God, a metaphor which has long enjoyed acceptance, finding its way into doctrine, and even explaining the concept of God, as a Trinity of persons. The status that has been awarded to the 'father' metaphor as the *defining noun* for God, to the exclusion of others, is the reason why McFague referred to its use as 'idolatrous' (1987, p. 97). As my focus here is to state and provide an overview of McFague's metaphoric *method*, I will only detail her models here. These, along with her argument, are found in the cited pages. Finally, I wish to remark on the high degree of creativity, humility, boldness, and respect for the Christian tradition that she practiced. It reflects the rich spirit and thoughtful detail of constructive theology (Grau, 2020, p. 56; McFague, 1974, p. 31; Wyman, 20017, p. 316).

[205] A heuristic refers to the action of 'serving to find out' (McFague, 1987, p. 36). In teaching, it describes a system that is used to help students discover concepts through their personal process (ibid.).

their constructed meanings were ‘credible candidates for theology today, from both a Christian and a postmodern perspective’ (McFague, 1987, p. xi). She chose metaphors for God which evoked the ‘power of love’ on which the human potential to care for the cosmos is hinged (McFague, 1987, p. 16), words which provided a sense of the nature of this love, included: ‘fidelity; nurture; attraction; self-sacrifice; passion; responsibility; care; affection; respect; and mutuality’ (McFague, 1987, p. 21). Her heuristic took steps to ‘flesh out’ metaphors and models of God, and in the process, she constructed an argument about their utility and appropriateness for a contemporary, ecologically-, and evolutionary-minded society, threatened with nuclear annihilation (McFague, 1974, pp. xii, 15).

With a goal of offering an ‘imaginative picture of the relationship between God and the world, which will express the saving presence of God in our present’, McFague’s heuristic is a picture which speaks to all persons, including followers of religions other than Judaism and Christianity (McFague, 1987, pp. 78, 79, 101), outlining steps to be taken toward this form of theological construction. She grounded her theology of God in the metaphor of the ‘world’ as God’s body, symbolic of God’s ‘palpable presence in all space and time’ (McFague, 1987, pp. 60-61), and chose three metaphors for God, namely: 1) ‘mother’ (McFague, 1987, pp. 107-109, 110-113, 113-114); 2) ‘lover’ (McFague, 1987, pp. 130-136, 142-146, 147-154); and 3) ‘friend’ (McFague, 1987, pp. 162-167, 169-174, 178-180); these were images she recognized as already ‘emerging’ in social life (McFague, 1987, pp. xii, 20).

The heuristic examined three questions regarding each metaphor. They were the following: 1) ‘What sort of divine love is suggested by this model’? 2) ‘What kind of divine activity is implied by this love’? and 3) ‘What does this kind of love say about existence in

our world'? Her argument unfolded by providing answers to each question in relation to the metaphors of God, elaborating on each in an orderly way, and comparing the answers with those stemming from others referring to metaphors already existing in traditional Western Christian systematic theology.[206] This advanced a provocative argument, and as it would be with a 'poet' and a 'philosopher', McFague's heuristic proved itself to be a bold, yet, humble attempt to facilitate 'talk about what we do not know how to talk about', respecting the Divine's ineffability (McFague, 1974, pp. xii, 31). In the end, these models of God appeared to be appropriate for a contemporary post-Christian, ecological, evolutionary, nuclear world (McFague, 1987, pp. 21, 24, 31).[207]

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[206] McFague was referring to her detailed explanation of metaphor in her book, *Metaphorical Theology: Models of God in Religious Language* (1982). What she was addressing here were limitations of the model of God as mother (or parent). She based her point on the reality of human limitations concerning *agapic* love, for, human parents direct their love primarily toward their own species, or kind. Still, McFague identified other aspects of divine *agapic* love that are fulfilled by the model of God as mother (parent) (1987, pp. 108, 109). What she did here was significant. For, while the exercise is not a characteristic of qualitative research, similar to the concluding stages of refinement of a grounded theory, as a researcher, McFague's action of reviewing gaps in the logic of her metaphoric theology demonstrated her attentiveness to the theological task as art and a science. Some of McFague's identification of specific gaps in logic (e.g. the model of God as mother), demonstrated that they reflect challenges inherent in constructing theories which are no more than plausible as understandings of the nature of Divinity - for the Divine is not fully expressed in humans' experiences of Them **(**McFague, 1987, pp. 97, 108-109). Furthermore, grounded theorists, Corbin and Strauss, acknowledge that in theoretical construction, the 'truths' of qualitative inquiry cannot be validated fully, such that Corbin admits, 'I don't feel comfortable using the terms *validity* and *reliability* when discussing qualitative research. These terms carry with them too many quantitative implications (a personal bias). Somehow the word *truth* also bothers me in the sense that it seems that no matter how you define *truth,* the terms carries with it a certain degree of dogmatism. I prefer the term *credibility* when talking about qualitative research. To me, the term credibility indicates that findings are trustworthy and believable in that they reflect participants', researchers', and readers' experiences with phenomena, … the explanation the theory provides is only one of many possible 'plausible' interpretations from data … I don't believe that the same judgement criteria can be applied across qualitative methodologies because *each methodology is based on a different theoretical foundation and has different procedures*. Each method deserves its own set of judgement criteria' (Corbin and Strauss, 2015, p.347, italics mine).

[207] McFague had a caution about Christian theology which continues to deny that all human realities are constructed ones. In its hesitancy to deconstruct and reconstruct metaphors which no longer speak to pressing, and contemporary realities, she felt that Christianity had demonstrated a practice of what Nietzsche had criticized - of claiming 'worn-out metaphors' as truth, thus betraying its dependency on a 'metaphysics of presence' (McFague, 1987, pp. 21- 23). She viewed 'metaphysics of presence' as the effort to avoid the recognition of 'absence, emptiness, and uncertainty' which lie at the core of all things. This trend is evident in Western Christianity's insistence on concepts such as consistency, and fullness, as

3.7.4 A Novel Heuristic - Tool for a Grounded Theopoeisis

To repeat, the three questions from which this qualitative research stems are the following: 1) How have the spiritual journeys of persons who identify as LGBTQ and believers in the Divine been shaped by their varied life experiences? 2) How have these journeys affected the lives of those closest to them? 3) How has their spirituality impacted their awareness of who they are as persons who are on a life journey of Becoming?

I interpreted the data arising from these questions in ten themes, from which, I arranged three groupings of categories,[208] and in discussing them, I engaged with my own heuristic, which involved answering these three questions: 1) What is the nature of human Becoming suggested in the categories related to this theme? 2) What sort of Divine-human involvement is implied in the narratives referring to these categories? 3) What does this grounded *theopoiesis* suggest about human Becoming in the context of Mystery today? In the process, like McFague, I asked the following about the theory I was constructing: 'What sort of construction is it? What are its sources and resources? How can it claim continuity with the Christian paradigm?' (McFague, 1987, p. 31).[209] In the end, as I worked with my heuristic, the theological literature, and the 'four sources of theology', remaining open to a unique representation of the Christian faith, mindful of where my theory was challenged (Grau, 2020, p. 56; Wyman, 2020, p. 29). Approaching this

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qualities which concern the Divine. In a sense, 'metaphysics of presence' denies Divinity as Mystery, and as such, that much about Divinity remains uncertain (McFague, 1974, pp. 24-25). In her view, the significance of recognizing the utility of metaphor, and its role in expressing the core values of the faith tradition is all the more critical for reclaiming theology as relevant for these times.

[208] See section 2.5.3 for the three main groupings of categories: 'beginning', 'homesteading', and 're-creation'.

[209] As McFague found, 'the first question will involve metaphors, models, and concepts; and the second will treat Scripture, tradition, and experience; the third will attempt a sketch of demonstrable continuities within the Christian paradigm' (1987, p. 31).

theological construction as an exercise of ‘faith seeking understanding’, I kept Grau’s guidelines in mind, teasing out the variety of expressions of faith and doubt in the participants’ narratives (Grau, 2020, p. 58). Led by McFague’s comment that, while ‘this sort of theology says much, it means little’ ’ (McFague, 1974, p. xii), I was inspired to embrace humility in my theological re-construction. My constructive grounded *theopoiesis* is my best response to these questions. It is the subject of the next four chapters.

3.7.5 Section Summary

Sallie McFague’s metaphorical and ecological theologies were the topic of this section. I provided an overview of the sensibilities defining her constructive theologies, and the process by which she composed models of God for the contemporary world. McFague’s constructive heuristic was a guide for my creation of a heuristic for my grounded theory. I shared my application of this process in my constructive theologizing.

3.8 Chapter Summary

The literature I reviewed demonstrates that constructive theology defines and furnishes an appropriate context for the study of a phenomenon of spirituality as human Becoming with LGBTQ persons. Furthermore, while Becoming is treated in distinct ways within specialized disciplines, of Christian spirituality, Queer theology, theopoetics, process theology, psychology, psychoanalysis, and the philosophy of religion, applying Keller’s cosmological theology of process, my integration of knowledges concerning the human ‘self’ from these varied perspectives provides a creative, *tehomic*, holistic appreciation of the potentialities in Becoming in the chapters to come. With this heuristic

as my own working model, I move into a discussion of the research findings, themes I have categorized, and the main category of my grounded theory. I begin with **Chapter 4**.

CHAPTER 4

BEGINNING[210]

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I introduce stories of Becoming of the research participants. I begin by sharing briefly some relevant biographical details; my intention is to provide a context for appreciating their journeys of spirituality, which follow in this chapter, and in those that are forthcoming.

I begin my interpretation, engaging with Catherine Keller's process theology, that she describes as a theology of 'becoming'; I use it as an epistemological tool in my theological construction, arguing that Keller's use of the concept, *creatio ex profundis*, a 'beginning', an 'opening out' of the mysterious *tehom* of 'the deep', provides a useful frame within which to expand on the themes of 'beginning', in the first 'movement' of this grounded *theopoiesis*. I also argue that the three categories of this theme, represent a point of initiation on human persons' conscious journeys of growth.

The point of this chapter, therefore, is to explain the grouping of categories to which I refer as, 'beginning'. To do this, I employ my own heuristic, expanding on the nature of Becoming suggested in the categories related to this theme. In responding to the initial research question, I describe and explain each category in this 'movement'.

First, is the construct of 'conscious self-awareness', which involves the human

[210] Keller explains that in Greek, the word 'beginning' means 'becoming', and that this is the subject of process theology. This journey of 'becoming' is one she describes as 'nonlinear' (Keller, 2008, pp. xii, xiv).

encounter with the 'self', the personal ground of Becoming, in their physical, psychological, and spiritual expressions.

The next concept is the 'call to life, pruning and growth', which unfolds in concert with 'conscious self-awareness; this 'call' is a beckoning toward flourishing as a human person, involving self-giving, receiving, and refinement of the 'self'.

The last concept in the 'movement' of 'beginning', is 'facing the deep'. This construct involves an encounter with an 'Other', a reality, an entity, or an experience, that is chaotic; of consequence, 'facing the deep' can also be considered to be the confrontation with a source that is ill-intentioned, tending away from that which is life-giving. However, despite engagement with the potential for ill effects, 'facing the deep' is a 'movement' that may be met in a way which contributes to flourishing.

In the second part of my heuristic, I explore the type of Divine-human involvement suggested in narratives derived from the six participants. Here, I expand on the motif of 'beginning', by situating the thematic 'movements' in the lived realities found in participants' interview narratives, discussed in the light of contemporary literature. I apply Keller's interpretation of the theme of the biblical creation story, as one which concerns an ongoing process of 'becoming', highlighting participants' spirituality as one involving the 'movement' of 'conscious self-awareness', as an 'open-ended', *creatio continua*.[211] Then, I draw on Melanie May's theopoetics, to demonstrate how an encounter with the 'self' is a primal aspect of Becoming.

[211] I have defined *creatio continua* previously, as an ongoing process of creation (see section 3.5.6.1).

The theme, the ‘call to life, pruning and growth’ is the next one on which I elaborate, and in this context, I introduce Sallie McFague’s metaphoric theology to explain the ecological sensibilities in participants’ narratives; this highlights the significance of their relationships with creation, in addition to the priority of their attention to the ‘self’.

I follow with a discussion of the theme, ‘facing the deep’; another facet of potentiality in ‘beginning’, it is the last theme in this category. I return to Keller’s theological construction, and apply Jay Johnson’s experiential theology, to provide a unique illumination of this concept’. I demonstrate that ‘facing the deep’ is an integral component of ‘beginning’, complementing other themes.

Finally, I discuss the third question in my heuristic, which concerns what the grounded *theopoiesis* described in these data suggests about human Becoming, in the context of Mystery, in the contemporary Western Canadian context. I draw on the theological insights of Robert Goss, Melanie May, Jay Johnson, and other social scientists, to conclude the section, with practical theological considerations. I refer to the knowledges of one participant’s friend and colleague, emphasizing the significance of ‘beginning’ in the Becoming journey of LGBTQ persons in B.C. today.

4.2 The Participants – A Biographical Précis

Eva, the first participant I introduce, lives in a city in rural B.C., her parents immigrated to Canada from another country before Eva’s birth. Eva’s spiritual formation occurred in the Anglican Church, where her mother was a Sunday school teacher; her father accompanied them to church on religious holidays. Although Eva enjoyed going to church as a child, before entering her teenage years, a disagreement between her mother

and the parish priest, resulted in the family no longer attending. Eva married young, and divorced shortly thereafter, due to the controlling and abusive relationship she experienced with her spouse. She has no children, and leads her life as a single person who identifies as Queer and female. Eva came out first, to her family and friends; when she came out to some members, and clergy of her church, she was grateful for their expressed affirmation.[212] As someone who is known for her leadership in the community, Eva is well respected, and possesses collegial and community allies.

Andy, a second participant, identifies as gay and male. He is single, has never married, and enjoys the community he has created around him through his job in a city in rural B.C. Born and raised in this province, Andy was adopted as a baby by a couple, who, as immigrants to Canada, raised their children in the Roman Catholic religious tradition in a rural town in B.C. As a youth, Andy remembers receiving messages in church that non-heteronormative living was 'sin', and he was also bullied at school. In his young adulthood, he was welcomed into evangelical and charismatic settings; then later, when he moved away to a large city in another province, Andy experimented with illicit drug use briefly; but, eventually, he accepted the fact that this habit hinted more of internal psychological, and spiritual distress, than of a desire for leisure, as many claimed to enjoy. Despite

[212] I held supplementary interviews with four persons who were longstanding members of various Anglican congregations, and who identified as LGBTQ allies. For LGBTQ persons with more community longevity, more permanence can afford them status, an advantage for the viability of working in a community. However, they also spoke of some of the challenges experienced by LGBTQ clergy who live in rural towns and cities, where the clergy and/or their families-of-origin do not possess a long history. These supplementary interviewees acknowledged that although the climate for LGBTQ clergy in the Anglican Church has improved today (Anglican Church of Canada, 2010; Anglican Church of Canada, 2023), and the subaltern status experienced by many is a reality that must be negotiated with tact and confidence. Still, in Canada, Kennedy's study reports that rural living was preferred by the majority of the gay men in his research, despite issues of concern which prevailed (2010, p. 1086); Bernadette Barton states that the loss of family and relationships can be significant for nonbinary persons, who remain ostracized in their small communities (Barton, 2010, p. 477).

significant marginalizing contexts in the course of his spiritual formation, Andy has had memorable experiences that he considers as occasions of 'rescue' by God, and God's 'agents'. His growing sense of acceptance in the Divine causes Andy to feel a sense of belonging to something greater than his 'self' alone, and he is hopeful concerning his advancement in the community in the future.

Dawn, is a third resident of rural B.C. Although she has never met her birth parents, and is not a visible minority, she is aware of having an ancestral heritage as a Métis, which abides with her today.[213] After spending her first few years in a children's home, Dawn was adopted by a married couple in a central Canadian province.[214] To her knowledge, English is her mother-tongue, it is her only spoken language. As an adopted child, being sensitive to her mixed ethnicity as Métis added some complexity to her journey of identity formation in youth and young adulthood. Dawn was often unable to feel a sense of belonging - feeling at home - regardless of whether she was with her parents, or away from them. In her childhood, Dawn was sensitive to her desire to relate to the Divine; subsequently, she experienced faith formation in Catholic, Anglican, and United Churches. Although seasons of significant personal emotional turmoil and loss shaped her life before adulthood, Dawn recalls receiving support, affirmation, and love from caregivers, professionals, and educators. She identifies as female and lesbian, is married

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[213] The term Métis, refers to persons of mixed Aboriginal and French-Canadian ancestry. Aboriginal persons are also known as the Native First Peoples of Canada, and French-Canadians are descendants of the French. Along with the British, the French were involved in the colonization of Canada, which occurred in the late 16th and 17 h Centuries. (Chartrand, 2011, p. 131).

[214] The provinces which comprise Atlantic Canada are Newfoundland and Labrador, and those known as the Maritimes (Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and Prince Edward Island). Central Canada refers to the provinces of Ontario and Quebec, which are east of the Prairie provinces (Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta) and Western Canada (British Columbia). The three territories in the North are Nunavut, the Northwest Territories, and the Yukon Territory (Government of Canada, 2012).

to her wife of several years.

Sophie is a fourth participant. She is among the second generation of children in a family of origin whose parents were born in Western Canada. Her parents have different ethnic and national ancestries, one a visible minority. Although they did not expose their children to established spiritual or religious traditions, Sophie's parents practiced tolerance, which contributed to Sophie's comfort and curiosity about Christian life practices observed in one of her friends during their teenage years. Since that time, Sophie has pursued her own faith formation, in a variety of non-denominational evangelical Christian churches. Being sensitive to her self-identification as a person who is mixed-race, female, and lesbian since her youth, she demonstrates priorities of thoughtful, social critique, and justice. She enjoys a contemporary lifestyle in an urban city in B.C., to which she relocated from another Western Canadian city. Sophie is single, has never married, lives on her own, and at the time of this research, was involved in a relationship with another woman. Now, attending a non-denominational evangelical Christian church that is not gay-affirming, Sophie chose to come out to the pastor, with whom she enjoyed a good relationship. Due to the denomination's polity, she was not allowed to remain involved as a church member or volunteer.

Franca, a fifth participant, also lives in an urban city in B.C.; it is one to which she immigrated in early adulthood, after she and other members in her family-of-origin moved to Canada. Raised in the Roman Catholic Church, Franca enjoyed faith formation that was shaped by contemporary catechetical mentoring. In B.C., she became involved in fundamentalist, evangelical, and Baptist churches. After many years of assuming the male gender identity, assigned to her at birth, Franca married her young adult sweetheart, and

they had two children. However, early in their family life, Franca experienced dysphoric feelings, related to closeting her gender identity and sexual orientation; after some time, she shared this with her wife. Initially although her wife supported her in praying for 'healing', eventually, Franca explored medical interventions to transition to her authentic gender and sexual identity as female and lesbian. In the end, what transpired was a civil, but heart-wrenching divorce, and the two parted ways.[215] Franca communicates with her adult children, has a tight-knit circle of life-long friends, and desires to support LGBTQ persons, while challenging the Church toward renewal.

Summer, the sixth participant, lives in a rural city in B.C. Her parents were born in Canada, of different ethnic ancestries. As a child, Summer experienced private religious education, which she enjoyed very much. However, she has unpleasant memories of school, and her religious formation in The Lutheran and United Churches of Canada; these contexts stand out as signs of conservative fundamentalism's preference for heterosexual marriage, and its message of eternal damnation for persons who do not comply with its religious proscriptions. In high school, Summer's preferences for cultural diversity, ecumenism, and co-operation, were piqued; subsequently, she became interested in issue related to philosophy, peace, international justice, and reconciliation. After working in social services, Summer thrived on community justice projects, and at the time of this study, she was engaged in a new job search. Summer identifies as female

[215] Loss of a marital relationship and religious community is not uncommon for persons who identify as transgender, transition, and then, 'come out' to their social communities (Hattie and Beagan, 2013, p. 254).

and gender fluid,[216] and as bisexual; she is married, and had two children with her husband.[217] She and her family no longer attend church, but Summer practices yoga and meditation, and listens to a variety of podcasts on contemplative Christian spirituality; she yearns for regular, intimate connections with persons who share her spiritual priorities.

4.3 The Heuristic

4.3.1 What is the Nature of Human Becoming Suggested in the Categories of 'Beginning'?

As I selected codes and categories from participants' stories, they reflected an 'opening out' on a journey of human Becoming. This journey was rooted in a conscious awareness of the 'self' as a unique person, and the world about them; this appreciation arrived by way of participants' body, soul, and spirit.[218] Alongside 'conscious self-awareness', another category unfolded, that is inseparable from an awareness of the

[216] In Canada, the Aboriginal term used commonly for one who is gender fluid is 'two-spirited'. It relates to the 'two-spirits' - masculine and feminine - esteemed to inhabit One who does not identify by using binary terms for gender; historically this was considered a 'third gender' by the First Nations (Goldie, 2001c, p. 11).
[217] Psychotherapist, D. Niki, reports that the majority of persons have experienced feelings of attraction to persons of both sexes, but that sexual orientation is understood to progress along three axes, in this way, 'attraction, behaviour, and self-identity' (2018, pp. 46-47). She also shares that bisexuality is as common as heterosexuality, and is the most predominant of nonbinary orientations in the LGBTQ population. Despite this, bisexual persons are often rendered 'invisible' because they are misunderstood, experience 'biphobia' and pressure to 'choose' a sexual identity, and experience mental health challenges (Niki, 2018, pp. 46-47, 49). In addition to this, Gross and Yip found that fewer of their participants' churches had addressed bisexuality in their congregations (16.9%) in comparison to those which had addressed homosexuality (20.3%) (2010, p. 14). As an issue, homosexuality had received more tolerance and understanding within the Christian ecclesial contexts they studied (ibid.).
[218] See Table 1.7a, and the codes related to the coloured category 1a; Although some use the term 'soul' interchangeably with 'spirit', David Benner views the 'soul' as the 'womb of safety and containment', which helps an individual manage the tensions of life (2011, p. 44). He also draws on the theoretical frame adopted by James Hillman (1975), who explains the soul as 'the middle ground between matter and spirit', and thus, Benner presents the 'soul' as that which exists between what happens to a person, and their subjective experience, namely, between what is 'matter' and what is 'spirit' (ibid.). In this thesis, I refer to the soul in the sense of 'psyche', an individual's conscious expression of mind, will, and emotion. I use the term 'spirit' to describe a person's *intuitive,* or *inner felt* sensibility which, while not quantifiable, is something to which they attribute the source of their life passion, drive, and meaning.

'self'. I named it as, the 'call to life, pruning and growth'. This call was described as a felt summons to flourishing, that I interpreted as a vocation, inspired by a propulsion toward holistic self-identity.[219]

The 'call to life, pruning and growth', therefore, was captured by words reflecting a tendency toward authenticity, a response to these inner beckonings, moving participants toward integrity. Participants' encounters of 'self' in everyday experiences signified this call. The yearning for 'life' was seen in their actions of: questioning; curiosity; openness; attraction; and experimentation. These 'movements' led to their discovery of the 'self' as a person. The outcome of this 'call to life, pruning and growth' was participants' choice, to leave behind lifeless, and life-draining ways of being; hence, there was a felt need to explore the 'self', not only physically or psychologically, but sexually as well. This 'movement' explains their subsequent reasons for inquiring into their sexual identity.

But this 'call' was also evident in participants' descriptions of their experiences of the 'self' in contexts that were discomfiting. These included occasions when persons experienced a process of 'pruning and growth'. Occasions like this were characterized by feelings of: yearning; struggle; fluctuation; and confusion, and in essence, this 'movement' of 'beginning' was evident in descriptions of the vibrant, sometimes chafing aspects of Becoming. The words participants used to describe their self-exploration suggested that the 'call' occurred gradually, and that it contributed to a desire for an honest, more wholesome expression of the 'self' in engagement with Others.

[219] See Table 1.7a, and Table 1.7b, and the codes related to the coloured categories 3a – 8b.

I interpreted narrative codes as depicting another encounter: ‘facing the deep’, a final category within the theme of 'beginning’. This category was evident in expressions depicting a confrontation of chaos, as a reality which had an effect on an individual’s body, soul, or spirit; it was recognized as including negative possibility.[220] Its nature was one of threat, danger, or loss to the Becoming ‘self’,[221] and it represented unwelcome, unpredictable events, that must be negotiated due to their potential to undermine the ‘movement’ of ‘beginning’. However, while ‘facing the deep’ was a ‘movement’ overshadowed by physical, emotional, and existential pain, it also represents a transformable event in the manner of potentiating Becoming for the better; it reflects one of the paradoxical elements of spirituality.

Thus, participants’ lives reveal themes of ‘beginning’ which encompass the vibrant, unruly nature of growth, including the establishment of boundaries, and the encounter of loss on the Becoming journey. An image of these ‘movements’ is found on the following page.

[220] For example, in section 4.3.2.3, Eva’s experiences with childhood abuse, and the discrimination faced by her family, came under this category; See also table 1.7a, and the codes related to the coloured categories 1b and 2c, also related to the final category, ‘facing the deep’.
[221] Some of these incidents are described later in the Discussion, in section 4.3.2.3.

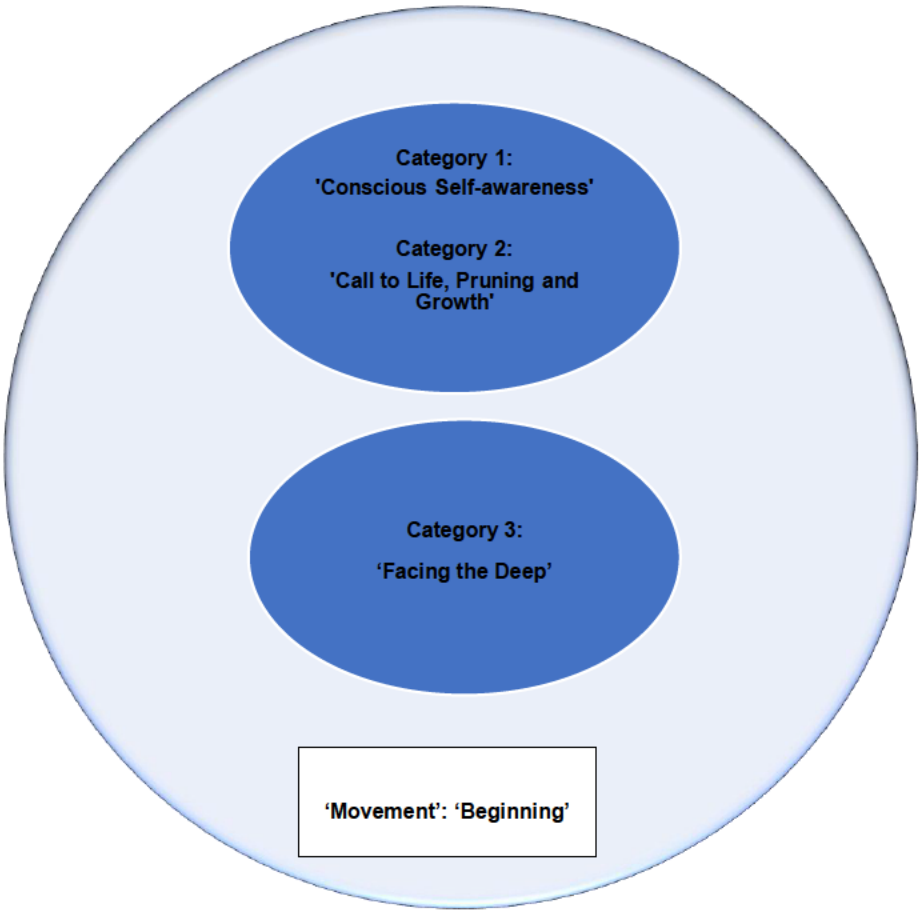


Figure 3 'Grouping of Categories in the 'Movement' of 'Beginning' '.

4.3.2 What Type of Divine-Human Involvement is Implied in the Narratives Describing the Categories of 'Beginning'?

4.3.2.1 Conscious self-awareness

The philosophy of religion falls short in recognizing the 'self' as a conscious bodily entity, ignoring the conscious physicality, emotionality, and sexuality of human persons, in favour of persons' rationality (belief) and volition (will) (Jantzen, 1998, pp. 31-33, 80). Yet, Dawn's narratives refer to her body as the physical house for her 'self', revealing a 'movement' of 'conscious self-awareness' in her perception and engagement with the outer world which surrounds her,

> When we moved to [province] there was a … church that my mother really liked. So [when I was] at [age] 4 we started attending and I did my part of the children's church; loved sitting in the church; loved the choir; and then at [age] 7, they had started a class for getting first communion - it was actually for kids that were 12, but I kept showing up. So they really had no option but to let ME do [study] the book also. So I did the book and received first communion that year, I still have the book … the pews were this way [points]. And then there was where the choir sat, was just behind the organ just to the right, and I didn't sit with my mom, I sat at the front 'cause I liked to listen to the angels singing, so I just loved the angels singing.

These words describe Dawn's sensory awarenesses during her first experiences of formalized religion, her spirituality, in this context.[222] Moreover, she enjoyed rites and activities, like, sitting on the church pews, listening to the choir singing, and studying a book of religious formation. Here, the 'movement' of 'conscious self-awareness' is evident in her body during religious formation (i.e. her awareness of thinking, feeling, and volition).

[222] Grace Jantzen emphasized that the philosophy of religion falls short in recognizing the 'self' as a conscious bodily entity. All too often, the conscious physicality, emotionality, and sexuality of human persons are ignored, in favour of persons' rationality (belief) and volition (will) (Jantzen, 1998, pp. 31-33, 80).

Summer, shared about an occasion where she discussed the matter of sexuality with her mother. She expressed an awareness of the changes she felt in her body,

> I mean there was LOTS of fun at that school, I enjoyed that school in lots of ways too. But there was [a] sense of 'you had to behave a certain way' like there was just - I guess that God's love was conditional I think - or that, YEAH, like they talked about HELL! And that hell was like a place that you went to if you didn't believe. Like that was – it was a very REAL place, you know, an um, I'm PRETTY SURE that I remember one sermon where the pastor talked about like falling in a pit, but you just keep FALLING and FALLING and FALLING in DARKNESS for eternity. And it was like, it TERRIFIED ME!
>
> Then there was always, there was this, like real sense of REJECTION or potential rejection, or potential fear. And um, and I know, I mean the things to do with sexuality, was just when I was in about grade 4. We had sex education in school and they – they MUST HAVE TALKED ABOUT homosexuality. And I know I WORRIED about that … and I remember talking to my mom about it and she just was [said] like, "Oh, don't worry about it honey, you're not [homosexual], but I remember being AFRAID of that. And you know, that I don't KNOW at the time if I found that particularly helpful, but because I remember it, it was just probably more of a shut-down than anything, like my mom could not have coped with that.[223]

In these examples, Summer perceived a dissonance between the values of the outer world (those of her school, and of her mother) and those of her body. In her body, she was experiencing life as something that was good and enjoyable. But, the words of the

[223] I interpret these awarenesses about her body as perceptions of the soul, the psychological 'self' by which Summer communicates with her body. In this way, she engages all living realities around and within her. In this writing, I refer to the soul of the 'self' as including facilities of thinking (mind), feeling (emotion), and volition (choice), and in this narrative, Summer's volition is implied in the statement that she 'shut down' after her mother's comment about homosexuality. Hence, she speaks of not pursuing an exploration of the issue of sexual orientation with her mother. This separation between her body and soul, the 'shutting down' of questions regarding her sexual 'self' is unfortunate, in view of Dorothee Söelle's understanding that the Creator is recognized in the creature (1990, p. 44). Unfortunately, religious and familial biases toward nonbinary sexual orientation resulted in Summer's inability to recognize the Creator in her own curiosities about her sexuality. In contrast to the integrative 'self' – the self who responds to physical, emotional, spiritual, volitional, and rational components of its being – Robert Goss spoke of the disembodied 'self', the 'self' who is split off from its physical, or bodily component, due to extreme religious asceticism (2002, p. 11). In a circumstance that is similar to what Summer was referring to here, One's continued rejection of natural bodily sensations and care, can result in alienation, and harm in their corporeal 'self'.

aforementioned individuals, at church, and at school, caused her alarm and fear; they resulted in a 'shutting down' of her willingness to discuss the issues to which they referred.

Reflecting on the metaphor of the world as God's body, Sallie McFague proposed that persons' sensibilities and connectedness to their bodies can be considered in a manner that can be compared to the sensibility and connectedness experienced by God, in relation to what is happening in the world (1987, p. 73). Likewise, when applying McFague's metaphor of the world as God's body, Summer's responsiveness to her bodily sensibilities are an image of God's care and love for their creation (McFague, 1987, p. 74). So, her awarenesses toward her 'self' are appreciated by God. An additional point, however, is important. In her young age, had Summer accepted the opinions of adults, about matters such as hell and sexuality, above her own truths, she would have been moving in a way in opposition to her 'conscious self-awareness', and her 'call to life, pruning and growth'. Although this happened many years before she became aware of the meaning of her sensibilities, it is significant that she did not disregard her inner knowings about her sexual questioning, but instead, distanced herself from the dissonant voices of the adult world around her (McFague, 1987, pp. 67-68).[224] Writer and speaker on spirituality, Vanessa Sheridan, identifies as transgender, and shared that she

[224] Sallie McFague theorized about the Divine being present in every created being, which means that One's sensory appreciations are a means of God's communication to them (1987, pp. 54, 57); I believe it is significant that Summer is married to a heterosexual male, and is in a monogamous marital relationship, for, this means that she *could pass* as heterosexual. Psychotherapist, D. Niki, is a woman who identifies as bisexual, and she remarks that regardless of their ability to 'pass' as heterosexual, bisexual persons often find this practice to be stressful (2018, p. 48), and sometimes this leads to feeling oppressed because of 'double discrimination' from straight and Queer persons (Niki, 2018, p. 48). In effect, Summer experiences 'bi-erasure' from her husband and a few of her friends, a form of prejudice which involves a failure to acknowledge or speak about someone's identification as bisexual, and as she does not have the opportunity to address her husband's 'biphobia' and lack of acceptance as fully as she would like, at times, it contributes to feelings of hurt, confusion, and distance between them (Niki, 2018, pp. 48, 49, 52).

possessed a sensibility concerning what she called, an 'internal difference' when she was two or three years of age; although she was unable to express its meaning to her 'self' in an understandable way, like Summer, Sheridan gleaned that discussing her gender variance with others at that time, would not have been fruitful; she refrained from doing so for some time (Mollenkott and Sheridan, 2010, p. 54).[225]

In addition to sexual orientation, Sophie, shared another aspect of her identity about which she had expressed sensibility, from a young age - her race and ethnicity. She expressed her spiritual knowings about these self-defining characteristics,

> I think maybe growing up in [Western Canadian city] and feeling out of place as both like, mixed race ('cause there weren't really - there were other [racial group] students at school, but not a lot, and they usually hung out with each other, spoke their own language). And then with any Caucasian students I just felt like I didn't fit, in that way, and then, I mean, I knew at a young age too that I was attracted to the same sex, and I just felt that I didn't fit into sort of the norm of, society, in a way, yeah, probably elementary, maybe like grade 5 or 6 [age 10-12], somewhere in that realm.[226]

Here, Sophie commented on her awareness of not fitting into the dominant Western Canadian Caucasian heterosexual community in which she was raised, with which one of her parents identified.[227] Claiming One's sexual and gender identity is a process, that

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[225] An implication of this suggestion is that, as participants' lives bear witness to alternative realities of LGBTQ persons, similarly, the Divine reflects multiplicity, in ways unknown, and unimaginable to createds.

[226] Barnsley proposed a framework for understanding the transgender identity. She described f-gender (the gender one 'feels'), p-gender (the gender one 'performs', as in 'drag') l-gender (the gender one 'looks like'), and j-gender (the gender as judged, or responded to by others) (2012, pp. 41-44). While I acknowledge that this narrative is located in Sophie's story (who identifies as lesbian) and demonstrates this theme, another participant, who identifies as transgender, also expressed a similar awareness, which she experienced in childhood. Here, Sophie has expressed her f-gender, an awareness of feeling like a female, since her formative years.

[227] To reiterate, I use the concept of a spiritual knowing to represent a distinct form of sensibility that I propose to be an *intuitive*, *subjective* facet of conscious self-awareness. Virginia Mollenkott remarked that when some people saw the photograph of herself, that she had provided for the jacket of her book,

takes place over time, and Melissa Wilcox points out that unlike the experience of persons who cannot recall when they self-identified as straight or cis-gendered, some queer and transgendered persons actually *do* feel that they fall outside of the norm in early childhood, and this becomes meaningful later, when they identify as nonbinary (Wilcox, 2021, p. 127). Sophie's life is one example of this experience.

4.3.2.2 'Call to life, pruning and growth'

Franca's awareness of her 'self' ripened, and alongside it, unfolded the 'movement' I name as, 'call to life, pruning and growth'. In her incarnational, process theology of 'becoming', Keller discusses the concept of 'divine *Eros*' as: 'the lure that dares us to become. To become more than we are. We surface the desire hidden in our doubts' (Keller, 2008, p. xiv). The complex pull of 'beginning' is a source of Becoming. Yet no matter how much is evident to primary caregivers, the divine lure calls createds to differentiate from their points of origin, especially their biological ones (Keller, 2008, p. 62). As one facet of this call, Franca continued to discover additional parts of her 'self', and being One who images the Divine, she recognized that while inhabiting a body, and feeling a call to create a home that is a true expression of her 'self', as it was, her body could not express who she was with completeness (Kearney, 2001, p. 10).

Richard Kearney's philosophy applies here, appropriately, for he defines *persona* as the 'aura of 'possibility' which eludes, but informs a person's actual presence here and

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Omnigender: A Trans-religious approach (2001), they asked her friends whether she was male or female. At the time, Mollenkott expressed her hope that they would respond, 'Technically, a woman; but spiritually, both' (Mollenkott and Sheridan, 2010, p. 52). This is an expression of her unique way of knowing her 'self', one she recognizes as originating from her spiritual sense of who she is, something not everyone appreciates.

now' (Kearney, 2001, p. 10). His comment explains the fleeting sense of incarnation and transcendence that human persons represent; consequently, at various points on her journey of Becoming, Franca's 'self' experiences the reality of being in flux. It is a motion which pulls and pushes her, stretches and holds her, while accompanied by pleasure and pain. The fluctuation that Keller suggests derives from *Eros*, is also expressed in Franca's narrative,[228]

> By that time I'm still having these struggles, but I'm still HOPEFUL and I'm starting to SEE this – that I've met this girl that I'm, you know, that I'm doing things that – it's like I said, there's kind of a honeymoon period - it's kind of like all these compulsions and whatever (needs and confusion) were all dialled down, and then I moved … and then I have this correspondence with her and I'm starting to think [addressing God]: 'Oh! I see what you're doing, God! Thank you for – one of these days this is all gonna be gone. Because here I am, I've meet this beautiful girl and she's gonna be – and she LIKES me and she LOVES me and then, Oh!' We're gonna get married and so I'm beginning to see this is how God is going to answer that BIG prayer of MAKING ME NORMAL … So we get married. I never told her anything about my struggles because I sincerely believed I was a NEW PERSON. That was in the past! What [why] do I need to confess what is no longer alive! So even though those feelings are still there – I'm not acting on them. I'm staying CLEAN. I'm walking on the straight and narrow. And I feel EMBOLDENED to continue because I'm beginning to see God at work and now I'm in LOVE and now I'm MARRIED.

Franca's 'call' onto the Becoming journey was one of the 'movement', 'beginning', it was the lure of God (Keller, 2008, p. 95). Yet, as this 'call' unfolded, the 'movement' of encountering and acknowledging her 'self', embracing God's acceptance of who she was, was extensive and prolonged. In part, this was influenced by her initial search for relief from the dysphoria she experienced, while assuming the male gender identity she had

[228] See Keller's quotation of the Twelfth-Century mystic, Hadewijch, who speaks of a divine love, which, 'urges' and 'counsels', and has 'swayed everything that lives' (Hadewijch, 1980, p. 202, cited in Keller, 2008, p. 95).

been assigned at birth. Franca lacked peace of mind, and this led her to consult with medical professionals, in hopes of a possible cure for her dysphoria; as she searched for relief, she tried to make meaning of God's activity in her life, tried to predict God's next moves, bartering with him to secure a guarantee of acceptance.[229]

But the desire to keep her family intact competed with this 'movement' of 'call to life, pruning and growth'. In yearning, confusion, and openness, Franca explains,

> it's after … that I realize: 'These feelings haven't gone away ... I've fallen in love … Why do I still struggle with these feelings? [I'm thinking]: 'Maybe the reason God isn't answering my prayers is that I wasn't honest with [wife]. I should have confessed to [her]. But if I CONFESSED to them maybe she wouldn't have loved me! No, I CAN'T … I'm at a point where I'm thinking: 'Why isn't God answering? It would be so easy for him to snap his finger and for him to take all these desires away. And he's not doing it. So I guess God, I think what you're asking me to do is to confess to [spouse] and to let [her] know my struggles and by doing that, THEN you'll answer my prayer and you'll make it go away. That's the MISSING PIECE of the puzzle!' And so I wrote a letter, read it to her – came out to her. But in those days the word transgender (the whole concept of being transgender) was still NOT AVAILABLE TO ME. And it was still a concept 10 years too soon. So um, I PLEADED with her to pray with me and to fight this battle together. [230]

In this account, Franca's multiform attempts to maintain the status quo involved: abiding by cultural and religious proscriptions; monitoring herself for potential spiritual failures; and anticipating God's response to her efforts, so as to confirm his favour. These strategies contributed to emotional fatigue, and as her efforts to forestall the consequences of life change failed, she grew discouraged, as it did not align with her

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[229] In this thesis, I adopt a practice of using participants' pronouns for the Divine in all of my references to their narratives. Here, Franca refers to God using the pronouns 'he/him/his'.

[230] Like Franca, Barnsley's participant, Leigh, reported having misgivings about coming out about her transgender identity. In Leigh's case, she was surprised - in an encouraging way - at the responses of friends and family, including admissions of attraction and desire for her (Barnsley, 2012, pp. 141-142).

growing sense of who she was. The result was that at times, Franca wondered whether she should continue living a divided life, or whether death would provide her the relief for which she longed.

The theopoetic writer, Melanie May, did not identify as transgender. Her experience as One who identified as nonbinary, however, bore witness similarly, to Franca's reality of emotional turmoil. May expressed her experience of knowing her 'self' as lesbian, and of coming to appreciate that the human body knows in critical ways, which when unheeded, may result in significant and unpleasant consequences.[231] For example, May spoke of knowing, 'what it is to be there and not be there at the same time', adding that an 'absent presence' from her own body's sensibilities, exacerbated her own struggle with depression (May, 1995, p. 73). The result, she explained, was living 'in the shadow of death rather than in the fulness of life' (May, 1995, p. 78). This phenomenon was explained as a common occurrence in the contemporary 'age of absent presence', where persons lose touch with their physical sensibilities (May, 1995, p. 73). Initially, May toyed with dishonesty about her sexual orientation, and in her early adulthood, 'passed' as heterosexual to avoid living in this truth.[232] But, then, she came to the conclusion that, 'my mortal body, my female body, which is 'my first body of knowledge,' is created to glorify God … I am created …. to be and become thanksgiving to God' (May, 1995, p. 105). Appreciating God's revelation in her bodily 'self', she believed that by tending to it, she

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[231] It stands to reason that ignoring bodily knowledges that have been imparted to One by God is irreconcilable with honouring the 'self' as *imago dei*. This is tantamount to ignoring the body of Godself, a reality which explains the profound distress generated in individuals when they ignore this part of God.

[232] This is an act that is common, especially among persons who become proficient at disregarding their body's knowings and communication to them. One can therefore imagine the progressive spirit-soul-body separation which ensues by disregarding the body's knowing over a prolonged period of time. It beckons for eventual reconciliation among these parts of the 'self'.

was respecting a sacred body of knowledge (May, 1995, pp. 85, 103).[233] Eventually, she heeded what her body already knew (May, 1995, pp. 78, 80, 83).[234]

So, like May, Franca's pruning involved coming to terms with her emotional fragility, accepting her true identity, and exploring new options for living, with an attitude of humility. Later, Franca initiated steps to pursue surgery for a gender transition; and over years of progress, she moved through psychological and physiological therapy for transition from male to female gender.[235] This step affirmed her way of relating to her 'self' and Other, in a way that was congruent with her spiritual sensibility, and hence, her gender and sexual identity. In addition to the 'movement', 'call to life, pruning and growth', participants encountered another reality, an opportunity to confront possibilities antithetical to flourishing. This was another 'movement' of 'beginning', that of, 'facing the deep'.

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[233] May was eloquent in her perspective on the body as possessing a history, a history of knowledge that is to be shared. Therefore, she viewed honesty with herself and Others concerning her sexual orientation as acts of participating in 'the revelation of God' through her body (May, 1995, p. 85). This esteem for the body as the sacred revelation of God implies that individual knowledges of One's body are potential storehouses of God's stories concerning Godself. The suggestion that the Divine would inhabit all createds - human, non-human, animate, and inanimate - lends credence to the claim that every life is part of the story of God.

[234] May explained this phenomenon as a common occurrence in the contemporary 'age of absent presence', where persons lose touch with their physical sensibilities (1995, p. 73). Initially, she toyed with dishonesty about her sexual orientation, and in her early adulthood 'passed' (feigned her sexual identity) as heterosexual to avoid living in this truth. This is common among persons who become proficient at disregarding their body's communication to them. One can therefore imagine the progressive spirit-soul-body separation that ensues by disregarding the body's knowing over a prolonged period of time. It invites an eventual reconciliation among these parts of the 'self'.

[235] Keller's concept of 'beginning' is echoed in Franca's 'movement' of 'conscious self-awareness' and growth, an 'endless process of Becoming', which has been part of her for as long as she can remember. Marcella Althaus-Reid claimed that the right to be Oneself, whether One identifies as straight, or of non-binary sexual orientation, reflects the right to be different, and as a result, she made a distinction between human rights based on equality and rights based on difference (Althaus-Reid, 2004a, p. 98). Franca developed a growing awareness of this right to be different as she embraced her 'self'.

4.3.2.3 'Facing the deep'

Participants also acknowledge experiences related to, 'facing the deep', a 'movement' which involves another potential, that of having One's journey of Becoming threatened. In Eva's story, she refers to her own sexual abuse, a reality that can be understood as involving the 'movement', 'facing the deep'. The heinous encounters of which Eva speaks, occurred during her childhood, and she shares some details of her awarenesses,

> Um, there's been a strong spiritual connection between myself and The Divine, um, from my earliest living memories. Um, when I was a child between the ages of 3 and 7, I was sexually molested by a neighbour. Um, my parents knew nothing about it ... he was known in the community, not the kind of person that you would ever suspect, and in the early 19--'s I don't think there was the awareness of childhood sexual abuse that there is now ... So it was, um, it was one of those moments that I think would be, a dissociation … when the abuse would be happening, I would be on the ceiling, watching.[236] Um, as a child, you're not able to articulate what that is, but as I grew older and went into therapy to deal with the trust issues and anger, and all those sorts of things, I realized that I was being held in the arms of the Sacred as this was happening - so that my body would be damaged, but my spirit would not be - and so I felt safe in that ... we left the community, we moved to [location]. Um, probably about 3 or 4 years after we arrived, I got a letter from a friend of mine, it was a newspaper clipping of this man being arrested and tried with multiple counts of sexual interference, sexual assault of a minor, etcetera.

The trauma this involved was something Eva described as causing damage to her body and soul. She recalled encountering God in very pungent ways on these occasions, feeling held in God's arms. But this trauma required healing, emotionally and relationally, and Eva chose to engage in therapy so that she could learn to be open with persons in

[236] Wilcox makes mention of the experiences of some LGBTQ persons in charismatic services where they are 'slain in the spirit' and 'held in God's arms … tenderly cared for by the deity [during which] God told her that she was God's child' (2021, p. 53).

her life and the world, and to trust again.

In Andy's case, as career discernment led him onto different paths, he moved in circles with charismatic Christians, very different from the church context of his formative years;[237] and despite the positive experiences he had, overall, he described these occasions as antithetical to the fulsome life he desired. For instance, in one church fellowship, after seeds of trust had been planted and nurtured in relationships with some denominational leaders, Andy shared his struggles with his sexual orientation. The members with whom he spoke offered him an opportunity to be 'rid of homosexual tendencies', and the 'healing' they promised was ignited by Andy's desire to belong; in time, he deferred to their advice, and attended multiple gatherings of intensive prayer and exorcism,

> For ME, it was very much, okay … God forgave me for being gay, and now I keep having all these thoughts. I need to root this out in order to be pure, and to ME, the theology I was under at that time was around, you know, I don't know how to describe it except to say that: "We must STRIVE for purity, we must STRIVE for holiness, for me, there was this millstone that was around my neck all the time, my attraction … I couldn't stop it! … so it's always weighed on me, um … I was a child of God. And therefore God and I must root this out together. And he even got a bunch of servants together over there that are gonna really help me and deal with this. That, to me, was it, I'm doin' this FOR him, and um, you know, God so LOVED ME, I must give this up. I MUST become PURE. I MUST get married. I MUST have children. I MUST live a holy life …this is what ***I*** felt was what God wanted for me, God never once ever told me that ***he*** wanted me to do that, for me, this was ***me*** saying, "This MUST be what God wants," 'cause my understanding from the church was that homosexuality was not only a sin, but it was like the BIGGEST sin … so if that's abhorrent, well then I must get rid of it … so I'm gonna go through these exorcisms where I'm gonna MEET God in the process, much like [the experience] I had the week-end of my conversion. I was trying to MEET this [God]. And to ME, every single one of

[237] I use the word 'career', instead of 'vocation', because as I have employed it, vocation insinuates a broader path of Becoming than skill development and professional advancement alone. Wilcox speaks of the perspective offered by Justin Tanis, a scholar in religion and culture, who embraces his transgender identity and accepts gender as God's invitation to participate in the world in a new, holistic way (2021, p. 116). The idea of gender as a vocation or calling which unfolds, ongoing, over time, supports a view of Becoming as a process that is not only fluid, but which, in its evolution, contributes to the flourishing of the lives which surround it.

> those experiences was violent … I don't remember walking out of a single one of those feeling that God had met me. I felt (at the time), that I had met the devil ... so what would happen was, it never went away! And so there was this CONSTANT, CONSTANT, CONSTANT beating myself up, this is why I got married ... and then a church … was looking for a … minister, so I was ordained.

Andy speaks of how the religious proscriptions in this context reinforced his self-rejection, and undermined his Becoming. Eventually, the promised 'healing' brought an additional emotional burden – disappointment.[238] As a result, he accepted the next option that church leaders provided him – a ministerial position.

Theologian, Jay Johnson, a gay man, raised in a conservative Christian 'religious subculture of the American Midwest', found himself in a comparable situation, and shares insights from his own experience of God (2010, p. 153). During this period of his Christian spiritual formation, Johnson speaks of being warned about 'falling in (love) with the wrong sort of crowd' (ibid.). Like Andy, Johnson refers to his previously unquenchable thirst to appease the God of Western Christian theological construction, so much so, that he had to muster up courage and strength to wrest himself free of the grip of 'the deep' – the chaos of the evangelical subculture which had overshadowed his social interactions in young adulthood (Johnson, 2010, p. 153). Ensnarement in the close-knit relationships within the church context were described by May as bondage, rather than belonging (1995, p. 32, 35, 36). She recognized, and named the religious bureaucracy with which

[238] Another example of dissociation of the 'self', as a step away from the 'movement', 'call to life, pruning and growth', is seen in Brenda Hattie and Brenda Beagan's study (2013), in the experience of a Canadian woman who identifies as lesbian. After an extended period of trying to become 'holy enough for it to go, or for me to gain control of it', this participant became involved in 'deliverance, which Catholics call exorcism'. However, eventually, she 'recognized it hadn't gone' (Hattie and Beagan, 2013, p. 252). Like Andy, her experience involved an unproductive outcome, despite the anticipated promises.

she had grown familiar, as a static state of 'death in life' (May, 1995, p. 29), remarking that it was necessary for her to rekindle the will to live after her long history in the church; she likened this passage to the contrast between death and life (ibid.).

In his encounters with the members of his church, Andy did meet other Christians who were facing a similar challenge as he was - that of embracing, and having their non-binary identity accepted by others. In fact, psychologist and educator, Joel Kushner, explains that, there are at least four ways in which those who identify as heterosexual, *and* those who claim their identity as non-heterosexual react to the desire of nonbinary persons to integrate their sexuality and spirituality.[239] These are: 1) hostile; 2) indifferent; 3) tolerant; and 4) inclusive (Kushner, 2022). Openness, rather than 'passing', allowed Andy to explore sexual intimacy in new ways. In addition, he began to voice his disappointment and anger about the church's duplicitous treatment of him regarding his struggles, for its leaders had hid the truth about his sexual orientation from the congregation's members, avoiding it altogether. In time, Andy left that religious community. Kushner encourages persons to avoid assuming what the identity of the Other is, because it is only the LGBTQ person's own 'declaration' which determines their identity (Kushner, 2022).

Johnson's theological construction developed by 'doing theology autobiographically', a licence he had been encouraged to use when reading Althaus-Reid's call to individuals to construct 'indecent' theology from their sexual stories (Johnson, 2010, p. 157). Like Johnson, Andy ignored persons' empty warnings about what

[239] Kushner's (2022) writing is based on his practice at the Institute for Judaism and Sexual Orientation with Hebrew Union College's Jewish Institute of Religion.

Johnson described as, 'falling in (love) with the wrong sort of crowd' (Johnson, 2010, p. 153). In the course of his new encounters with others, Andy also found himself 'falling in (love) with God', the 'living God' who frequently seeks company with the crowds whom both Jesus, and his contemporary followers were warned to shun (Johnson, 2010, pp. 153 – 156, 165).[240]

Now, after doubting himself, and privileging the opinions of others regarding his sexuality, Andy's resilience and thriving have surfaced, and due to his experiences in the 'movement', 'facing the deep', he is engaging in life more, rather than shrinking from it. But, for Others such as Eva, a tinge of sadness underlies their accomplishments. For, despite her education, life-long learnings, and position in her community, she remains isolated among her professional peers, religious overseers, and laity. Her sensibility signals the heteronormative bias which persists within her ecclesial community,[241] one with proscriptions against marriage for nonbinary persons that fall short of Eva's ideal of

[240] As a result of his theological experimentation, Johnson shares his appreciation of the God he 'nearly missed' in the context of the conservative religion of his past, and describes God as One who 'rises up from that matrix, not first as familiar friend, but always as the Peculiar, just as strange as our ever-shifting desires' (Johnson, 2010, pp. 154-156). His honesty, and transparency in sharing his story, furnished him with unanticipated dividends.

[241] While a change in spiritual communities is a common part of relocation, for persons of a sexual minority, this can be an additional issue of concern and deliberation, because it is about more than the right to be different (Althaus-Reid, 2004a, p. 98). I also appreciate that the expression of the 'self' as a human person who is sexual and spiritual, is something that is a basic human right – this is because it signifies one's right to live as the person One is created – that is, fully, and not in a manner which requires the 'self' to be compromised or compartmentalized by being marginalized, hidden, or ostracized due to One's identity in different spaces. The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, the highest law in Canada, protects persons' freedom of conscience. It describes persons' right in this way: 'The purpose of section 2(a) is to prevent interference with profoundly held personal beliefs that govern one's perception of oneself, humankind, nature, and, in some cases, a higher or different order of being' (https://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/csj-sjc/rfc-dlc/ccrf-ccdl/check/art2a.html). Where violations between an individual, and a business or organization occur, persons retain the right to pursue legal action. Naturally, where One's human right conflicts with those of another individual in a shared context (e.g. another person's right to practice a religion of their choosing), resolution of Charter rights becomes a complicated, extensive, and costly issue, requiring an examination of One's priorities. As a result, it is common for religious organizations to defer this resolution to democratic census and vote among their membership. But,

loving and living in the holistic freedom of Christ.[242]

Yet Eva does not allow sadness to overcome her. While it lingers, she holds it less firmly today, and her progressive acceptance is consistent with the strength she finds to face and manage the difficulties of life, without being destroyed by the pain of situations. This form of faith, pointing to freedom, a quality that Peter Rollins views as 'resurrection faith', for it 'embraces existence, not because it is perfect, but because it is beautiful in the midst of its very imperfection' (Rollins, 2011, pp. 131). It is part of Eva's Becoming for the present time.

4.3.3 What Does this Grounded Theopoiesis on 'Beginning' Propose for Human Becoming in the Context of Mystery in the Contemporary World?

In view of the Canadian culture in which she was raised, Eva's spirituality is a phenomenon that has 'always already' been unfolding, even while 'reckoning with an Other' in situations of the mysterious *tehom*, 'the deep' (Keller, 2003, pp. xvii, 12; Johnson, 2010, p. 156; May 1995, p. 78). Her Becoming journey has been proceeding out of situations of chaos that are also contemporary experiences for her (Keller, 2008, pp. 51, 54; Keller, 2003, pp. xvii, 22, 114).[243] As a reflection of the journey of the Divine, 'beginning' has progressed in multiform 'movements', that are not predictable. This effect

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disagreements between any one organization and an individual claimant, over an allegation of a violation of the individual's rights, become a matter for resolution between their legal counsel.

[242] Eva shares her contrasting experience in the Metropolitan Community Church (MCC), a community of LGBTQ Christian persons with whom she fellowshipped when she was in university. Founded in 1968, The Metropolitan Community Church, is an international group of worshipping communities, which states that it strives for justice for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer persons and other socially marginalized groups around the world (Metropolitan Community Church, 2020).

[243] See Keller (2003, p. xvi). I suggest that this is true for all creatures who are *imago dei*, especially LGBTQ persons. Similar to some misgivings individuals have concerning the Divine, LGBTQ Becoming is both

was shared by Eva's friend and colleague,

> Talking with Eva … reaffirmed that sense that all people on that spectrum … are God's precious people … getting to know Eva deeply was a matter of … strengthening and reaffirming that for me ... the Pride Day here … was a big part of that ... and knowing Eva just … put a face to an issue ... it becomes more important … it's no longer just an issue, it's a person, it's a relationship, it's a life story, it's an experience. And … I come to see – both the pain, and the grace of being different. That fear of 'Who do I tell? Do I tell anybody? Oh, shit, I've told so-and-so, was that the wrong thing to do?' Um .. I remember when Eva told me that she had come out as Queer to a few folks in [city] … there were a few weeks there when, [she asked the question] 'What's this going to do to my ministry here?' It was unexpected.[244]

The 'movements' of 'beginning' in Eva's journey illustrate that she is among the *creatio cooperationis,* who continue to thrive and influence other createds, amidst unknown challenges and opportunities (Keller, 2003, p. 117; Keller, 2008, p. 59).[245] Indeed, a relationship with Mystery, does not offer promises that are surface, predictable, finished, finite (Keller, 2003, pp. xviii, xvi); such tidy constructions are inadequate for theology in the future (ibid.).[246] As her colleague commented, these 'movements' have led Eva in directions that are not preordained (Keller, 2008, p. 9). She cannot claim 'delusional certainty', for hers is a path of 'theological *caminata*', 'walking into different

misunderstood and feared. Consequently, some LGBTQ persons demonstrate their apprehension concerning their 'self' who is unknown, even to them. This is internalized homophobia.

[244] This narrative is derived from Interview 2, in which I engaged with Eva's friend in mystagogic accompaniment, in Eva's company.

[245] This view is in comparison with the traditional predetermined, autonomous construct of *creatio ex nihilo*. Keller's collective dynamism represents a unique image of the Divine, which connotes an invitational space of collaboration, if not room for unexpected possibility. Keller's proposition of a space such as this one, promising ecumenical multiplicity, allows nondominant, and even subaltern createds, to be recognized as belonging within this community of Becoming persons (2003, pp. xvii, 3, 5, 6). My research shares this aim, nodding at Keller's penchant for collaborations of diverse genres of inquiry which may range from scientific, to literary and artistic. I appreciate these as critical for my grounded theopoetic inquiry, which I believe holds potential for new and unexpected fruit.

[246] This question is most germane for LGBTQ persons who are seeking to pursue their spiritual journey with Mystery with authenticity, and who desire to find safe spaces in their communities in which they can find companions on their journey.

neighbourhoods, leading to novel, and sometimes obscure alleys' (Althaus-Reid, 2003, p. 51). This view is in contrast with the traditional construct of *creatio ex nihilo*, of life which yields outcomes that are predetermined. Not only does the collective dynamism in Keller's incarnational theology represent a unique image of Divinity and an invitational space of collaboration, it leaves room for possibility, a space coloured with ecumenism, permitting nondominant and subaltern createds to be recognized as belonging within a community that is also Becoming (Keller, 2003, pp. xvii, 3, 5, 6).

While the paths of participants have, at times, been shaded by paradox, their new encounters with 'self', other createds, and the Divine, have been invitations to them. 'Tehomic' spaces have offered them opportunities to shed historical fears, prejudices, and preconceived notions concerning unanticipated settings where Life can be discovered.[247] Participants have been called to embrace these as gateways to discovery and unforeseen possibilities.[248] They have also revealed their embrace of the 'movements' of 'conscious self-awareness', 'call to life, pruning and growth', and 'facing the deep'. They image a walk with Mystery in which they are Becoming, as they are an evolution of who they were before (Keller, 2003, pp. xvii, 3), as Andy shares,

> I used to be terrified of being alone. Gee, it was all could do to spend a night by myself, I couldn't stand my own company. I was afraid of it. To me it seemed empty. And I don't have that [anymore]. To me God feels like, you know that PRESENCE that fills every waking moment of my day, you know, to me, sometimes it is so PROFOUNDLY THERE that I just go (there have been times that I have been at work and I just go: 'Wow!') You know … that's why I'm also not worried about this thing about a partner and having somebody in my life because for me (it's starting to get lonely, but) that love I was so searching for, really has manifested itself through God here more than anywhere else –

[247] Keller attributes the label, 'tehomophobia' to the association of the *tehom* with feelings of danger, fear, and prejudice (2003, pp. ix, 32, 64).
[248] In contrast with the aforementioned antonym, Keller names this tendency, 'tehomophilia' (2008, p. 58).

> than any other time in my life. And … when the time is right, when God knows I'm ready, I know he'll bless me with somebody. I know that, and he also wants me to be successful in that relationship. And that relationship will come along at a time when I am ready to fully receive, and fully give. And I know that there's still some things that need – that are washing away – that will allow me to be in a healthy place, and God knows that timing … I'm hoping that the person that I'm with will also be like me. You know … in [names previous places of residence] it was all about ME … and I'm hoping that the person that God brings into my life will reflect God's love to me, and that I can reflect it back, and that we both recognize this, you know? So to me - it's like the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost - to me it's that presence of God that I'm hoping will be a big part of that next relationship. And to me it's just – it's like God with TWO sons, you know? Doesn't mean it's one OR the other, you're happy to see them [both] –

For Andy, 'movements' of Becoming have led to a change in his dependencies. Life in the context of Mystery has not been complete, nor does he expect it to be. But, it has been growing in fullness, for, as he said, God's love has manifested itself to him more now than it was at any other time in his life. He has been looking forward to the possibility of being in relationship with a partner who will reveal the love of God to him in new ways - as he hopes to do for them. Andy is living the reality of the question: 'what is theology but an incantation at the edge of uncertainty?' (Keller, 2003, p. viii).

In corroboration with Eva's reality, her friend and colleague viewed the experiences of Eva, and of other LGBTQ persons, as lenses through which to interpret the good news about which Christ testified,

> I've always responded to those who feel excluded with a warmth and a tenderness … for me they were … just more confirmation of the rightness of the inclusive way of being … the welcoming way of being …. more relations as a lens through which to view the gospel… the gospel isn't an issue, it's a set of relationships. And so the people who are a part of our lives and the circumstances with which we've had to deal, [sighs] all colour how we look at the gospel … I think Eva is one of the first people I've ever met that I would say I love to see the struggle as Eva works out what this looks like in life… 'how do I put this all together?'.. I suspect we had similar upbringings.[249]

[249] This narrative is derived from Interview 2, in which I met with Eva and her friend.

It was evident that Eva's friend reads her life as a gospel written for today, for her distinct circumstances have extended the spaces into which Christ's news of redemption can be seen; such redemption is transformative, administrating freedom in her life (Althaus-Reid and Isherwood, 2007, p. 303). What has been evident in her 'movements' of Becoming, is that her life is a space of relative 'beginning-in-process, an unoriginated and endless process of Becoming', which resides in a chaos that was 'always already there' (Keller, 2003, pp. vii, xix, 3, 9, 15); and Eva's friend has found its unfolding a joy to behold.

4.4 Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I argued that Catherine Keller's theological construction of the 'beginning' in the biblical Genesis account - as '*creatio ex profundis*', a 'beginning' which 'opens out' of a mysterious *tehom* of 'the deep'- is useful as an incarnational interpretive lens with which to expand on the theme of 'beginning' culled from participants' interviews.

I began by introducing the six research participants, sharing a biographical précis. Then, I employed three heuristic questions to analyze the 'movements' seen in their narratives. The first question involved a description of two groupings of categories that I created from coded interviews. These were: 1) 'conscious self-awareness'; 2) 'call to life, pruning and growth'; and 3) 'facing the deep'; and I defined and addressed the 'movements' based on the themes I noted during coding. I highlighted my observation that 'beginning' referred to persons' 'conscious self-awareness' of their body, and that honouring the bodily 'self' includes sexuality as one of the characteristics which reveals Godself among human createds.

I addressed the second heuristic question, by turning to the theological reflections of Sallie McFague, Catherine Keller, Melanie May, Marcella Althaus-Reid, and Jay Johnson, and demonstrated how their insights provided a unique understanding of the themes in the three categories of ‘beginning’. Among the significant features of this ‘movement’ is an embrace of the ‘self’, a representation of the world, a metaphor for the body of the Divine; this occurred even amidst the threats of chaos which arise.

The final step in my heuristic involved an analysis of participants’ Becoming in relation to Mystery known as God. Focusing on Eva and Andy, as persons who identify as LGBTQ in contemporary Western Canada, I discussed the relevance of their living in a way that is true to their Becoming ‘self’, with persons in their social and ecclesial relationships. The theme of ‘beginning’ was seen to be a critical part of their living into a future of potentiality, albeit amidst chaos, and discrimination.

Participants’ narratives of the ‘movement’, ‘beginning’ have set the stage for the next theme I present, one I name as, ‘homesteading’. The ‘movements’ in this theme are reflected in their stories, which illustrate two groupings of categories. They refer to the consolidation of the Becoming ‘self’ in relation to the Divine, the subject of **Chapter 5**.

CHAPTER 5

‘HOMESTEADING’

> British Columbia, and increasingly the rest of Canada, is a post-Christian province, a post-Christian country … assumptions that were made fifty years ago will no longer hold still ... *We* are the hands of Christ. *We* are the face of Christ. *We* are the feet of Christ in the world (Eva, Participant, British Columbia, Canada; emphasis mine).

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I am integrating scholarship of constructive theologians and social scientists into this grounded *theopoeisis*; I argue that their insights offer a distinctive, and compatible epistemology, explaining the ‘movements’ in a second grouping of categories, which I name as, ‘homesteading’. Additionally, I am claiming that the ‘movements’ of ‘homesteading’ are an extension of the ‘movements’ of ‘beginning’, leading toward the solidification of the ‘self’. Therefore, this grouping of ‘movements’ plays a significant role in Becoming.

Having introduced the research participants in the previous chapter, I begin now, by engaging with the first question of my heuristic, and describing the nature of Becoming suggested in the categories of this theme. The first two constructs I mention are, ‘self-recognition’ and ‘self-identification’, and I discuss how these assist in reifying One’s unique concept of the ‘self’. Following this, I speak of ‘resistance’, a ‘movement’ which accompanies the aforementioned concepts, acting as a counterweight, to override threats to the consolidation of the ‘self’.

‘Fluidity’, one aspect of a pairing of categories, is a construct which represents One’s sensibility to change and flux, and completing this pairing, is ‘self-love’, an indicator of One’s priority to love and honour who they are as a person. The final category within the grouping, ‘homesteading’, is ‘secure attachment’. It refers to an individual’s state of being tethered to the Divine, a grounding for the Becoming ‘self’, as they search out, recognize, identify, explore, and love their ‘self’, in its uniqueness.

After defining these categories, in the second part of my heuristic, I examine the type of Divine-human involvement suggested in the interview narratives which represent participants’ lived realities. I frame their narratives in contemporary literature pertaining to Becoming as I have defined it, specifically, the theological writings of Melanie May, and Sallie McFague. I highlight my applications of May’s concept of ‘claiming one’s birthright’, and McFague’s metaphor of ‘the world as God’s body’, with an end to discussing how ‘homesteading’ is key to consolidating the ‘self’.

I end my discussion with the third question in my heuristic. Here, I focus on what my grounded *theopoiesis* suggests about human Becoming in relation to Mystery for LGBTQ persons in contemporary Western Canada. I integrate the writings of Peter Rollins, Marcella Althaus-Reid, Jennie Barnsley, Sallie McFague, and Melanie May, to interpret participants’ interview narratives in a way which emphasizes points of practical theological significance. I underscore how these writings relate to comments from participants’ friends and associates regarding the significance of Becoming today.

5.2 The Heuristic

5.2.1 What is the Nature of Human Becoming Suggested in the Categories of 'Homesteading'?

5.2.1.1 'Self-recognition' and 'self-identification'

The codes and categories that I interpreted as 'movements' of 'self-recognition' and 'self-identification' were seen frequently, and they were straight-forward. They referred to participants' appreciation of variegated parts of their identity. These categories concern 'movements' that begin with self-exploration about their qualities, such as: character traits; background and identity as influenced by different cultures, as well as lifestyle preferences which reflect their personal tastes. I noticed that in this process, participants confront their thoughts, feelings, actions, and motivations. This is, essentially, a demonstration of their progression in self-knowledge, which invites the 'movements', 'self-recognition', and eventually, 'self-identification';[250] it influences their ability to act with integrity by making choices, reflective of the 'self' they are coming to know.

5.2.1.2 'Resistance'

I observed a companion to these categories in the 'movement' of 'resistance', which refers to the innate, reflexive reaction of the 'self', to a perceived threat to life or flourishing.[251] My coding revealed that exposures to oppressive acts - such as discrimination or bullying, or social mores and prejudices, which exclude or deny One's personal truths and realities - mediate these threats. Participants' 'movements' of

[250] See Table 1.7a, and the codes related to the coloured categories 3e – 4f.
[251] In Chapter 4, where I discussed the participant, Eva, threats such as these were described as entities extraneous to her 'self'. They were evident in her own encounters in the 'movement', 'facing the deep'.

'resistance' are expressed in many, categorical ways. They appear: covertly, or in secret; discretely, in gradual, successive approximations of opposition; or overtly, as in protest, defiance, or petition.[252] For this reason, though not necessarily a flagrant form of expression, I recognize 'resistance' as an important 'movement' on the journey of spirituality.

5.2.1.3 'Fluidity' and 'self-love'

I assigned some codes within the 'movement' of 'homesteading' to categories that were multiple, distinct, and still, related. I named these related categories or 'movements' as, 'fluidity' and 'self-love'. The first, 'fluidity', is a sign of flexibility, and is seen in participants' acceptance and negotiation of their life as something that is ever unfolding and evolving; for them, life is something that is in flux. 'Fluidity' signifies participants' recognition that their path in life is one that is without guarantees, or a predictable ending.[253] In partnership with 'fluidity' is a 'movement' which signals participants' resolve to maintain priorities which respect their personal uniquenesses. This esteem for the 'self' is one I categorized as 'self-love', that is, a high regard for 'self' and One's needs, as One's life continues to unfold – these include occasions which tempt participants to be someone other than who they are Becoming.[254] Thus, in 'fluidity' and 'self-love', I notice a degree of maturity in participants' chosen Way in life. I recognize this as inherent to Becoming, because it assists in consolidating the 'self'.

[252] See Table 1.7b, and the codes connected to the coloured categories 5c – 6b.
[253] See Table 1.7b, and the codes connected to the coloured category 11b.
[254] See Table 1.7b, and the codes connected to the coloured categories 11a, 12, 13a, 13b.

5.2.1.4 'Secure attachment'

The previous categories point to a distinct form of trust which began developing in participants, a trust in their Becoming 'self'. Yet, it is also a trust which includes a Reality that is greater than they, and they appreciate this Reality as good. In the codes I recorded, I recognized this trust as a grounding for participants' Becoming 'self', for it enables them to progress into life with increased confidence. As a result, I named the category as, 'secure attachment', because it is a movement that is peculiar, epitomizing *both* participants' firm grounding, *and* the outward flourishing which stems from this groundedness. Therefore, my definition of 'secure attachment', represents participants' anchoring in the Divine - the 'Reality' that is a ground and source of their Becoming.[255] What is significant is that, while the codes related to 'secure attachment' evoke anchoring, provided by a fixture of stability, they *also* image tension and elasticity, which provide *room* for participants to shift, move, and respond to opportunities which arise. This distinct concept signifies moments of extension *and* release, which *allow them to negotiate the ebbs and flows* of the waters on life's journey. Thus, I recognized 'secure attachment' as a 'movement' that is integral to flourishing, a sign of *emergent* life, of participants' progression in 'homesteading'. An image of these 'movements' appears on the next page.

[255] See Table 1.7c, and the codes connected to the coloured categories 14a – 14c.



Figure 4 'Grouping of Categories in the 'Movement' of 'Homesteading' '.

5.2.2 What Type of Divine-Human Involvement is Implied in the Narratives Describing the Categories of 'Homesteading'?

5.2.2.1 'Self-recognition' and 'self-identification'

Dawn is a person who recognized that her sense of who she is was shaped by qualities such as her adoptive status, her ethnicity, her gender-identity, and her sexual orientation, among other aspects of her lived experience. Although she had not appreciated the richness of the contributors to this unique identity as a child, she has been accepting the different roles various identities played in her coming to know her authentic 'self'. Andy, on the other hand, has observed a number of different ways by which persons navigate their multiple identities. He is aware that identity, as defined by One's family of origin or primary social group, sometimes dictates persons' expectations and experiences of the 'self', in ways that are dishonouring to who they are Becoming. For instance, some of his peers are the eldest child in their sibling line and, as in his case, their families of origin esteem the position of the firstborn. Hence, their families have placed expectations on that child to succeed. Other individuals embrace cultural ideologies which include practices of stratification, such as: men assuming the role as head of a family; children having progeny to maintain the family name; maintaining pride in one's ethnic heritage, or status as multi-generational Canadian (Wilcox, 2021, p. 97). All of these ideologies played a role in Andy's family history, and he has confronted and acknowledged his role in perpetuating aspects of them that are not life-giving for his Becoming 'self'.[256]

[256] Melissa Wilcox (2021) includes the subject of 'identity' in her discussion of queer and transgender religiosities. She points to the sociological phenomenon of 'identity compartmentalization' as one of the practices in which queer and transgender persons engage as they negotiate coming out, involving attempts to preserve ethnic ties with a community, while distancing Oneself from their sexual identity (Wilcox, 2021, p. 97). The same occurs when persons prioritize ties to a religious community over their identification as a member of a nonbinary community.

Growing more attuned to, and respectful of, her multiple sensibilities, Summer has been making room for her 'self' in her contemporary context. Aside from focusing on sexual orientation, her ecological sense of connection and belonging also takes precedence. This has involved moving more deeply into a Way that does not fall within categories of competition, in a social imaginary with priorities such as: 'the survival of the fittest'; the commodification of human beings, animate, and inanimate createds; and the consumption of the material goods and resources of the earth. In addition to this, Summer's respect for all forms of life and createds, and her awareness of their interdependence, is seen in the nature of her community involvement – she patronizes local and regional farmers and growers, and companies which share her ecological values and stewardship priorities; and this, too, is evolving. While these practices can be a challenge to embrace in a fast-paced global economy marked by capitalism, Summer sees her 'self' as a created human sibling; hence, the 'movement' of 'homesteading' prioritizes a value of justice for her planetary community (McFague, 1987, p. 13); this is compatible with her sensitivity to understandings of Canadian Aboriginal persons' of a cosmos whose origin is shaped by the Creator.

5.2.2.2 'Resistance'

In Eva's case, she is not surprised by the degree to which the 'movement' of 'resistance' appears dominant in her life. This sensibility of protective care began early in her childhood, one she recalls with pungent emotion. Diagnosed with a mental illness, her mother moved through her own marginalization bravely, when Eva was young. Eva recounted how, one day, as she and her mother were walking hand-in-hand on the streets

of their neighbourhood, people were looking at them disparagingly, and expressing pity for her mother and the family, aloud. However, Eva recalls clutching her mother's hand proudly, walking beside her, in innocent, childlike solidarity, while ignoring the adult onlookers and their comments.

McFague's metaphor of God as mother, who acts as judge, adds a fresh layer of meaning to the 'movement' of 'resistance' in Eva, even at this age. Expanding on the model of God as judge, McFague explained that like most animals, human mothers protect and act in defense of their young; she added, 'whatever thwarts such fulfillment is fought, often fiercely, as mother bears and tigers amply illustrate … those who produce life have a stake in it and *will judge, often with anger, what prevents its fulfillment* '; this instinct is shared across the human species (McFague, 1987, p. 113; emphasis mine).[257] Eva's act of judging those who attempted to shame her and her family, reflect God as mother (ibid.), thus accentuating the 'movement' of 'resistance'. Furthermore, she identified occasions in her young adulthood, when she stood against tides of discrimination she was called to negotiate – on behalf of herself and the Other. She added,

> I'm loud and mouthy; yes I can be obnoxious, but I'm not going to stand on a sideline and watch an injustice be served. I think that's an egregious sin when we stand back and are complacent when someone's being hurt, especially someone that's voiceless … I'm gonna be 'brash'. I'd much rather live into the 'brash' … Um, people are going to judge ... British Columbia, and increasingly the rest of Canada, is a post-Christian province, a post-Christian country, that assumptions that were made fifty years ago will no longer hold still ... We are the hands of Christ. We are the face of Christ. We are the feet of Christ in the world. And the way that we live that out is by standing out, by speaking …Jesus was always about speaking up, about doing for, about journeying with. And he talked to the wealthy and to the educated, but the majority of what survives that is written about him was with the poor, the needy, the sick, the wounded, the broken, the voiceless, the

[257] Normally, children inherit the human instinct to survive and thrive. McFague explained that this protective tendency is shared among mothers, and fathers, and persons who protect and propagate life (1987, p. 113).

> widows, the orphans, the prostitutes. And we look at the society in which we live and there's still very much a divide between 'us' and 'them'. And I feel much more comfortable with those that are described as 'them' ... And so getting to the point where I was ready to have my voice be heard was, [referring to herself], 'Okay, you take this step, you can't step back. You come out into the light, you can't go back into the dark'. And so that's what I decided, that it was time to live into the light.

Thus, as a result of her progress in this 'movement', Eva made a commitment to her 'self', not to '… go back into the 'dark' '. In years to come, the 'movement' of 'resistance' became grounded in Jesus, her model as a keeper of justice; and Eva moved out into the world with more confidence, sidestepping acts of social marginalization and silencing, that were perpetrated against persons referred to as, 'poor in spirit' (Matt 5:3).

5.2.2.3 'Fluidity' and 'self-love'

When he was a young adult, Andy met other persons in Christian denominational contexts who identified as LGBTQ, and learned that they, too, struggled with their sexual orientation, internalized homophobia, and heteronormative bias - a reality that is common and often accompanied by complex argumentation and conflicted feelings (Barton, 2010, p. 478). Uncomfortable with the cultural proscriptions which had coloured his expectations and knowledges of his 'self', Andy became sensitized to his preoccupation with Others' impressions about him, and satisfying their desires, rather than his own; moreover, this practice did not lead to feeling more comfortable with his 'self', or with the persons in the Church whom he had been trying to please – they still did not accept him for who he was (ibid.). But, with time, Andy recognized the 'imprecision and mismatches' of life in the quotidian (Althaus-Reid, 2000, p. 64). Instead of privileging Others' rules and preferences, the 'movement' of 'fluidity', which focused on life's realities, helped him to progress toward

being more ‘free from attachment and aversion, but not be indifferent’ (Thich, 1996, p. x); this meant that he neither ignored the interests of Others, nor became married to his own – he began looking at issues and his interactions with people in a less emotional, dependent way.

In Andy’s quotidian experience, the focus of his life began to shift, and he became less reliant on the labels he used as the primary definitions of his ‘self’ – be it his ethnicity; birth order; sexual orientation; or gender identity - in different contexts (Yip, 2008, pp. 8-9). In fact, recognizing his ‘self’ to be fluid and complex, he appreciated that he was more than the sum of these identities; their definitions were being ‘stripped of their operative power’ in his life (Rollins, 2011, p. 170; Rollins, 2012, p. 101). In Eva’s case, her sense of being genuine in the presence of Divinity was a more stable anchor for her identity than the comfort she had previously sought from Others. Consequently, her Becoming now takes on a playful, child-like trust in potentiality, rather than ‘culturally marginal self-identifications’ (Althaus-Reid, 2000, p. 64). As we spoke, she insisted,

> I can only be the person that God has created. I can’t be everything to everybody – and that’s really liberating! To be in that place where I can be the ‘brash’, ‘loud’, ‘mouthy’, ‘Queer’ woman of God.

Hence, Eva has been yielding to pleasing her ‘self’, a choice she is enjoying. Rollins expresses this as holding One’s identity differently, which arises from identifying with Christ, and following Christ into existential peace (Rollins, 2012, pp. 101, 107).

‘Homesteading’ has been a foundational ‘movement’ to Eva’s identity formation, for she has begun to develop a deeper relationship with her ‘self’; and as respect for her ‘self’ has grown, she has approached life increasingly, not only in the ‘movement’ of ‘fluidity’, but also ‘self-love’. This love is what Althaus-Reid recognized as necessary for ‘coming out’, which she conceived of as a form of rebirth, much different from what she called an ‘overspiritualised [sic] classical form’ (Althaus-Reid, 2000, p. 121). A contemporary rebirth of this nature, is a ‘resurrection from below’, an ‘uprising’ of those who have, until this time, been oppressed (Althaus-Reid, 2000, p. 121). Identifying the ‘coming out experience’ with Christ’s bodily resurrection, the ‘indecent’ theologian claimed, ‘Christ came back to life because he loved life. A person comes out as a human being, because that person loves life so much that she has decided to come out from structures of death and oppression’ (Althaus-Reid, 2000, p. 123); so, in Eva’s words, it is a ‘coming out into the light’, or a ‘living into the brash’, a decision which signifies an ‘ethical need for rebirth’ (Althaus-Reid, 2000, p. 123); for, apart from this, persons’ past histories of compliance with structures of death will undermine their progress (Keller, 2008, p. 33). In essence, the ‘movement’ of ‘self-love’ is evident in a form of prophetic ‘truth-telling’, which demonstrates Eva’s personal truths, her Way of advancing into tomorrow (Althaus-Reid, 2004, p. 100; May, 1995, pp. 91, 98).[258] Her statement about ‘coming out into the light’ speaks of the potential she envisions (Keller, 2008, p. 33).

[258] Eva had ‘coming out experiences’ which related to several aspects of her lived experience. In addition to speaking about coming out as LGBTQ, in her interview, she spoke of a time when she was court-ordered for treatment for alcoholism. Unlike many in her program, Eva admitted to her poor life choices, responsibility, and persistent faith in a ‘power’ that was greater than her ‘self’, inspiring her to confront life with honesty and hope.

In our final mystagogic interview, I had occasion to ask Eva how she might introduce her Becoming 'self' to God. She shared acceptance and love for the 'self' she would present,

> Hello, my name is Eva, thank you for creating me. Thank you for journeying with me. I hope and pray that I haven't said anything completely offensive. And every time I've opened my mouth that I haven't said something not too bright. I hope you will forgive me for the mistakes that I've made - and there's been many of them. I pray that you will continue to be with me in this wonderful journey called life that's ahead of me, as I attempt to be who it is that you have called me to be. That I hear your voice, not mine; that when I'm put into a situation where I really don't want to be, that you will continue with that gentle prodding and say, 'You can do this, you got this'. Thank you for never abandoning me in times of need. Thank you for welcoming me into the family, and letting me know that I am worthy, and I am holy, and that I am yours.

Eva's Becoming is marked by humility about her human needs and frailties, and yet, her sensibilities about her value and worth to God are evidence of 'self-love'. The consequence has been wonderment and acceptance, of the flux and mystery involved in navigating One's way through life with God who considers her their beloved.

In a way that is notable, 'movements', of 'fluidity' and 'self-love' have been leading Franca away from apprehension and fear, embracing her 'self', and thus, welcoming possibility,

> I think God wants us to be ASKING those questions. I think God wants us to be asking all the time. And uh … and to be RESTLESS …… I think .. I think that gives him joy, you know that he's allowing us (when it says he's made us in his image, he's made us as creative beings, as beings that want to be SOMETHING NEW and asking questions like, 'What needs to be done to make it BETTER?' All that kind of thing. And then to involve HIM in that conversation). Not that it's involving him in prayer [by] saying "Lord these are the issues I have," no. It's just that in our thinking, just being conscious of HIM and his impact. I'm aware of his IMPACT in my life and I know that I wouldn't be doing any of the things I'm doing now if it wasn't for the fact that I sincerely believe that I am BELOVED,

> that he LOVES me, and that he's got something for me to do that really gives me fulfillment. He's saying, 'Yes, you just put yourself in the PLACE. Just go there. Just go there and THINGS WILL HAPPEN!'[259]

In these two 'movements' of 'homesteading', Dawn, is another One who expresses confidence in God's love for her, and her part in ushering in a kingdom of justice on the earth today. Then, she adds a description of her changing 'self',

> So in regards to growth of God working in me and through me, I think I – maybe I'm growing up a little – as much as I don't believe in growing up! [smiling]. I don't think you should ever GROW UP, TRULY (there's the mischievous piece there)! But I think, yeah, [I am] learning what is mine; what is mine to carry; and what is NOT of mine, and is too much of mine … Yeah, [quoting Jesus] 'come unto me all you that carry heavy burdens and I will give you rest'… I hide in Jesus' pocket sometimes when I really can't handle things [chuckles] … I think it's um … it's HEALTHY… It's more WHOLE. It's the ability to step outside myself and NOT TAKE ON SO MUCH of the burd[en] –

Here, Dawn shares that she and God are partners, and in these words, she identifies her questioning nature and restlessness as idiosyncrasies which bring God joy. Shedding the weight of expectations, and becoming less encumbered, she is experiencing what it is to be 'free from attachment and aversion', while not 'indifferent'(Thich, 1996, p. x), as a child of God companioned by Jesus. This is a benefit she appreciates as one that pertains to another 'movement' of Becoming, 'secure attachment'. For Dawn, this provides stability

[259] Robert Goss shared a similar knowing of Jesus' challenge and invitation to him to follow him to unknown places, and to experience what, to him, was unimaginable. He described the process which ensued as involving his Becoming - he was being changed into a more authentic person, in love and service (Goss, 2002, pp. 21, 22).

to venture out further, while on her Way in the quotidian.[260]

5.2.2.4 'Secure attachment'

After settling into her urban community, Sophie was invited to participate in the band at the church she was attending. But having come out as lesbian prior to moving there, it was important to her to be open about her sexual orientation in her significant interpersonal spaces. When she shared this with the leader of the band, he received her with respect. However, the pastor of the church, someone with whom Sophie enjoyed a good relationship, informed her of the denominational polity concerning heterosexual marriage – it was viewed as the singular will of God for committed human relationships (Gross & Yip, 2010, p. 15).[261] Confident in her identity as nonbinary, Sophie declined the offer to participate as a committed member of the church, and in the music ministry. This was to the disappointment of many whom she knew; nonetheless, she had a conviction about engaging in this act of discrete resistance while the matter concerning her belonging in this congregation remained unresolved, due to its adherence to polity.

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[260] This image of attachment and flourishing is one which arose from my understandings of the child developmental process of attachment. The child who enjoys the satisfaction of their physical and emotional needs, associates satisfaction with a secure, stable, parental figure or guardian, and I liken this parental figure to God. Initially, I used the term, 'tension' to describe this category, applying a metaphor of a tetherball to a person, who is tethered to God. Since I discuss this metaphor further in section 7.4.5, here I borrow from David Benner, who expresses another image eloquently, using the metaphor of a kite: 'For proper flight, a kite needs a string that grounds it. Without the tension produced by this grounding it may continue to be blown by the wind, but it won't soar with the energy that comes when one end is firmly anchored to the ground' (2011, p. 51). Again, 'secure attachment' requires anchoring so that flight is possible.

[261] Gross and Yip found that some LGBTQ persons were comfortable 'coming out' in their congregational contexts because, despite their denomination's non-affirming polity, they were respected and treated with welcome (2010, p. 15), and later, this often caused a breach in persons' confidence in the Church as an organizational institution (ibid.). This may have been the case in Sophie's congregation, and it can cause a rift in the Church's relationship with adherents, members, and other persons who identify as nonbinary.

During our mystagogic interview, I invited Sophie to engage in an exercise of contemplative reflection on her subjective experience of the Divine concerning this situation, and she shared,

> I feel that he [speaking of Jesus] is sad as well … [he would be] sitting with me … I always imagine - when I talk with Jesus – about being in a cabin, on a lake, just a very peaceful setting. Or just sitting on the stairs or on the dock …. him just BEING with me … I think he'd be holding me, and just understanding the pain in this … I think he'd say, 'It's gonna be okay' …… I think as far as what [I am] to do next, be in a space of actively waiting … it's HARD [chuckles] … yeah, it feels like knowing .. knowing that there are UNKNOWNS. That, um, but just because those unknowns are there, doesn't mean you just sit in the room and do nothing. I continue to PRESS IN and …. just seek direction in that way, and just continue LIVING life.[262]

While sharing her experience of hurt, disappointment, and anger (Gross & Yip, 2010, p. 10), in our mystagogic exercise, Sophie describes her sense of intimate accompaniment by Jesus. [263] She speaks of Jesus' empathy for her sadness and need to wait for religious inequity to be addressed. Still, 'secure attachment' is leading to forbearance, for while in Jesus' company, Sophie moves forward, 'pressing in', 'seeking direction', and 'living life'.

While recounting her own experience within her denomination, Melanie May came to a place where she decided that it was time to relinquish 'the no longer life-giving connective tissue that had bound me to … church and community' (1995, p.

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[262] Sophie's description of Jesus as sitting beside her by a lake during this time of oppression is an image which is consonant with McFague's comment about the 'metaphor of the king who became a servant, one who suffers for and alongside the oppressed' in Christian theology (1987, p. 48).

[263] Liberation theologian, Dorothee Söelle clarifies that One's expression of faith comes about in different ways, which include, 'singing, dancing' and the 'quest for intellectual clarity' (1990, p. 4). This demonstrates the importance of recognizing the different ways in which persons express their spirituality. For One such as Sophie who is a contemplative and a performing artist, to forfeit these as part of her current spirituality, is a decision of significance.

20). Similarly, holding fast to religious injustice is no longer Sophie's personal truth. Her opinion is comparable to Althaus-Reid's judgement that, 'the exclusion of [LGBTQ] women from religious ministry, is very, very violent. It violates their sacrality … and alienates them from a spirituality linked to productive forces' (2004, pp. 24, 100), therefore, by stepping away from participation as a bona fide member of the congregation, Sophie intends to make her lived reality known to Others,[264] while holding fast to the Divine (rather than religious precepts) as her grounding.

The suffering that has resulted from Sophie's choice to be 'free from attachment and aversion, but not be indifferent' (Thich, 1996, p. x), reveals the cost of the 'movement' of 'resistance' as an LGBTQ adherent in a non-affirming church; it is an experience that is at odds with her previous experience of an affirming spiritual community at a Christian LGBTQ conference she attended recently. Hence, Sophie has encountered a 'trauma', the psychological confusion, which arises from an *encounter* with 'the Real' (Homer, 2005, p. 83; Rollins, 2011, pp. 27-31), and it is one reason why, from time to time, Sophie ruminates on her religious 'trauma', for she has difficulty articulating the full effect of 'the *impossibility* of the encounter with the Real' on her 'self' (Homer, 2005, pp. 72-73) - her loss and grief are realities which refuse to be erased. Peter Rollins would explain Sophie's experience as 'Crucifixion', it is what happens when the truths One has held as immovable are experienced to

[264] Sophie's resistance here is overt, and yet, she describes it as more discreet than open protest. It is important to understand that depending on the circumstance, LGBTQ persons express resistance to differing degrees, and at different times. In fact, Melissa Wilcox suggests that the exchanges in which queer persons engage within religious contexts are not all worth pursuing, and do not all result in the removal of barriers to participation (2021, p. 79).

be otherwise, when 'one [sic] loses everything' (Rollins, 2011, p. 21).

But, Sophie's 'experience of the Cross' involves 'a sacrifice, rather than a mere loss', for it has involved her facing that which she 'must be courageous enough to let go' (Rollins, 2011, p. 31). Furthermore, while she did not articulate a truth to which she had become attached, and must relinquish, like Jesus whom she experienced as sitting with her, she possesses an unrelenting commitment to justice. It is possible that the 'movement' of 'resistance' that is is operative in her at this time, involves relinquishing an attachment to justice *in the present*. This act may mean a forfeiture of cherished truths about God and/or the Christian Church – that is, ideas about the nature of God and the Church, or about what they will do.

Consequently, I appreciate Sophie's 'movement' of 'secure attachment' as one that is directed toward a *telos*, that I view as 'Resurrection' (Rollins, 2011, pp. 29, 108, 111). In the mystagogic exercise of imagination in which we engaged, Sophie experienced Jesus as remaining *one with her* in her time of darkness. Significantly, like she, Jesus has been described as experiencing the trauma of 'the Real' (Rollins, 2011, pp. 29-30), and as we engaged in this exercise, Jesus did not erase her trauma, or eliminate the *consequences* of 'the Real' with which she was contending.[265] Actually, *while* she was experiencing 'the Real', Jesus' presence was a comfort to Sophie (Gross & Yip, 2010, p. 10).[266] After the freedom she experienced

[265] Sophie's experience of 'Crucifixion' can be compared with what Jesus suffered, for as in the Gospel accounts, God the Father, did not save the Son from the consequences of 'the Real'.

[266] Rollins shares this image of 'Crucifixion': 'Every time there arises from the depth of the human heart the childish cry which Christ himself could not restrain, 'Why am I being hurt?', then there is certainly injustice (Rollins, 2011, p. 82). In her experience, Sophie has identified with Jesus' cry as he confronted 'the Real'.

at the Christian LGBTQ conference, by embracing her choice to sacrifice religion, Sophie shows her commitment to 'press in', to continue 'just living life', while she *participates* in her 'Crucifixion' (Rollins, 2011, p. 27; Rollins, 2012, pp. 56, 57). Her sacrifice here, is but one pillar in the construction of a more inclusive Church (Gross & Yip, 2010, p. 16).[267] Last, like Jesus, Sophie's 'Crucifixion' and 'Resurrection' do not concern her alone, their aim is advancing the global family of createds.

5.2.3 What Does this Grounded Theopoeisis on 'Homesteading' Propose for Human Becoming in the Context of Mystery in the Contemporary World?

As observed by a relative, Sophie's life and spirituality was the subject of a supplementary interview with a relative, who shared her feelings about Sophie's influence in her own life,

> What struck me is HOW MUCH SHE LOVES THE LORD, no matter where she was at – THAT TRUMPED EVERYTHING – it was the strongest part of her … as she wrestled, it challenged my thinking (I lived in a blissful grey area), and I watched her, I didn't know how 'out' she was ... In 2007 I read a book about Jesus' perspective on people and their hearts. Somebody else's sexuality is none of my business. I became less and less convinced about biblical evidence – as her journey evolved so did mine. I don't need to go 'head-to-head' with a theologian – God's love is the same for me and for her and she lives a life as honourably as mine ... her journey has impacted my own … sexuality aside, I have a real admiration for her commitment. What is amazing is that she still stays there! [at the non-affirming church] She shows so much maturity. There is a lot of behind-the-scenes secure attachment. She was hoping they would be an affirming church. I don't know where she's gonna land. It complicates her relationship with [her partner] … the western Canadian context is still a battle. I don't think there's freedom. There is still a lot of shame and fear. It depends on what circles you run with. What bugs me is that I wish everybody could be like [her], she lives by certain standards, while there is so much

[267] Now, it can also be argued that Sophie is avoiding the eventual confrontation of another possibility – another Real she refuses to recognize. This is the possibility that the local church, and the denomination will not change their polity while she remains among them. This is a common issue for LGBTQ persons in her position (Rollins, 2011, pp. 67, 68, 146). If this is so, the question then, becomes one of the meaning Sophie makes of her sacrifice and companionship of her LGBGQ sibs in the context of Mystery. In the end, regardless of the outcome, Sophie is responsible to assess the costs and benefits of her decision; her journey of abandoning 'attachment' or 'aversion' without being 'indifferent' will reveal the outcome of her 'Crucifixion'. Her journey will be *her* truth.

> hypocrisy [around]. I just fear for her heart (which is caring, kind, and loving). I don't want people to miss out on [Sophie], she hopes for a network that she can be supported by. I'm one of her biggest allies, but I can't be there for her [due to location]. It's good to be known by her.

This relative recognizes the contrast between Sophie's loving Way,[268] and the evident hypocrisy, shaming, and fear, which dominate Sophie's religious context. When considering these oppressive tendencies, which remain suspended, like a cloud, over Western Canada's Christian landscape, this person perceives Sophie's maturity in facing oppression to be like a ray of sunshine; Sophie's Becoming rises high above ecclesial structures hewn by rigid rules that must be supported by duplicitous living, unable to be upheld consistently on their own.

There is a contradiction between the Western Church's esteem of celibacy as a sexual practice that is lauded in its teaching, and the accompanying pressure for relational coupling, evident in an expressed preference for heterosexual marriage. This is something Wilcox remarks as being suggestive of the tradition's inability to tolerate sexual eroticism in any context other than heterosexual marriage (2021, p. 95). Its qualities of rigidity and

[268] I use the expression, 'the Way of Jesus', or 'the Way', to mean the spiritual sensibilities by which Jesus lived as a human person, as Son of Divinity who expressed living into wholesome, authentic relationships with Others (Brown, 2012, pp. 12, 13, 55). As I appreciate it, for One who wishes to be a spiritual disciple or follower in this Way, what is significant is that 'the Way of Jesus' is not a prescription 'to be'. I define it by the relationship of interdependence that Jesus enjoyed as One who lived in intimate relationship with God and Others, as per his calling to be human. Similarly, each human person lives into their own calling in God. I interpret this concept of 'the Way' fluidly, and suggest that One does not control their Becoming. Rather, their choice to engage with life in collaboration with the Spirit of Jesus involves an *open* heart, enabling their 'self' to be shaped in relationship with Mystery, which invites them to journey through life in partnership. Such 'movement' with God is an apt description of the process of accompaniment employed by a mystagogue, for it is a practice which invites the Spirit of Jesus into a shared space which offers mystès and mystagogue illumination concerning the former's path. Sophie's narrative reflects her understanding of accompaniment by Jesus on her journey of Becoming.

intolerance run categorically antithetical to the resurrection faith and freedom which define Sophie's actions (Rollins, 2011, p. 131). Finally, even more obvious, is Sophie's experience of pain, even while she looks forward to an end of discrimination for her and her sibs. In fact, the metaphor of Jesus as a lover provides a utile image of the love which is involved in her journey of Becoming in this context, for like Jesus, she is 'totally opposed to … monstrous treatment of the beloved and has no part in it … [she] participates in the pain of the beloved as only a lover can … [and] takes the suffering into her own being' (McFague, 1987, p. 142).

In actuality, Sophie's actions in this situation have two foci, she is: 1) acting in 'resistance', by repairing schisms, and restoring relationships within the body of God – i.e. the community of believers, which includes those who identify as LGBTQ *and* the heterosexual leadership and laity in her congregation; and 2) sharing in the suffering and passion of marginalized non-binary persons (McFague, 1987, p. 142 - 145). The passion of this LGBTQ person of faith is evident in her embrace of struggle, not least, in muting her own self-expression via music (McFague, 1987, pp. 142-144). In fact, placing her sexuate self in the foreground of the community's life is a critical feature of correcting distorted thinking about what it is to be human; Sophie's vulnerability, strength, and waiting in this liminal space honour qualities which point to the 'divine horizon for human becoming' (Jantzen, 1998, pp. 91).

Regardless of this, a critique might arise concerning Sophie's choice. That is, by allowing her 'self' to be silenced, is Sophie complicit in marginalizing the presence and gifts of LGBTQ persons in the body of Christ? In this way, is she not silencing living

testimony and discourse concerning God, who is present in divine multiplicity (Jantzen, 1998, p. 94; May 1995, p. 88)? At face value, these assumptions could be deemed as true. However, it is helpful to regard her behaviour from an alternate lens, making use of McFague's metaphor 'of the universe as the self-expression of God' (1987, pp. 60-61). In using this cosmic image, McFague established that with 'God's incarnation, notions of vulnerability, shared responsibility, and risk are inevitable' (1987, p. 72). That being the case, embracing injustice requires a fluid mindset. In this case, Sophie's circumstance carries with it, a potential to equip her with an appreciation for what it is to be sympathetic – *to be at one* - with the *entire world* as *her* body (i.e. her LGBTQ sibs *and* her heterosexual 'church family') (ibid.). This form of intimacy involves both a conviction to be true to Oneself, and a deep knowing of the Other, while not necessarily approving of the Other's ways (ibid.). Consequently, Sophie's approach toward caring for the whole 'universe' as God's body, and as her body, equips her with the power to treat it with loving deliberation, which requires divine grace to accomplish.[269]

More importantly, it is not Sophie's lived *experience* of injustice which *sets a limit* on her resistant acts. She chooses both *what* action she will take, and *when* she will take it, in response to her conviction about the 'world as her body', and needs she perceives within her (extended) body. Her willingness to proceed with no guarantees creates room for new potentialities as 'through decreation both personal and social, through a (re)invention of [her ecclesial] … institution' (Barnsley 2012, p. 111). Thereby, in her season of 'active waiting', Sophie reflects respect for Mystery, anticipating an end 'beyond'

[269] Barnsley clarifies that 'to attend to GOD/DE is to attend to the suffering world' (2012, p. 112).

her own needs (Barnsley, 2012, p. 108). Her 'movements' of Becoming reflect the ability to hold onto desire, and to attend to its fulfillment, through 'selfless detachment' (Barnsley, 2012, pp. 108, 109); these two realities perpetuate each other (May, 1995, p. 91).[270]

In a similar way, in Jesus, the Divine's immanence and submission to maltreatment and death place Godself 'at risk in human hands' (McFague, 1987, p. 73). Likewise, Sophie's confidence that, in the end, 'Resurrection' will in some way, occur, honours her felt sensibilities, and her willingness to risk her well-being temporarily, despite unknowns. It is a reflection of her 'self' as *imago dei* in a contemporary story of salvation. As One who is waiting before acting, not seeking to 'lord it over' others, Sophie anticipates good, and thereby, makes herself available as a vehicle through which divine graces can flow and accomplish their work (Barnsley, 2012, pp. 108, 110); thus, her 'entire being is caught up in embracing the world' (Rollins, 2011, p. 127), which is God's body, her body. This is a task for which fluidity is paramount.

Thinking theologically and metaphorically about Sophie, what becomes apparent is the tension, even contradiction, that would result if she ignored her calling to care for the 'world as God's body'. For, this act would be tantamount to choosing *not* to love her *'self'* (McFague, 1987, pp. 77, 117, 148-150). Her grace-ful way of responding to injustice fits squarely with May's description of truth-telling, of claiming One's birthright, while expressing truth about the 'self' (May, 1995, p. 91). Sophie is part of the world, and the world is part of *her*. In addition to her lived reality, it is important to bear in mind that being

[270] Alluding to an image of women's bodies which are in waiting while anticipating the birth of a child, May issued a reminder that 'possibilities for new life may spring amid the space of presence' (1995, p. 91). This is an apt image of Sophie's posture in this situation, and of the possibilities which can arise in this liminal space, where desire is a motivator for justice.

wounded in the process of healing is viewed by McFague as a cost of the work (1987, p. 146). In addition to this, Sophie does not allow her 'self' to serve a community that is unwilling to receive her 'self' for all of who she is. She deserves more. Therefore, by waiting for the congregation's acceptance *before* giving her 'self', her love for 'self' *saves* her 'self'; her relative observes that Sophie is 'made whole only as [she] participate[s] in the process of making whole' (McFague, 1987, p. 145). Her self-loving bears witness to God's freedom, and her *persona* reifies the nature of God's love (Kearney, 2001, p. 18; McFague, 1987, pp. 76, 144; Rollins, 2011, p. 123).

Sophie's Becoming, as *prosopon-persona*, is corroborated also by a friend, who speaks of the progress of the 'movements' of 'homesteading' in her life today,

> Yeah, I kind of had the thought that you were gay, but that, to me, that wasn't a hesitation … I'm not a change person … and then, you showed up and I'm like [said to myself]: 'No, this is good!' … I think also ... maybe that thoughtfulness and that drive to research and finding answers. And really, kind of explore more about what it means to be a Christian believing in God. AND ALSO being really comfortable with yourself as being gay. Like I think that's a – that's one of the main things for me. I think, that really CHALLENGES ME to .. think more about why *I* believe …. and to really ask some of those deeper faith questions. And to not be afraid to find answers. And to READ, and to RESEARCH, and to have more CONVERSATION until I get a sense of peace … [addressing Participants] And I think, yeah, just your experience of that has been quite illuminating for me … So someone comes out as gay, and by their choice or not they've really chosen to divorce themselves from the church and from faith. Um, OR had a very tough time reconciling that … But all the questions, and all the researching, I mean definitely all the thoughtfulness that you have put into your journey, has been really, yeah, really inspiring. And again, that is again something new that I've seen … there's definitely a PERSISTENCE … A curiosity and a persistence … I think a lot of what of what I was talking about was some of these things that a lot of people grapple with in their faith that can never truly be answered. There's so many questions, and so many tricky things to reconcile … You know what? It's a struggle. No one might still have the exact right answer, but you can still find peace … there's a value in the search for answers, but also there's a value in understanding that this might just be what it is … You've always been honest. And that's something that I really value ... I think for me personally a lot of that comes from having been brought up in a Christian home and gone to a Christian school. Um a lot of these things are fed to you, and then you kind of get spit out of the (sort of) bubble and you realize: 'Okay! Which way am I gonna go here? It's up to me now!' And um, there's definitely a desire to know

> and to understand the – and to be confident in what I believe. And that takes time. And that takes curiosity. And that takes tenacity. And uh, that's all something I'm very slowly, slowly getting there. And that's something that I see in Sophie that is really encouraging … It IS work.[271]

This friend identifies what Keller refers to as 'mystery' and 'wonder', a Becoming journey in which every step has significance in a 'living process', in which, 'to live is to step with trust into the next moment: into the unpredictable' (2008, pp. xi, xii). Admiring Sophie's perseverance in 'living into the unpredictable', this individual admits that *she, herself*, still seeks 'answers', and hopes for 'peace' within her own process of discernment. Her statement echoes Keller's insights on appreciating One's truths: 'What if truth itself is a *way*, not an endpoint? What if the way and its truth deliver no totalizing absolute – nor deliver us to the indifferent dissolute? What if we have here to find a third way?' (2008, p. xiv; emphasis mine). This participant's life reflects living into the unknown, holding out for an option that does not yet exist, but is 'on the way', something Keller calls, 'faith'; indeed, Sophie is not imprisoned by 'right or wrong belief or dogma', her life is an embodiment of truth *as process* (Keller, 2008, pp. xii, xv, 2, 37; emphasis mine). It is a 'third way' that is 'already but not yet', always existing in relation to what already is (Jantzen, 1998, pp. 69, 90; Keller, 2008, p. 2).[272]

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[271] Sophie's friend is describing the process of 'being for the other' in their relationship, something that is explained by Kearney (2001, pp. 15, 18).

[272] Sophie's friend describes attributes which include those like 'sensitivity and attentiveness, well-trained intuition and discernment, creative imagination, and lateral as well as linear thinking', of which Grace Jantzen spoke as valuable for personal 'becoming', but which are not highly esteemed by the Western binary symbolic (1998, p. 69). These can also be considered attributes that persons already possess, but, as reflections of divinity, they continue developing.

5.3 Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I introduced the stories of the participants to illustrate two groupings of categories, which comprise the 'movement' I name as, 'homesteading'. I discussed the first question in my heuristic, which relates to categories of Becoming in this theme, namely: 1) 'self-recognition' and 'self-identification'; 2) 'resistance'; 3) 'fluidity' and 'self-love'; and 4) 'secure attachment'.

I defined each category, with reference to their appearance in the narrative data. The first pairing of 'movements', 'self-recognition', and 'self-identification', involve participants' confrontation with, and embrace of their 'self'. They involve nonbinary persons' encounters with personal qualities, preferences, and multiple social identities, which include qualities such as ethnicity, and ecological advocacy. 'Resistance' is a 'movement', presented as a companion to 'self-recognition' and 'self-identification', for it responds to threats to Becoming in protective ways that are overt, discreet, and covert. The next pair, 'fluidity' and 'self-love', describes 'movements' which lead to two appreciations: 1) that life is a fluid, unpredictable path, for which nothing can be guaranteed; and 2) that the 'self' as essentially valuable, worthy, and thus, deserving of respect. 'Secure attachment' is the 'movement' which followed, and I explained it as One's engagement with the genuine 'self', and with the Divine as primary sources of stability; it is a 'movement' which demonstrates flexibility in engaging with life's unexpected events and opportunities.

The second question in my heuristic referred to participants' narratives, interpreted through the lenses of constructive theologians. I discussed 'self-recognition' and 'self-identification', by illustrating how Dawn, Andy, and Summer are acknowledging and

appreciating their multi-faceted identities, and embracing qualities and practices they own legitimately, all key to reinforcing the 'self' with increased authenticity. I employed Althaus-Reid's 'indecent theology', and Rollins' theopoetic philosophy of religion, to reveal that 'fluidity' and 'self-love' is a pairing of 'movements' which has enabled Eva to rest in life's unpredictability, and to shed homophobic expectations, which have been weighing on her 'self' in an oppressive way. Acquiring a sense of freedom, and a desire for 'resurrection from below', Eva has begun to re-capture agency and power, which have always been hers; they provide evidence that 'homesteading' is a potentiation of Becoming, initiated with the 'movement' of 'beginning'. Finally, I turned to Rollins' application of Jacques Lacan's construct of 'the Real', and his conceptualization of 'Crucifixion', adapting them to Sophie's experience of religious oppression. The example of her decision, and her action to remain tethered to Jesus and her truths, provides evidence that 'secure attachment' has made it possible for her to bear the tension of marginalization; it has inspired her with freedom to wait for her resolution of discrimination in the local church.

To expand on the third question of my heuristic, I drew on the narratives of Sophie's relative, and her friend. Interpreting the influence of her life on Others with the sensibilities of constructive theologians, I demonstrated that the 'movement' of 'resistance' is evidence of Sophie's 'claiming her birthright'; it affirms Barnsley's description of 'selfless detachment', anticipating an end beyond her own needs. From the perspective of those who know her well, Sophie's lived experience provides an appreciation of how the 'movement' of 'resistance' reifies the Becoming 'self'; it accentuates One's transformation into a person who is increasingly free. Reflecting on Sophie's narrative through

constructive theological lenses illustrated the relevance of ‘homesteading’ in the eyes of contemporary persons who are sensitive to her challenges.

The next grouping of ‘movements’ signifies a final set of aims that are related to Becoming. This grouping also bears witness to the main category which connects them. ‘Re-creation’ and the categories which comprise it, is the subject of **Chapter 6**.

CHAPTER 6

‘RE-CREATION’

6.1 Introduction

The focus of this chapter is the last of three groupings of ‘movements’ of Becoming in this grounded theory; it is one I name as, ‘re-creation’. These ‘movements’ are: 1) ‘Divine communion’; 2) ‘transformation’; and 3) ‘surrender’. I argue that the writings of constructive theologians provide a robust epistemology, with practical theological significance regarding this grouping. I further contend that these ‘movements’ involve processes which relate to those of ‘beginning’ and ‘homesteading’.

Referring to the participants I have introduced in this thesis, I continue, with an explanation of their lived experiences reflected in the themes in which these categories are grouped. I do this by applying my three-part heuristic to the themes. The first question involves a description of the nature of human Becoming expressed in the categories of ‘re-creation’. I preface this matter with an explanation of how the process of abandoning the false ‘self’ fosters the ‘movement’, ‘Divine communion’. Following this, I explain the role of each ‘movement’ on the journey Becoming, proceeding with ‘Divine communion’, followed by ‘transformation’, and then, ‘surrender’.

I treat the second question of my heuristic, examining the nature of Divine-human encounter in participants’ narratives. I interpret the meaning of these ‘movements’, drawing on the theological constructions of Marcella Althaus-Reid, Sallie McFague, Peter Rollins, and Catherine Keller, highlighting the relational encounters involved in these

themes, specifically, as they involve God, 'self', and Other. Further, I elaborate on the encounter with the 'self' in the 'movement' of 'transformation', as seen in the practices of self-awareness; self-acceptance; self-respect; and self-love; I also make reference to the theological construct of *metanoia* in explaining this 'movement'.

Then, I discuss 'surrender', and provide a distinct perspective on the theory of *kenosis*, that is part of Christology, the doctrine of Christ. By offering a historical explanation of the theory from the writings of systematic theologian, Stanley Grenz, I highlight a few common misunderstandings in Protestant theology concerning *kenosis*, since its origin in Fifth Century Chalcedonian theology. I conclude my response to this question by elaborating on this theme.

Last, I explore the third question of my heuristic, demonstrating the themes of 're-creation' in participants' stories, using statements made by significant persons in their lives. In this way, I demonstrate how the theme of 're-creation' relates to the realities of LGBTQ persons living in Western Canada today.

6.2 The Heuristic

6.2.1 What is the Nature of Human Becoming Suggested in the Categories of 'Re-creation'?

The codes and categories in the theme I named as, 're-creation', suggest that the 'movement', 'Divine communion' is the fulcrum of participants' Becoming; this 'movement' represents the union they experience with the Mystery they appreciate as God.[273]

[273] At this point, I repeat the premise on which I my discussion is based. It is that, human spirituality can be understood as journey of Becoming in relationship *with* the Divine, transpiring through a dynamic process which arises out of 'the deep' of cosmic chaos. I am also contending that human beings continue Becoming in relationship with the Divine. I am, however, also aware that persons may be engaged with the Divine

Comparable to what is noted in 'conscious self-awareness', a category in the grouping of 'movements' of 'beginning', participants' narratives show that they experience Divinity by way of their body, soul, and spirit, all sites of 'conscious self-awareness'.[274] The codes in this category refer to participants' perceptions of the Divine, aroused in multiple ways.[275] For example, participants refer to occasions where they have heard the melody of a familiar hymn from their childhood, which resulted in a sense of being accompanied by a presence, whom/which they understood as God. Additionally, they read a passage from the Bible, and subsequently, felt led to reflect on a concept, or to picture an image which provided fresh awarenesses about what they were reading. Alternatively, persons experienced an inexplicable prompting to take an action resulting in a significant outcome.

I coded properties of 'Divine communion', with dimensions which include moments when participants are alone, and in the company of Others. Furthermore, dimensions of

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while *not* possessing a sense of communion, or a subjective awareness or sensation of connection. In fact, the records of the renowned medieval mystic, St. John of the Cross, mention that the acute *absence* of a *felt awareness* of the Divine is no reason to dismiss the presence of the Divine, for the Divine cannot be apprehended by mere 'image, idea, or feeling' (Kavanaugh and Rodriguez, 1991, pp. 107, 108). Jennie Barnsley, also makes the point that the subjective awareness of 'absence' does not negate a relationship with Mystery (2012, pp. 106, 107), and furthermore, Homer, writing on Lacan, states that an alternate interpretation of the perpetual feeling of absence [of spirit], or of insatiable desire, has been interpreted by the psychoanalyst as a 'something more', that 'must be there because we are constantly dissatisfied' (Homer, 2005, p. 90). However, Lisa Isherwood spoke of this feeling of absence differently, in terms of the pursuit of an elusive and separate Other, who is *not* 'self', but who is the *object* of desire, and with whom One hopes to commune. This, she suggested, is the personal entity, God (Isherwood, 2004, p. 55). I appreciate these alternate views, recognizing them as contributing to a concept of 'Divine communion' I understand as an encounter mediated by mysterious grace, pursued by human volition which aims to realize a want for *relational completion*. Therefore, 'Divine communion' appears to be a beneficent gift of intercourse with Mystery that is neither contrived, nor predictable, but *is* experienced as a reality. Sölle explained this act of grace as something which 'hallows … breaks down the prison … a new beginning … something [that] has happened to us. The roses begin to bloom in the middle of winter. Unexpected, beyond our control, undeserved' (1990, pp. 79, 80, 85). Mystagogic accompaniment is a context for exploring persons' experiences of 'Divine Communion', and this research recognizes spirituality as pertinent to this need for connection, a longing to which contemporary mystics refer as 'too deep for words'.

[274] For an explanation of one participant's sensibilities, refer to section 4.3.1, where my explanation of 'conscious self-awareness' includes a definition of body, soul, and spirit.

[275] See Table 1.7, and the codes connected to the coloured categories 16a – 18e.

being in the company of others include human, non-human, animate, and inanimate createds;[276] participants also experienced felt connections with dimensions that I coded as, pleasurable and ineffable;[277] other properties of 'Divine communion' were occasions when participants were appreciating art, of either natural, or human creation.[278] These properties include a variety of occasions when participants were attuned to an awareness concerning God that they experienced as meaningful; their narratives suggest that they experience these as moments of grace, of unanticipated gifts.[279] Therefore, these encounters were coded and placed in this category.

The next category, 'transformation', has four properties, concerning growth in participants' relationship with their 'self'. It involves changes in the following concepts: self-awareness; self-acceptance; self-respect; and self-love. As constructs, they were

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[276] To repeat, the categories and sub-categories identified in grounded theory are characterized according to properties (which describe qualities or characteristics), and dimensions (which are indices or ranges, along which properties can be compared or measured). Properties and dimensions are the basis for the relationships between categories and subcategories. Therefore, in this case, their function is to explain the relationships between the 'movements' in this grounded *theopoiesis* (Strauss and Corbin, 1990, pp. 69-71).

[277] I wish to clarify that I am not equating the Divine with createds, either animate or inanimate. This means that I am not approaching a discussion of 'Divine communion' from a 'pantheistic' perspective. McFague has explained this subject in more detail, and in a more articulate manner, so I will not repeat these points here. To be brief, she clarified that there is a distinct separation and unity characteristic of a living human organism, and that the human ability to think about One's body indicates that an individual is not 'totally one with them' [that is, in body] (McFague, 1987, p. 71). I also view Divinity as a mysterious phenomenon, separate from createds, in the world, while at the same time, intricately involved with them (McFague, 1987, p. 71). I share the opinion of McFague and other thinkers, that all is *in* the Divine, and hence, that the Divine is expressed in all creation. This is named as, 'panentheism' (Keller 2008, p. 53). McFague phrased it in this way: '… the world is imagined as self-expressive of God … it is a 'sacrament' – the outward and visible presence or body – of God … it is not an alien other over against God but expressive of God's very being … if God can be present not only in what one hears but also in what one sees, then potentially everything and everything in the world can be a symbol of the divine' (1987, pp. 61, 67). Furthermore, Kearney added a perspective of God which does not refer to God who is pure 'being' or 'non-being' (i.e. metaphysical or on the other hand, reflective of negative theology), but onto-eschatological (2001, p. 22). He suggested that God invites humankind to become in a relationship of 'face-to-face' interdependence, and is dependent on humankind to realize the eschaton together in relationship with Godself (Kearney, 2001, p. 18).

[278] The variety of ways persons encounter the Divine cannot be enumerated, they are as varied as are persons' means of engaging with the reality around them, not least, the unseen, cosmic realities that cannot be grasped; See also Table 1.7c, and the codes connected to the coloured categories 18,c, 18d, 18e, 20.

[279] See Table 1.7c, and the codes connected to the coloured categories 16b, 17b, 18b.

coded as being cultivated in the context of relationships, that also had various dimensions, ranging from: intimate to casual; and affirming to dismissive. ‘Transformation’ reflects participants’ sense of purpose for living, as related to opportunities arising in the quotidian.[280]

‘Surrender’ is a final category in this grouping of ‘movements’, a distinct mark of Becoming. In participants’ narratives, ‘surrender’ described a posture involving a blending of attitudes in the context of their relationships, such as: dependency; interrelatedness; hope; want; love; and unsatiated desire.[281] The codes I grouped into this category suggest that ‘surrender’ arises out of a desire to live authentically; it displays a trust into Life, that can be likened to planting seeds, from which One anticipates growth. Also, ‘surrender’ reflects a posture, where, during times of challenge, One acknowledges their human limitations and vulnerability, all the while embracing Life as good.[282] The categories and ‘movements’ of ‘re-creation’ are found in Figure 5, on the following page.

[280] See Table 1.7c, and the codes connected to the coloured categories 19a, 19b, 20, 21.
[281] See Table 1.7d, and the codes connected to the coloured categories 22-24.
[282] See Table 1.7d, and the codes connected to the coloured category 26.

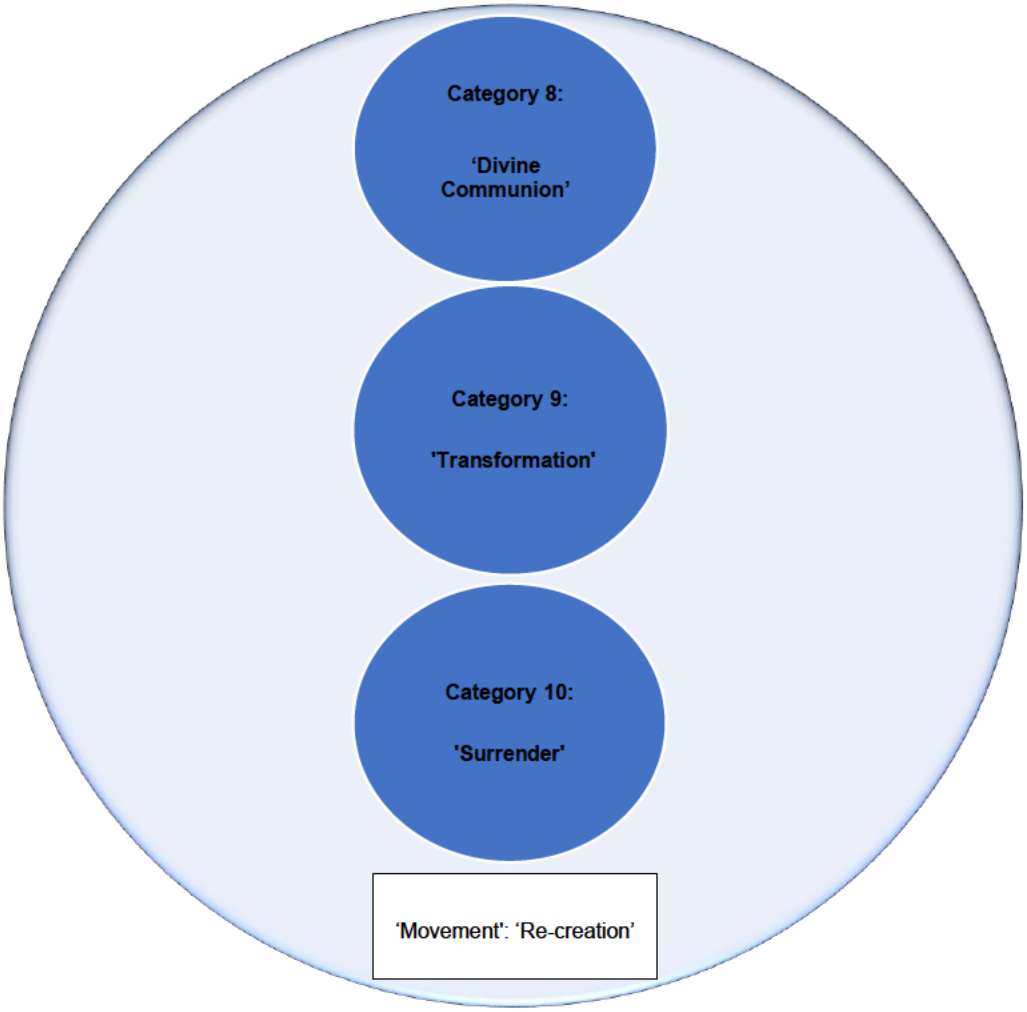


Figure 5 'Grouping of Categories in the 'Movement' of 'Re-creation' '.

6.2.2 What Type of Divine-Human Involvement is Implied in the Narratives Describing the Categories of 'Re-creation'?

6.2.2.1 Abandoning the false 'self'

Andy described his sensitivity to the heteronormative Western Canadian Christian context in which he was raised, and its resultant effects on him,

> I was both baptized and confirmed in the Catholic church, and a number of my friends were also part of the catechism class, because we went through this experience together, and that ended when I went into high school [age 14-15]. So, [it was in] high school, [actually] about grade 6 [age 11- 12] was when I began to wonder about being gay even. You know, and I didn't know how what I was feeling was tied up with religion. I mean honest to goodness! I just knew that Catholics - it was WRONG. It wasn't something, something that was said, but … it was always a man and a woman got married, that was the Catholic teaching … I knew from 5 years old that I was attracted to [boys]. I remember being enrolled in swimming, and I remember seeing a [boy] in the shower room, and thinking, "That was interesting." [Girls] never really had that same effect. EVER, and so for ME … I didn't have to worry about it until I got to high school and then suddenly the pressure was on - to date, and you know … I certainly would have been bullied all the way through school for being gay. I was, like … banged against, slammed into lockers, it was pretty, BAD, and, to the point where even in shop class, the guys in shop class were saying, you know, "[he] can give a blow job". What is that even? I didn't have a CLUE about any of this … I KNEW I was attracted to [boys]. I knew this wasn't what my parents would want. I KNEW that this wasn't what the church would want. I KNEW – and in my experience, in growing up, I never had what I would call, you know, positive role models.

As a young person, Andy was both identified, and judged by others, as falling outside of the binary categories of heterosexuality. Dorothee Sölle explained how, in response to One's sensibilities and the socio-cultural discourse, persons' reflections on their sexual orientation is common (1990, p. 102). Being a gay male, Andy felt a lack of affirmation often, from religious persons who questioned his identity as a child of God (Buchanan et al., 2001, p. 438). This led to a significant internal struggle about his place in God's family, and eventually, to a sense of being estranged from God. He experienced conflicted

feelings (e.g. desire and guilt), an experience that is not uncommon for gay religious men, and other nonbinary persons (Kennedy, 2010, p. 1064; Niki, 2018, p. 49). Along with emotions, he experienced repetitive cycles, which involved his secrecy; being 'outed'; and being bullied, and these occurred as he struggled with the reality of having no mentors in the Christian church, or models in society at-large.[283]

Rollins' psychoanalytic theopoetics offers an understanding of one process by which a nonbinary person's embrace (and consequently, internalized homophobia) of a heteronormative sexual and gender identity becomes a stumbling block, that must be overcome. By virtue of socialization, he avers that an individual's way of *being* is constructed, and hence, provides a false sense of who they are; thus, they become familiar with living *inauthentically* (Rollins, 2011, pp. 39, 94). For those who have accepted cultural messages, which assert that they must identify with the heterosexual norm, a habit of pretense occurs, fostering a separation from their 'self'; this is a practice with which Rollins claims, most are familiar, such that they 'affirm one thing consciously so as to continue to affirm the opposite thing' (2011, p. 44), and hence, this obstacle, 'fully a part of ourselves', [sic] … must be removed and let go' (2011, p. 31). Still, for most, abandoning the false 'self', the '*Ego*', leads to extreme anxiety; hence, such relinquishment is avoided

[283] Different responses to religious ostracism have been taken by LGBTQ persons. For example, although she does not identify as gay or male, one Canadian woman who identifies as lesbian, left her Catholic religious tradition in her young adulthood, and admitted, 'I grew up knowing that sex outside of marriage is evil and sinful, and you'll go to hell for eternity, let alone homosexual sex'. However, unlike Participants, in her young adulthood she asserted, 'I was pretty sure that the 'I'm an evil sinner ... stuff that was being force fed to us was not true. I don't know where I got that' (Hattie and Beagan, 2013, pp. 250, 254). In section 3.5.4, I discussed the experiences of Robert Goss, who contended against similar denominational beliefs.

(Rollins, 2011, pp. 84-85).[284] Melanie May wrote about the long-term effects of this pretense: 'Too many of us are dead while we breathe: dead to feeling, to imagination, to truth telling. Too many of us live satisfied with a shallow seriousness – sanguine or sober – since we assume what we now know is all there will be' (1995, p. 12). Rollins claims that where authentic selfhood is concerned, persons must eventually forfeit the habit of experiencing their lives based on the voice of social culture (Rollins, 2011, pp. 45-46), and in Andy's case, 'Divine communion' factors in relating to his 'self' with authenticity.

6.2.2.2 'Divine communion'

What began erupting in Andy over time, was a new reality – acceptance of his 'self', accompanied by inner peace. He experienced this unexpectedly, during an encounter with God at a Catholic retreat to which he had been invited by a friend; it was a profound moment, accompanied by an ecstatic expression of speaking 'in tongues'. Religious studies professor and theologian, Melissa Wilcox, refers to persons' accounts of being 'slain in the spirit' during charismatic prayer services, which may involve acts such as, speaking in tongues, ecstatic shouting, falling, or appearing to be in a trance. These are described as occasions of intimate and emotional experiences of meeting God (Wilcox, 2021, p. 53). Andy describes the conversation in which he engaged with the Divine, as well as the affirmation and communion he experienced,

[284] Hence, Rollins refers to this pretense as 'a dark night of the soul while keeping all the lights on', and challenges this way of being (2011, p. 53). Keller, describes this tendency as 'false humility', a 'false self-assurance', which undermines the call to life (2008, p. 130).

> Okay, how do I reconcile who I am? [recounts conversation with God]: 'I'm not like the rest of my family, but I am a child of God! I am YOUR son!' It was that sense of identity that I was looking for in this week-end … [describing his conversation with God]: 'So we need to wrestle!' and it wouldn't be the last time that me & God have gone on a spiritual journey to deal with this, okay [slowly, emphatically]. I felt that WHOLE week-end the presence of God … if there was ANYTHING I walked out of there with, it was a sense of belonging, and for me it was 'me & God'. So no matter what the heck was going on out here [gestures], no matter whose kid I am, no matter what, it was between me and God. And to ME, it was [God]: 'I am your FATHER, you are my SON'. I am saved by GRACE, I gave my heart and my life to God that week-end, and got filled with the Spirit. So for ME, you know, I'm sittin' there in this prayer circle and all of a sudden, I break out in tongues! And I'm sittin' there kinda, goin' [surprised], 'Okay!' And so for me, that's how open I was to God that week-end, and I admit, REALLY, and to me it was that sense of, 'it's me & God', 'me & whoever (Jesus)' – that's what all my life since that moment has been to me - the stabilizing force. No matter what's happening over here [gestures], I know that there was a promise that God made to me that day about being my FATHER, that his grace covered my SINS, and that I belong to the family of God. Yes, it's emphatic. And so, for ME, later in life as a gay man, and being questioned, 'How can you possibly be a child of God and gay?' - that I find that I know with such CERTAINTY that God is my Father (and for me there's that MEANING that I attach to that) - that to me it's such a slap in the face to the comments that God made to me that week-end.

Describing his encounter with God on this memorable week-end as a wrestling match, he struggled and gained a pungent understanding of his 'self' and of God. Because of the significant sense of welcome and acceptance he knew in the process, Andy felt *bound to God*, like he was *one with God*; his experience reified a sense of belonging *in* God.[285] He speaks vividly about his distinction as a gay man in his family and social networks; yet in comparison to persons who are heterosexual, and despite his experiences, Andy senses categorically that he is a child of God, he is God's son. His spiritual sensibilities of belonging serve as a buttress with which he stands up to religious interrogation.

[285] In this quotation, Andy hinted that his sexual orientation is a significant mark of his uniqueness. His sexual identity, is an aspect of identity, concerning which he experienced God's embrace as a son - the very quality for which he had been ostracized by his family and the Catholic institution. One can only imagine how significant this contrast in affirmation was for Andy, especially given its grounding in his *personal* subjective truth.

Likewise, theologian and priest, Robert Goss has recounted the depth of his spiritual awareness of Jesus' love for him as a gay man, an affirmation that is categorically distinct from the rejection he knew when marginalized by the Catholic rhetoric he had encountered earlier in his life; furthermore, after speaking in 'tongues', Goss felt that he was one with Jesus (Goss, 2002, p. 7). Moreover, God's joy was a sign of the intimacy they shared; and in his writing on homodevotion to Jesus, Goss concluded that, while times of spiritual contemplation brought him in touch with an erotic desire for Jesus, these were occasions when he also became aware of God's desire *for him* (Goss, 2002, p. 139). The lived experiences of Divinity's pleasure during Andy's and Goss' communion with God, bespeak the possibility that 'whatever [they] become reverberate[s] … in the divine' (Keller, 2008, p. 81). In fact, corporeal expressions of persons' subjective connections with the Divine has long been a subject of study in theology and religion.[286] In comparison, Rollins refers to communion distinctly, focusing less on persons' corporeal realities, and rather, on 'transcendence', an experience which arises when individuals who are in love 'subjectively enter into and intertwine ourselves [sic] with the other' (Rollins, 2011, pp. 75, 76). Though distinct, these different perspectives resonate with Althaus-Reid's opinion that intimate encounter between human persons and God is transformative, rendering both human and Divine changed, not the same as before (2004a, p. 100). Andy's account

[286] Michele Tarter's writing provides accounts of 'quaking' that was documented, regarding expressions of 'spiritual rebirth and apocalyptic delivery' in American Quaker meetings in the mid 1600's (2001, pp. 147-150). Another example of corporeal expression is found in the writings of St. John of the Cross in the early 1570's. The friar wrote that during one of his prayer times with Madre Teresa (of Avila), the two entered a state of ecstasy, which caused them to be lifted from the ground (Kavanaugh and Rodruiguez, 1991, p. 16). Andy's account indicates that he was affected deeply in his experience of speaking in tongues, and for him, the subjectivity of his encounter was not an issue. His narrative refers to experiencing multiple forms of connection with God, evident in section 6.2.2.3.

suggests that he was affected deeply by his experience of ‘tongues’, that the subjectivity involved in the encounter was not an issue of concern, and his lived experience demonstrates multiple forms of connection with God.

6.2.2.3 ‘Divine communion’ - multiple forms and moyens

In addition to having his identity as a gay man affirmed, Andy experienced the Divine’s meeting, understanding, and care in other ways,

> You know, he’s always – and when I don’t hear from God, when I don’t FEEL the PRESENCE of God (and I don’t mean that in an ‘ookey, spookey’ [sense]), but the COMMUNION with God - like me & God on the beach, (I know the presence of God) when there are moments that I kinda go, ‘Oh, shit!’ - God always has met me. And I have felt his hand on my life … ALL THE TIME. And there are times when [I ask]: ‘What the hell are you doing? Are you sure about this?’ … and I’d go to do things [and then I ask] ‘Okay God, where are we at with this? What d’you think about this? Is this your will?’ … I talked about how I was in [another city] and was really not in a good place … and God was NOT present. And I, and God just came in and cleared (it was like Jesus and the devil) [gestures as though creating space], and he just cleared the deck and said ‘No! This is NOT happening to my son,’ … and that vision that I had of me at the lane running towards my father, to ME was both literal and figurative, and I started to weep … I had another dream or vision, and I remember waking straight up (it was on my birthday), and it was God saying, ‘I’m taking back what’s mine,’ … and I was really and truly not in a good place, and I phoned a friend and said, ‘I just heard from God!’ [excitedly, laughing] … and she was spiritual. And she said, ‘Okay, so tell me, what did he have to say?’ [he replied] ‘He TOLD me! He’s claiming back what’s his!’ And I am now expecting God to be moving on my behalf, and he did, and I just let it happen, and I remember thinking to myself, ‘Holy shit!’ and I had that dream, and no sooner than I had that vision in the kitchen, I’m here! And I remember landing in [place of residence] and getting this plaque in the mail by some woman that I had never met really, in my church (from my church in [another city]), and it was this scripture .. it was another one of those moments where God made that promise, and he said, you know, ‘I will not harm you. But I will prosper you,’ and I remember taking this and thinking, ‘I was in the lowest point of my life before moving here - I came here with nothing, and now God’s talking about prospering me,’ and I’m goin’: ‘I am here, but by the grace of God, in this moment, in this community, with this job. I could very easily have become an addict on the street, that’s where I was goin’, and he took me right out of that. Some friends bundled me up, put me in a moving truck, drove me down here to [place of residence] and I never took any of this as my friends doing it – they were just to me, agents of God.’ And he got me here, and I remember landing here and I remember thinking to myself [and saying to God]: ‘Okay … thank you.’

Andy relayed his habit of open communication with God, where he makes an effort to cooperate with God's desires for him. He refers to a dream, a vision, as well as persons whom he accepted as God's 'agents'. These individuals sent him encouraging scriptures, and helped him relocate to the community he feels has equipped him to fulfill a vision - that God would 'prosper', and not 'harm' him, 'clear the deck', and 'take back what is his' (i.e. Andy). Thus, Andy's encounters occurred in a variety of forms: some were cataclysmic moments, paramount to his survival; others arrived at times he could not explain, and via means beyond his control. Appropriate to his needs and circumstances at the time, these incidents engendered humility and gratitude in him.

In relation to such communion, Susannah Cornwall suggests that in Althaus-Reid's 'indecent theology', God is touchable in the midst of struggle, pain, and resistance (2010, p. 96), which occurs when persons recognize Divinity incarnate in human persons.[287] Incarnation also implies that human persons are reservoirs for the Divine, the Divine *housed in the flesh*. In fact, McFague introduced a similar concept, referring to human persons as friends of God, who is also a 'Friend of the world' (1987, p. 172). Thus, from the perspective of these theologians, Andy's 'agents' of God, are incarnations (Cornwall, 2010, p. 96), friends of God (McFague, 1987, p. 172), supporting his Becoming in 'a dialogical process of popular conscientization' (Althaus-Reid, 2004a, p. 25). Hence, Andy is a 'messiah in process', his Becoming involves learning from a community of people.[288]

[287] This is a challenge to theologies of transcendence, which, Cornwall comments, ignore the vital role of the corporeal in persons' quotidian experiences of God (2010, p. 96)

[288] To repeat, Althaus-Reid described Jesus' journey of Becoming as one of 'popular conscientization', that is, learning about Becoming from women, and those among him, who suffered – for, it was they who taught him what it was to be fully himself, a human person living in relationships of dependency with God and

6.2.2.4 'Divine communion' - an extension of 'beginning'

In a distinct way, living in the Way of 'God-who-is-community', reveals the vanities of approaches of supremacy, dominance, and oppression for Summer today (Althaus-Reid, 2004a, p. 48); 'Divine communion' evinces her ecological sensibility concerning her role as One among the createds in the world as the body of God,

> I think checking in with God is really more about … well it's about maintaining that CONNECTION and … that WONDER which then kind of spreads to like connecting to other people, and connecting to the EARTH, and I think THAT'S THE IMPORTANT THING. I don't think it's that GOD NEEDS THAT or else God's gonna' be MAD … it's like God would be SAD if that connection was gone, because God LIKES that CONNECTION TOO … and it's important for US, but it's also important for the WORLD … IT GRIEVES ME BECAUSE … SMALLNESS IS DOING SO MUCH DAMAGE … TO PEOPLE LIKE ME, but also TO THE PLANET, to THE WORLD, TO IMMIGRANTS, TO ANYBODY THAT'S NOT WHITE [and] IN VARIOUS DEGREES OF PRIVILEGE.

Summer feels connected to createds who are disregarded, and she senses Divinity's sadness concerning this. As a companion and friend of the world, Summer's empathy reflects sensitivity to the suffering of the Other (McFague, 1987, pp. 165, 169, 171), therefore, she describes a sense of oneness with the Divine, a 'deep level of unification and love', a 'higher plane of consciousness', in which there is an 'absence of a need to articulate'.

What Summer is intimating in this expression is abandonment into the life of the Divine, a comment of distinction in her narrative. For, unlike other statements, here, she

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Others. The theologian referred to this as signifying the 'freedom-loving' and 'possibility' that is characteristic of God (Althaus-Reid, 2004a, p. 48).

underscores her *experience in* the Divine, not the Divine as the *origin* of 'unification and love' she feels. Her words mark a *felt intercourse* between herself and God, *without a sense of difference* between them, since they are communing reciprocally, as *equals*. Her sense of oneness inspires Summer to e*xtend this gift of oneness to other createds*, *a process* which propagates life on earth (McFague, 1987, pp. 160, 173).[289] Therefore, the 'movement' of 'Divine communion' is an extension of Summer's 'beginning', both *into* God, and *through* God, accompanied by the greater family of createds, her community.[290]

To apply Kearney's language, 'Divine communion' such as this involves responsibility, facilitating desire '*in the midst of* relation *to the concrete living other*. The good beyond finds itself inscribed *between* one and another. Desire … reveals itself … as positivity' (Kearney, 2001, p. 64; emphasis mine). This reality appears, notably, in a Canadian study on spirituality with women who identify as lesbian (Hattie and Beagan, 2013); the sentiment concerning spirituality as a form of communion with the Divine is expressed: 'It's about connections with something that's bigger than yourself, with other people I guess, in some kind of larger sense of goodness … it's like a feeling of connection to something bigger, it's part of a wholeness' (Hattie and Beagan, 2013, p. 261).

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[289] Experiencing God as 'process' is an issue that is expressed by Rollins (2011, p. 123-127), and by Keller as well (2008, p. 106).

[290] In comparison with the comments of other participants in this study, the description of communion with God, as quoted here is distinctive. It suggests that Summer has a concept of God that is broader compared to those onto-theological, metaphysical concepts expressed by others (and, at other times, by her). I must clarify that my description of Summer's immersion *in* the Divine does not imply 'completeness', in the sense that she has reached a termination point of immersion. Here, I do not use immersion to connote *the degree to which* one is submerged in an extraneous substance. Summer can be immersed, and yet remain exposed, vulnerable, even imperfect, to some degree. This is a way I have chosen to express the reality of *humanity, and Divinity* co-existing in humankind.

Goss also described an experience of unity and communion with God in a way that is distinct, and comparable to Summer's narrative here. In the context of sexual communion with his spouse and with God, Goss described 'a sense of oneness with each other and a deep sense of Christ's presence in a dynamic energy flow embracing our bodies. There was a letting-go and a surrender to rapture that transported us into a meditative realm of consciousness where boundaries dissolved' (2002, p. 22). Such unity is experienced in the context of erotic encounters between lovers, not least, between individuals and God (McFague, 1987, p. 131). Notably, McFague explained intimacy with the Divine as involving at least two sides of God. One side of God refers to God's 'universal immanence'; God's accessibility to the world as presence is felt intimately by persons who, as residents in the body of the world, are aware of God through their senses (McFague, 1987, p. 184). The second side of God relates to God's ineffability and distance, a quality humans struggle to grasp (McFague, 1987, p. 186); McFague described these as complementary features of knowing God who is Mystery (McFague, 1987, pp. 183-186),[291] and Summer's narratives suggest her familiarity with these.[292]

[291] Although the medieval mystic, St. John of the Cross, shares accounts of intimacy with the Divine, the friar also wrote of experiences of the absence of communion, a 'dark night', described as a period of lack, abandonment by God, misery, and loss of hope. Known as a time of 'purgation', that is initiated by God, this significant period is a way toward the development of a 'new Self' who is 'divinized in being and operation', and thus, the 'dark night' is seen as an act of divine grace (Kavanaugh and Rodruiguez, 1991, pp. 357, 384). This seemingly contradictory form of encounter of the 'dark night', offers an alternate understanding of McFague's concept of God's immanence. From a sensory perspective, the 'dark night' may fit her definition of transcendence. However, Divinity's intention is intimacy and communion. Hence, this 'dark night' can be understood as an offering of immanence. Just as with McFague's concept of the two sides of God, an individual who has passed through the 'dark night' often comes to appreciate God's ineffability, and God is known as transcendent. But here, in a different way, as a result of the 'dark night' God, also becomes known more intimately, immanent in way heretofore unknown.

[292] While in this particular reference, Summer's description focuses more on 'immanence', this does not suggest that immanence has been, or will be the primary influencer in her Becoming, today, or tomorrow.

The construct, 'Divine communion' is peculiar in another sense. It does not suggest that its 'aim' is personal fulfillment. Despite Summer's lived experiences of presence, pleasure, and affection in the context of interaction with Mystery, the *telos* of 'Divine communion' is the flourishing and Becoming of *all* createds - those with whom Summer partners in conscientization. Hence, the word 'connection', is a telling *metaphor* for Divinity's *Way* with their createds, and this is why 'connection' is endangered by 'smallness', which operates in opposition to a 'beginning' which 'opens out'.[293] Indeed, smallness is marker of atrophy, and shrinkage, not qualities imaging Divinity.[294]

Consequently, in communing with the Divine, it would be inconsistent with Summer's Becoming for her to hoard the love she is experiencing, as something that is to be dispensed on her flourishing alone (McFague, 1987, p. 117). As her sense of being 'one with God' burgeons, Summer feels united with the world expanding as God's body, in multiple forms and expressions; and her experience of 'Divine communion' is 'open[ing] out' (Keller, 2003, p. xv), growing as a desire to be one with God in social and ecological interdependence (McFague, 1987, pp. 10, 13). As Althaus-Reid and Isherwood affirmed, one aspect of conversion involves 'transformation of a person into a great lover of justice, equality and peace' (Althaus-Reid and Isherwood, 2007, p. 303). Thus, reflecting ongoing

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[293] This is a reference to Summer's word 'smallness', used in section 6.2.2.4. Moreover, 'smallness' signals competitiveness, even division. It foretells the extinction of the vulnerable – and thus, eventually, all.

[294] To reiterate, the 'movement', 'facing the deep', was discussed in chapter 4 as a theme pertaining to Eva. I defined 'facing the deep', a confrontation with the 'deep' or *tehom*, as a reality which signifies chaos, unknown potentiality which includes threat, or danger of loss to the Becoming 'self'. Keller suggests that one component of the process of 'beginning', is also referred to as 'evil' (2008, p. 54), and for more detail on Keller's point regarding evil, see her writing (2008, pp. 21, 30-32); Kearney, takes a different view, where he sees all things as contained *in* God (panentheism), and he defines 'evil' as 'a lack or absence of God' (Kearney, 2001, p. 104). Based on this assumption, 'facing the deep' would be one among many possibilities which lie within God, and therefore, an individual's choice would lead her to remain within God or to move outside the arena of potentiality, that is, a situation where potentiality is absent. While intriguing, the realities of human persons in this situation are difficult to conceive, and thus, are outside the scope of this writing.

change and propagation, Summer's Becoming is a revelation of God (Robinson, 2010, p. 115). Next, I expand on this progress in the context of the 'movement', 'transformation'.

6.2.2.5 'Transformation'

Eva's grandmother was a significant support person in her life, especially when Eva was young, for her 'nana' was someone who reminded Eva often that she was loved and accepted, and this influenced Eva's concept of her 'self',

> My nana used to sing to me, she used to sit in a kitchen chair, put me across her lap, hold me to her chest, and rock with me. But she didn't have a rocking chair. She used to sit in the kitchen chair, and she would move herself, rather than the chair. And so, she would sing to me, different hymn tunes, um some of which are embedded in the DNA of my soul. Um, and so she taught me songs that I learned in the church. And when I hear those hymn tunes, it always reminds me of her. Um, that she talked about, 'You're never alone', she would say that to me *often*, 'You're never alone,' um, and that was, I think, a big part of the connection that I had, that I would feel that I was safe and sacred - because my nana – who I loved more than anyone else in the world - told me that I would never be alone … And I remember always believing in there being always something greater than myself. Always believing that there was something there to guide me. Not to stop me from doing things that were foolish, because we do have free will, but when I did make big mistakes – and I made a lot of them – that The Divine was there to say, 'Let's try again'. The Divine was there to say, 'No matter *wha*t, you're loved'.

The hymns and tunes that were sung to her remain with Eva today. Despite the pain of rejection and ostracization she encountered later in life, she reflects often on the words in these hymns. These memories provide assurance, solace, and guidance to her; and Others whom she met also reiterated her nana's message: 'You are worthy', facilitating this 'movement'.

Sophie presents a different example of One's sense of personal value, when she

speaks of the overwhelming feelings of relief, affirmation, and confidence experienced at an ecumenical Christian conference, where she met other LGBTQ persons,

> It was just connecting to who I am and WAS AUTHENTICALLY as a FULL person, not feeling like I had to HIDE parts of myself which - the interesting thing being that I don't know, until I went to that [name] Conference, I don't think, I NEVER KNEW what that feeling WAS to just BE, and not have to worry about that struggle of kind of hiding myself. Because I think I had done it for so long, it just was, that was NATURAL. And I didn't think about it. And then going to that conference and experiencing what LIFE and COMMUNITY is like BEING OPEN, and it not being an issue as well. And not having to be sort of ON GUARD for what potentially could be asked or brought up, yeah … Probably being able to let go of the shame, and realizing that I WAS OKAY was also .. really FREEING.

Being open about who she was as a lesbian in an affirming Christian context, was a transformative experience for Sophie. Not only did the freedom she felt bolster her awareness about the priority of her sexual orientation, it solidified her self-acceptance. She felt that she no longer needed to hide, that she could be 'who she was' (Rollins, 2011 p. 168); moreover, 'who she was' was 'good'.

Sophie had carried a feeling of shame about her sexuality; she attributes the pejorative concept of the 'self' she nurtured to internalized homophobia (Murr, 2013, p. 358; Windsor, 2014, p. 260); this had resulted in a feeling that it was *she* who was 'not good'. Philosopher and counsellor, Chuanfei Chin (2022) discusses the challenges and dilemmas he confronts with clients in his role as professional counsellor, as well as the strategies he applies in therapy with LGBTQ persons. Chin discusses his observation that the resolution of an emotion like shame, requires time, due to multiple issues involved in its preservation, which include factors such as: internalized homophobia; proximal and

distal stressors; prejudice; belonging; and mental health.[295] Sophie recounts the notable moment when she first heard the liberating discourse of affirmation at the Christian conference she mentions; the relief she felt was categorical, something she had not known before then.

Contrary to the explanation of the 'fractured personality', which philosopher of religion, Paul Helm proposes as occurring when One's desire 'overpowers' the will (Helm, 1994, p. 32, cited in Jantzen, 1998, pp. 80-86), the experience of the emotion of shame that Andy knew cannot be attributed to an issue as simplistic as a personality composed of dissonant parts. For, while Andy had struggled often with his desire and will when feeling attracted to other men, another matter he considered was *the effect* of his intimate relations *on his sexual partners*. He did not wish to portray 'self-centredness' with those to whom he was attracted, especially those who were his Christian 'brothers'. Andy did not consider himself 'torn' by competing parts of his 'self', but admitted that he had made choices that did not always correspond with who he was Becoming; thus, Andy attributed his struggle with shame as relating to being a person *in* process, and thus, his self-acceptance had a powerful effect on the shame he had been holding. Andy's act of 'projecting' his desire for Becoming, images a 'divine horizon', a *telos* that is accessible to him as he moves toward 'becoming divine' (Jantzen, 1998, pp. 85, 91).[296]

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[295] In a personal communication during his presentation on counselling LGBTQ+ persons of faith in the United Kingdom, Chin speaks of shame as a complex phenomenon. In his purview, it possesses features which involve more than psychological defense, it carries with it, an element of morality, and it is a construct on which Chin is still formulating his thoughts (Chin, 2022); additionally, in his quantitative and qualitative research, Philip Tan reported that LGBTQ persons who believed themselves to be moral persons, and had a sense of purpose, had better indicators of emotional well-being than those who did not, and who scored high on internalized homophobia (2005, p. 142); for the latter, psychological symptoms may be a result.

[296] As her distinct feminist symbolic, I consider Jantzen's term, 'divine horizon', to be a non-theistic approximation of the 'best' of Divinity enfleshed in human persons (1998, pp. 91, 92). It can therefore be

Relinquishing the shame she had been carrying, Sophie's 'transformation' demonstrates respect for the 'self' she is now embracing.[297] More importantly, she has started to behave as One who loves her 'self', like a person who desires to be 'one with' her 'self'. The freedom about which Sophie speaks in her narrative is evident in her degree of feeling that she is 'belonging' to her 'self'; this less encumbered way *with* her 'self' translates into a growing interest in belonging to God and Others, in a deeper, relationally-fulfilling way.[298] The nature of redemption, on which 'transformation' focuses, is something Althaus-Reid and Isherwood described as the result of the administration of freedom (2007, p. 303). Its author is God.

As Eva comes out with increased transparency about who she is as a Queer woman, the affirming responses of Others toward her remind her that she is indeed, not alone. As a result, her sense of *belonging* and *being loved by* the God about whom her nana spoke, deepens; the liberation experienced in this Way heightens in 'surrender', the next 'movement' of 're-creation'.

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understood as qualities evident in human persons who are Becoming, a process suggested in the reference, *theopoiesis*, 'making God, or making [persons] divine' (Keller, 2017, Kindle locations 2186-93, cited in Thatamanil, 2020, p. 38).

[297] Jantzen goes into detail explaining Western Christian theology's appropriation of Lacan's concept of the ideal 'self', a being which is 'uncoupled from the body', without impulse or desire (1998, p. 37). This fractured, ascetic model of human godliness is the level against which many have measured their spirituality, being convinced that they are persons who are 'rooted in unconscious desire and racked with insecurity' (Jantzen, 1998, p. 37). Such a concept of the 'self' leads to low estimations or rejection of their 'self'.

[298] This concept is echoed in Keller's affirmation, 'we are not alone' (2008, pp. 24-25), where she refers to individuals' participation in an evolving, infinite process of Becoming, in and with Divinity.

6.2.2.6 'Surrender'

In one season, many years ago, and when she was without hope, Dawn had a unique encounter, much unlike any she had ever known. The encounter was with love, and it carried her across a salvific threshold,

> I had gone and gotten drugs at a drug store … and it was a Saturday, and I thought: 'I'm going to take these. I'm going to go down to [location] and I'm going to swim. And I'm going to keep on swimming until God takes me home. I'M DONE. THAT DONE!' BUT [first] I was going to stop and walk in the labyrinth. Which was a practice I had already been doing. So I went to the labyrinth. My intention was I WAS DONE. If there was any reason for me to stay on this earth, I needed to know it 'cause I WAS DONE! And I walked into the labyrinth … I was aware of what my plan was. And I started walking the labyrinth and that time of purgation [as] it's called (it's kind of a letting go of the things) wasn't a purgation! ALL THE PEOPLE IN MY ENTIRE LIFE WHO HAVE EVER LOVED ME [were with me] … It was my Auntie [name], it was my grampie, it was … EVERYBODY in MY ENTIRE LIFE WHO EVER SHOWED ME AN OUNCE OF LOVE, CARE, GRATITUDE, ANYTHING! By the time I got to the middle [of the labyrinth] to that union with God, there was NOTHING BUT LOVE! BEYOND LOVE! Like THE BIGGEST LOVE A PERSON COULD FEEL! And I bawled, and bawled, and bawled, and bawled in the middle, on my knees, huddled up in the centre of the labyrinth. BAWLING from this abundance of LOVE.

In this narrative, Dawn expresses her emotionally vulnerable state, saying, 'I'M DONE. THAT DONE!' Her desire then, was to swim until she could swim no more, transitioning through death into the arms of the Divine, into life eternal. However, her plan was conditional on a contemplative walk in a labyrinth, to determine whether there was 'any reason' for her 'to stay on this earth'. Then, as she approached the centre of the labyrinth, she encountered love, personified in every individual who had ever loved her over her lifetime. Love arrested her.

At first glance, Dawn's emotional account of the feeling of being 'done' may not be viewed as unusual for someone challenged with a mental health issue, such as

depression.[299] In fact, it might be argued that Dawn's words suggest a preoccupation with 'deliverance from suffering and danger' (Althaus-Reid and Isherwood, 2017, p. 303).[300] However, her plan to walk the labyrinth prior to being engulfed by waters, in which she planned to breathe her last, is key to this interpretation of 're-creation'.[301] In actuality, there has always been in Dawn, a yearning, a longing to be *one with God*, the union to which she speaks, in this interview. It is important, to emphasize that Dawn's comment about swimming 'until God takes me home', demonstrates her admission of human struggle;[302]

[299] As a mood disorder, depression is not only familiar with persons who face significant societal marginalization, it is known to be related to suicidal ideation. Chin explains mental health risks for LGBTQ persons experiencing dilemmas in reconciling their faith and sexuality. These include: 1) anxiety and mood disorders; 2) substance use and risky behaviours (including social media and sexual activity); 3) self-harm and suicide; and 4) non-suicidal injury (Chin, 2022). In their discussion of research on their *Embodied Spirituality Scale*, researchers, Horn and her colleagues, discuss the relationship between bodily, spiritual, and psychological integration, as well as benefits for counsellors in recognizing the body's expression of spiritual and mental concerns which may be unaddressed (2005, pp. 97-98).

[300] In this particular (2017) writing, Althaus-Reid and Isherwood define salvation in this way. But, there has been a change in the focus of Dawn's life narrative since her youth. Section 4.2 refers to Dawn's childhood in a children's home, her adoption, and her experience with different caregivers, many of whom provided her with significant, loving care. Dawn shares her experience of attending liturgical religious services in her early years, as well as the meaning these meetings held for her. As a child, she applied her creativity, from her religious formation, where, after a period of trauma in the family home, she had created her own place of meeting with the Divine, transforming a household vacuum cleaner into a prayer stool. From this place, she petitioned Jesus to come to her aid. Dawn knew many periods where she felt overwhelmed as a youth, and during these, she also engaged in self-harm, including attempts to end her life. Her early childhood experience of home being an unsafe place, sheds appreciation for Dawn's seeking out a place of 'sanctuary', a 'home', during times of trouble. Later, these included not only encounters touched by abuse and grief in her younger years, but financial hardship as an adult. However, love, expressed in those who cared for her, supported her through a variety of seasons. Since then, the love Dawn has been experiencing in a committed marriage also equips her to encounter and embrace her 'self' today. 'Metanoia', the turn toward her 'self', has fostered self-love, and has enabled her to nurture her intelligence, aptitudes, interests, and desires. Thus, Dawn is growing in self-giving, reproducing the love for 'self', in which she is finding a home. Dawn is One whose intelligence, giftings, and passion for justice are attractive, recognized by those who know and are served through her life vocation.

[301] That is, the themes of 'Divine communion', 'transformation', and 'surrender'. For evidence of this claim, review Dawn's expression of: a) her motivations for 'Divine communion' in childhood (section 4.3.2.1), b) her description of her 'self' as more 'WHOLE' and 'HEALTHY' – i.e. 'self-love' (section 5.2.2.3), and c) her awareness of the 'movement' of 'transformation' in her life (section 6.2.3.3). These demonstrate the fulsome human experiences she is knowing.

[302] See Dawn's words, in Section 6.2.3.3, that, in her purview, 'my VULNERABILITY is my strength'.

but, equally important is her love of life.[303] Keller reminds that, 'the birthright of genesis is … not a right to indiscriminate (re)production. God is not 'prolife' but *of life:* the life of the world, the spirit of a 'chaosmos' in which death circulates through every living process' (2003, p. 222). Thus, in a life that is within God, death is not excluded. Indeed, despite her traumas, over her lifetime, the seeds of life, already buried within Dawn, have been seen to sprout, and they have been regenerating into newness of life, into Becoming.

Robert Goss mentioned a similar desire in another disciple of Christ, who, in his writing on the theme of desire, expressed this in *The Growth of Mysticism*. This referred to the mystic, Rupert abbot of Deutz (1075 – 1129), who described death as a *pathway to* God, a road to Life (Bernard McGinn, 1992, p. 332, cited in Goss, 2002, pp. 127). Thus, in this light, a more thoughtful reading of Dawn's narrative would not overlook the depth of *her* desire, or her unwillingness to risk its loss, by making a request of God. It is important to appreciate a fuller view of the threat confronting her on the 'face of the deep'.[304] That is, Dawn's description in this narrative began in the darkness of *tehom*, one marked with uncertainty and confusion.[305] But what is significant about her description is that her decision to walk the labyrinth is coloured with a tinge of faith, a daring hope, the type of possibility which 'precedes the work of creation' (Keller, 2003, pp. 9, 10, 196). In essence, despite her psychological distress, *it was faith* which led Dawn to the labyrinth,

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[303] In my first naming of categories, prior to deciding on the term, 'surrender', I used the term, 'resurrection through vulnerability' to connote this 'movement' (See Figure 2). See Dawn's words in section 5.2.2.3, where she shares her growing desire and sensitivity to work in partnership with God, relinquishing burdens that are not hers to carry, thus, maintaining a humble, childlike spirit.

[304] *Face of the Deep: A Theology of Becoming* is the title of Catherine Keller's (2003) book, speaking of beginning as creation out of the *tehom*, the chaos of 'the deep'. See section 3.5.6.1.

[305] Because of the likelihood of misunderstanding, I clarify that the *tehom* is not equivalent to evil. As Keller explains, the potentiality of 'beginning' and the encounter with 'the deep' that is, chaos, introduces creation as something that is open to encounters of both evil as well as good (2008, p. 54).

and consequently, her entire walk can be considered one of 'faith seeking understanding'. This is because, as Dorothee Söelle asserted, 'faith struggles for the *clarity of its cause'* and it is not without doubt, but seeks, and questions in order to comprehend, otherwise, it would be a matter of 'naïve optimism' (Sölle, 1990, p. 4; emphasis mine). Dawn's labyrinth walk indicates the profundity of her 'tehomic*'* faith concerning her life *in* God. The passion propelling her search is seen in the extent to which Dawn dared to travel in order to acquire an answer to her question – that is, to face temporal death (Keller, 2008, p. 87).

Just as compelling is another contention, and it is this: Dawn's decision to see if there was *any other* reason for her to remain alive in this situation is more than a request for reassurance from God. I recognize Dawn to be holding God accountable, *requiring* something *of* God. In fact, her behaviours image the lover in the Song of Solomon, who combs the streets and squares of her city, searching for her lover (Song of Sol. 3:1-4). McFague noted that many persons, including mystics of the medieval era, read Song of Solomon as an image of the relationship that exists between God and the human soul (1987, p. 127). Aware and critical of the Western Christian theological construction of a God who knows no passion or desire, McFague argued against assumptions of God who has no need or interest which can be met by createds, including humankind (McFague, 1987, p. 126).[306] She focused on the significance of theological construction which speaks into lived realities involving love, and helps individuals explore their purpose, benefit, and

[306] Equally important to my grounded *theopoeisis* is McFague's caution about constructing models of God that are based on human characteristics in ways that are simplistic, and without thought (McFague 1987, p. 126). To her, this meant challenging constructive theologians to consider 'what is good, appropriate, and right about it as a model of God's relationship with the world' (ibid.). Therefore, I contend that a God without desire is *unthinkable*, for it would be impossible for a God who is involved *in creating* anything - including human persons who are *imago dei* with desire – to be without desire, for the act of creation arises from desire. As a result, human creatures who, like Dawn, are *imago dei*, are replete with desire for 'self', God,

potential, *in relation to* God – persons like Dawn. Thus, thirsting after God, Dawn is *demanding* assurance of her value in God's eyes - of God's desire *for her*. Corroborating this posture, is the term, 'demand', that Keller uses to describe the '*agapic*' love of God, love, which, while it 'receives', holds an air of judgement or expectation in it (Keller, 2008, p. 38). This expectation is something without which, as God's lover, Dawn, is not prepared to live (McFague, 1987, p. 128; Rollins, 2011, p. 4). This demand concerns 'faithful relationality … everything to do with con/sciousness [sic] 'knowing with' and nothing to do with certainty' (Keller, 2008, p. 38). In this light, Dawn's walk in the labyrinth was replete with boldness and desire, her posture in relating to God.[307]

Consequently, the *real* danger which threatened Dawn was that of *losing her hope* that she *would* taste the fruit of her faith – the requited love of God, her lover (Rollins 2011, p. 124,125, 127); the 'movement' of 'surrender' is evidence of her *will* to step into the *tehom* of the unknown - despite not fully understanding it - and to *risk* her expectation of a response from God.[308] When Dawn's trust enabled her to set down the image of God she had held since childhood, the 'Idol' which had been shielding her from the trauma of 'the Real', was abandoned. It was then that Dawn 'join[ed] with Christ in crying out, 'Why have you forsaken me?'. Hence, she

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and the world. For more of McFague's point concerning desire, see chapter 5 in her (1987) book, *Models of God: Theology for an Ecological, Nuclear Age*, on the theme, 'God as Lover'.

[307] Once again, I challenge the assumption that Dawn's search for God in chaos reflects the Western symbolic of death, one which intimates that salvation is operational in eternal life which *follows* death (Jantzen, 1998, p. 79). Dawn's 'agapic' demand suggests an expectation that her life *in* God is a *continual* process of Becoming, *without end*.

[308] When assigning codes and categories to this part of Dawn's narrative, my memos included concepts that were signifiers of mystery, uncertainty, and desire to comprehend purpose – that is, signs of 'faith seeking understanding'. At the same time, there were concepts which depicted connection, solace, love, comfort, and a willingness to surrender to something greater than the 'self'. To me, this reflected the paradoxical reality of 'surrender', and of the faith which makes it possible.

'experience[d] the forsakenness of an absolute paternal figure' (Rollins, 2011, p. 82);[309] and she demanded reassurance from God that there was some reason for her to remain on earth.

One point is key to understanding the profundity of this 'movement' of 'surrender' in the experience of Dawn – it is her daring hope to receive from God, while unable to see its evidence in the present situation (Heb 11:1). What is pivotal in her story, is that Dawn's relinquishment of her assumptions of God was not the path she chose in order to *orchestrate* gain. In fact, daring to relinquish her ideal, by demanding an answer to her question, was a choice that was true to Dawn's Becoming. It is One's *willingness to 'let go'*) of the attachment to something One has cherished, in the pursuit of what is true, that has been referred to by Rollins as *kenosis* (2011, p. 168). This is why I have conceived of the final 'movement' of 'surrender' as one that is like a 'resurrection through vulnerability', an act of 'reproduction of the [real] self [that is given for the sake of] love [of God]'. Such potentials arise by *participating* in Jesus' Crucifixion by experience, *not* belief (Rollins, 2011, p. 31; emphasis mine). When persons relinquish a false hope, they experience an *existential self-emptying* – they have no other recourse than the choice that is truest to the deep needs of the 'self' (Rollins, 2011, p. 168).[310]

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[309] While Rollins adds that this statement concerning God can apply to any One who has assumed the position of an 'absolute' paternal figure, such as a pastor or religious authority, individuals may assign this position to persons, spiritual practices, or beliefs. All of these may function in the role of what Rollins calls a 'crutch', as God has been for some persons (2011, pp. 48, 49).

[310] Significantly, Kearney's definition of *kenosis* is a self-emptying, where, 'Abandoning *ego*, I allow the infinite to beget itself in my persona' (2001, p. 108). Such 'giving place' to the Other is the image of a perichoretic relationship. Such willingness to be 'powerless' for ultimate good resonates with Rollins' concept of the potential that is derived from what I termed originally, the 'reproduction of the [real] self (ibid.).

The willingness to be 'powerless' for ultimate good resonates with the name of the category I used originally, that is, the 'reproduction of the [real] self'. It is significant that Kearney speaks of God as choosing to be engaged with humankind,

> By choosing to be a player rather than an emperor of creation, God chooses powerlessness. This choice expresses itself as self-emptying, kenosis, letting go. God thus empowers our human powerlessness by giving away his power, by possibilizing us and our good actions – so that he may supplement and co-accomplish creation. To be made in God's image is therefore, paradoxically, to overcome our powerlessness, by responding to the call of creation with the words, 'I am able'. To God's 'I may be' each one of us is invited to reply, 'I can'. Just as to each 'I can', God replies 'I may be'. In this eschatological play of power and powerlessness, the human self becomes the capable self (Kearney, 2001, p. 108).

The historical term, *kenosis*, however, deserves some explanation before its significance for appreciating the 'movement' of 're-creation' in contemporary persons such as Dawn can be seen. I take this opportunity now.

6.2.2.7 'Kenosis' and 're-creation' – a queer reconstruction

Historically, the First and Second Ecumenical Councils, held at Nicea in A.D. 325, and Constantinople in A.D. 381, represented orthodox ecumenical Christianity's agreement on the matter of the divinity and humanity of Jesus of Nazareth.[311] The theological theory of *kenosis*, that is tied to his incarnation, has been debated in history, and its meaning still gives rise to arguments.[312] Systematic theologian,

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[311] The Council of Nicea agreed that Jesus was fully God, and the Council of Constantinople affirmed the full humanity of Jesus (See Grenz, 2000, p. 249, and p. 275, respectively, for these historical events).

[312] Althaus-Reid, 'indecent' theologian, argues that *kenosis* is not simply 'God voluntarily letting go of Godself in Christ', but as Liberation and feminist theologians, and educator, Paolo Freire theorized in his pedagogy, 'letting go' [in education] potentializes 'power in vulnerability' (2003, pp. 55-57). It is the 'dynamic

Stanley Grenz, has explained the origins of *kenosis* in Chalcedonian theology (2000, p. 306), and he elaborated on the source of the modern Christian preoccupation with 'the condescension and self-humiliation of the divine *Logos*, the Son, in taking to himself human nature' (ibid.). The aspect of Christology that receives less emphasis is that, in addition to Christ's self-abasement, *kenosis* involves 'the exaltation of human nature to inseparable communion with the divine *Logos* because of that act' (ibid.). Furthermore, Grenz expands that, 'Chalcedon claimed foundational importance for orthodox Christology, and therefore, 'the incarnation became the focus of theologizing after the fifth century. The centrality of the incarnation is especially evident in Protestant theology, as thinkers delved into the question of the actual dynamics of the incarnate life' (ibid.).

Several changes to the *kenosis* theory have occurred since scholarship in Protestant theology began to burgeon since the Chalcedonian postulate (Grenz, 2000, p. 308). Significant to Dawn's story, Grenz expands on the theological challenges and inconsistencies which have arisen from Christologies which have emphasized features such as: 1) Christ's birth as the occasion in history when the eternal *Logos* assumed the nature of a human being in the womb of the virgin, Mary; 2) the unchanging 'ontological categories' of two natures, 'human' and 'divine' in Christ; and 3) the denial of *full* humanity and *full* divinity of Jesus; these represent only a few controversies (2000, pp. 309-310). Moreover, equally misinterpreted are

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of self-effacing which the teacher needs to practise in order to let go' (Althaus-Reid, 2003, p. 57), the release of control for the greater good of the Other, the dialogical path to freedom (Freire and Shor, 1987, p. 89, cited in Althaus-Reid, 2003, p. 57).

New Testament references to the 'self-abasement' of Jesus, written by John the disciple, and the Apostle Paul, as these texts are not recognized as propositional claims of a narrative pattern; hence, they are not necessarily intended as veritable historical timelines, referring to Jesus' incarnation (ibid.).[313] Grenz, however, avers,

> With the early witnesses, we must employ a Christology '*from below*'.[314] We search for the answer to the identity of Jesus by looking at his historical life. Rather than being the presupposition of Christology, the confession of the incarnation – 'The Word became flesh' – can only be the conclusion of our reflections on Jesus' person. When we look first at Jesus of Nazareth, we arrive at the conclusion we explored in this chapter and which the apostles confessed: In this one historical, personal life we find revealed who God is and who we are to be – true deity and true humanity. As this human being, Jesus is divine. In this affirmation, which is a confession about the entire life of Jesus, lies the significance of the confession of the incarnation. Rather than a description of some purported activity of the eternal Logos, 'incarnation' is a Christological confession. It capsulizes what we find in Jesus of Nazareth, namely that *he is the 'word' – the dynamic revelatory word of God – in human form* (Grenz, 2000, pp. 310-311; emphasis mine).

Grenz's pithy summary on theories of *kenosis,* and its relevance to Christian appreciations of divinity and humanity, is a significant issue for today. For, it means that contemporary disciples of Christ must be sensitive to subjecting themselves to Others who may manipulate Christological theories, such as *kenosis,* for the purpose of targeted legislation of self-denial; such self-denial in the name of One's *humanity*, claimed as an

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[313] These references are found in John 1:1-14, and Phil 2:5-11, respectively.

[314] In contrast, Grenz describes 'Christology from above' as the doctrinal persuasion proposing a confession of Christ's divinity based on individuals' personal confrontation with Christ in their quotidian life (i.e. the present versus the past). Grenz cites an example in the Christology of American Black theologian, James Cone (2000, p. 251), and disagrees with Cone's perspective, emphasizing a need to honour Jesus' historical life (ibid.). Nonetheless, I argue that my epistemology demonstrates the expansive blending of the fruit that derives from a merging of theories, despite their divergences.

image of Jesus' incarnation, is recognized as a leap in logic (Grenz, 2000, pp. 307-311).

Contemporary followers of the Way of Jesus, who have encountered marginalization and control by the dominant Christian religious hegemony, possess a legitimate concern about the need to be wary of power that is wielded in the name of promoting *kenotic* life in the Other.[315]

For Dawn, however, the result of her action of *kenosis* was not an experience of God's 'power-over' her 'self'; rather it was an encounter of grace. Her choice resulted in being accosted by love, which is God, and she came to know that she was always already at home. Dawn's willingness to set aside what she had prized, propagated a new beginning – that is, 're-creation'. In this way, 'movement', 'surrender' reveals itself as the epitome of 're-creation'.

6.2.3 What Does this Grounded Theopoeisis on 'Re-creation' Propose for Human Becoming in the Context of Mystery in the Contemporary World?

6.2.3.1 'Divine communion'

To respond to the question of this section, I draw on the comments of one of Summer's friends, who attended our second mystagogic interview.[316] What was distinctive about this friend is that she did not profess to have a subjective appreciation of God as a personal entity, or a metaphysical Other, with whom she engages.[317] I interpreted her

[315] Among these are persons such as Dawn, who claim their identity as LGBTQ.
[316] The words of this guest are located in section 6.2.3.1, on this page and the next.
[317] Of the 18 mystagogic interviews I held with primary and secondary participants, six were held with family members, friends, or colleagues, who responded to this question: 'Please share how you have been affected by the life of your partner/family member/friend, and how you think their spirituality has affected you'. Where there was need for more clarification, the question was also expressed as: 'Please describe the ways that your partner/family member/friend's life has influenced yours and how their spirituality has had an influence on you'.

words as reflecting an encounter of ‘communion’, with the ‘spirit/wind/breath’ of God, referred to as the air which envelops humankind and all createds on earth (Keller, 2008, p. 49). This friend also refers to an eco-spiritual sensibility that she and Summer share; specifically, she speaks of her *inspiration* of fresh, cold *air* each morning, something that fills her lungs, and guides her daily movements and actions. She describes the calm act of *inspiration* as one which grounds her, and she responds to my question about the spirituality she recognizes in her friend’s life,

> HM! Well for ME I would say that [spirituality] it’s a connection with … the universe … and with the natural world. You know, so here, living in this park [describing the setting in which she resides] to ME is kind of like how I FEEL. Just nature … for ME, um, I feel like when I walk out in the morning and I take that FIRST BREATH OF COLD AIR in winter, it’s like I’M DRINKING IT IN. And then when I walk around and I’m by the water or the trees, or you know, just um, the birds, it take me – it kind of centres me and brings me, CONNECTS ME. I just feel .. more um .. uh, whatever kind of anxiety or fear [exists], it kind of just brings me PRESENT … to be more present … [referring to Summer] … um, well I know that Summer loves to be outdoors too and connect with nature. So, again, we don’t use those words, I don’t use those words, [he] doesn’t use them [those words] around me [giggles] … I think that’s where it comes from for Summer.

Like Summer, this friend used the word, ‘connection’ in her definition of spirituality.[318] As we continued our conversation, she elaborated on ‘where *it* [spirituality] comes from’, for Summer. By this, she assumed this connection to be the source of the character she

[318] To refer to Summer’s experience, see section 6.2.2.4; However, in contrast with Summer, her friend did not view Becoming as something which relates to Divinity. Rather, she used the word, ‘breath’ to describe the source of her grounding for the day. Therefore, focusing on her use of the word, ‘connection’, I considered its connotation of being anchored, or held, such as by a ligament or an elastic band. Her use of this word is illuminating, for like fibrous tissue, such as that which connects muscle to bone, this connection is the ground of her strength, as well as a possibility for expansion into the world on a given day. It is as integral to life as the oxygen, that is taken into the lungs with a breath (Keller, 2008, p. 107). Despite Summer’s self-described persuasion concerning spirituality, I find it curious that the word, ‘spirit’ in the

noticed in her friend, as One who is 'not good, but kind' – a description stated with precision. Summer is someone she views as: 'very strong in her determination to attempt to do the right thing', One who, 'thinks things through', and who is 'not a follower in any capacity … just trying to put it all together'. In saying this, this guest participant is clarifying that while Summer's motivation is not perfect, it is principled, loving.

Keller provides insight into one of the ways persons can connect with the Divine, contending that this occurs, 'sometimes very minimally, sometimes just by taking a breath … [they] embody the divine passion' (Keller, 2008, p. 107). Saying 'yes' to *Eros* can be as subtle as that (ibid.). These insights of Summer's friend, then, are an echo of Keller's invitation to persons, to set aside 'the specter [sic] of an all-controlling omnipotence' for one that is, 'a goodness that corresponds to our best hopes, to our desire for justice and the renewal of all creaturely life' (Keller, 2008, p. 83).[319]

Finally, as One who has known Summer for over 20 years, this friend reveals how she feels 'received' in the relationship she and Summer share. It is with welcome, without pretence about spirituality. As we conversed, I perceived between them a love which had held them together over the years; it was open, intimate, candid, and reciprocal - a reality of beauty.[320] It is suggestive of the divine *Eros*, described as 'the cosmic appetite for

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Greek, Hebrew, and Latin languages is also translated as, 'breath' (Keller, 2008, p. 19). Here, the spirit is the source of her friend's strength for the day.

[319] In addition to Keller's theopoetic statement, on a practical theological note, one of the participants in Hattie and Beagan's Canadian study also referred to a 'goodness' to which she attributed her sense of spirituality. She shared, 'I don't really understand what that is, but I do believe that there's something and I believe that there's ah, I don't know, a collective sense of greater good' (Hattie and Beagan, 2013, p. 260). This quality runs deeper than superficial acts, which obey religious rules of conduct with automaticity. In a similar way, Summer's friend describes her not as 'good', but 'kind', a mark of love, rather than perfection.

[320] Keller explains that, apart from 'truth', the only other words in the Christian scriptures which define God by using a propositional statement, are 'love' and 'spirit', and she describes these three concepts as the essence of God, evidence of 'the movement of the holy spirit in the world' (Keller, 2018, p. 33). She refers to 'truth', 'love', and 'spirit', as fluid processes, which, 'we cannot possess … we belong within [them]. [They]

Becoming, for beauty and intensity of experience', the compelling 'lure' which leaves room for human persons to choose (Keller, 2008, pp. 88-91, 95, 99).

Another friend of 28 years, affirmed Summer's character in a supplementary interview, describing herself as One, who also, is 'not religious', 'does not practice a spirituality', but connects with Summer on 'moral and philosophical issues'. She spoke of Summer's personal sensibilities for respect and kindness, and with candour, shared how 'horrified' Summer is when she meets 'people who aren't committed' to a way of love. Describing Summer as 'hypersensitive', and 'zealous', but not 'compulsive', she recognized Summer's strengths as, a 'deep thinker' with a 'very strong moral fibre' who struggles with being a 'worrier'. She and Summer share a common aim of living in the Way of love, and yet, this friend recognizes Summer as One who is open to persons who reflect 'every way of being', not only ways with which she is comfortable. She respects Summer's commitment to 'anti-racism' and 'everyone's right to be', she is someone who lives '*in* love. Love is in [her] – inviting, drawing, desiring' (Keller, 2008, p. 97).[321]

The presence of *Eros* is part of Summer's fulfilment of her prerogative of living into her humanity (ibid.). This is her expression of her 'self' as a bisexual woman who is a

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do not belong to us… [they are] a way, not an end' (Keller, 2018, p. 33). This description is an apt representation of Summer's Way of being, and her embrace of persons, as recognized in relationship with this friend. I believe it appropriate to add that my observation of the love between Summer and her friend is subjective. I appreciated their honesty about the affections, conflicts, and challenges shared in one another's company. In these interviews, Summer and her friend were unique in speaking about their conflicts, misunderstandings, and resolution of their different, idiosyncratic personalities. It was a joy to be in the company of each pair of participants in the second mystagogic interview.

[321] Sharing her thoughts on spirituality, Summer's friend stated emphatically, 'humans aren't alone with no greater power in the universe. I really think *love* is the main thing going on and it's what we have to promote to make it work, and to help it work'.

revelation of Godself in communion with the world, their body.[322] The act of honouring, referred to as, ‘claiming our birthright’, is particularly critical in an age where persons live at a distance from themselves and Others in increasing measure (May, 1995, p. 91), because, in relationship, the *Ego* is transformed, and it is the refinement of character which ‘exceeds any individual life’, calling persons to respond to the divine lure which beckons them toward Becoming (Keller, 2008, p. 116-117). Summer’s friend’s comments suggest that Summer is *inspired* by a similar motivation. Ttransformation’ facilitates this refinement, the next category in the ‘movement’ of ‘re-creation’ that I examine through a contemporary lens.

6.2.3.2 ‘Transformation’

A friend of Andy contributes her understanding of his Becoming, which is interpreted in the ‘movement’ of ‘transformation’. This friend shares some of the messages that had been promulgated in a Western Christian evangelical community in which they had spent a season of their lives as youth. She explained the significance of wrestling with the question of Becoming in relation to Mystery, in terms of the concept I describe as a ‘movement’ that involves the ‘transformation’ of the ‘self’. She expressed some questions she has faced as a heteronormative person - those on which, her LGBTQ friend, wishing to be faithful to his call to Becoming, also faces in the context of dominant heteronormative narratives,

[322] I have coined the phrase, ‘call to life, pruning and growth’ to describe the divine invitation to live into this cosmic way of communion in love. It is described in section 4.3.2.2.

> I got older … I felt that God was NOT fully expressing himself in the scriptures … like I felt like: 'I don't understand you [God], I think you left out some chapters!' … I think the older I got I thought: 'Who was writing this stuff down?!' I still think that - I don't understand! A whole bunch of men for one (and as a woman that bothers me) wrote this stuff down and said God told them so. And so maybe there's some passages that were left out, or maybe I felt that God was outside the scriptures ... Or maybe … (and I NEVER thought about it that far) but I think, when you say it, maybe it was … a divine thing saying to me: 'That is NOT what that means!' … I have recently looked through old journals and I realize that from the time that I was 16 and on, it was just DOUBT after DOUBT after DOUBT: 'How come I can't have faith? Why can't I believe this is true?' … but I did not think of THAT as a gift … I mean the way I was raised anyways - you BELIEVE ALL OF IT, you cannot pick and choose scriptures. You cannot say: 'THIS is right, and THIS I'm not gonna choose to believe it,' you believe the WHOLE thing, or nothing … Because there's a lot of things in the Bible that I think are cultural interpretations of a time, and cultural rules that brought some semblance of order in some way … But I definitely don't think it was a GIFT – it TERRIFIED me, 'cause I just wanted to be able to accept it … because I wanted it to be easy! I wanted to NOT question it … 'cause it was hard to feel divided … it's hard … for me to toe the party line when I didn't believe it … I REALLY wanted to believe all of it, but I … I just felt like I wasn't speaking the truth – or I wasn't speaking MY truth, anyway … And I don't know how we can be so ARROGANT to think that this is the ONLY way. And I have ALWAYS thought that … It was GREAT. Things started to line up more.

This friend's words illustrate her experiences with the culture and messages of the evangelical Christian community which had shaped both her own, and Andy's thinking in their youth; they experienced a pressure to believe 'all of it'. This view has a shadow of negative theology, which hangs over similar contexts today, one which claims a view of God as unknowable Mystery, while ignoring the deep theological questions lying beneath the doubts of individuals such as she. From this friend's vantagepoint, unanswerable truths also intimate Mystery's desire to be known, in ways not spoken of in the scriptures she had read as a youth. As both she and Andy expressed, this elusive Mystery reveals aspects of Godself, beckons to persons, and awaits their response (Keller, 2008, p. 55).

After our conversation, Andy's friend expressed some of her changing thoughts about God as Mystery, as she reconsiders her concept of Divinity. Specifically, rather than viewing God as a soloist, she now imagines God as an accompanist, voicing a burgeoning

suspicion: 'perhaps God waits for *us*, accompanying us along to where we're going because *we've* got to figure out the tune!'[323] For her, there is a possibility that God's role is not to orchestrate humankind's quotidian existence (Keller, 2008, p. 166), the Becoming journey is in *human* hands as well. At the conclusion of our interview, Andy and his friend discussed her suspicion that they are the persons they are today, because their 'self' today is 'truer' to who they are [the Self](!) and more 'sustainable' than the false 'selves' they had constructed. This insight is significant, because it relates to the 'movement', 'transformation',[324] something, Andy reports, is much unlike the predictable security craved by many in contemporary society; rather, it is a path of adventure and questions.

At the end of another interview, expressing a similar thought, Dawn, explained her changing appreciation of God as the ground of her 'self', her true home,

> I mean it's the [story of the] prodigal son. God's there. We wander off, we go away. The minute we're able to *metanoia*, the minute we're able to turn to God, [God says] 'There you are my child! I LOVE YOU! WELCOME HOME! It's you that keeps wandering away, silly child. [chuckles] COME BACK HERE! RESIDE HERE! Yes, I know you have to go out into the world, but come back!' … I would … I would THANK God, um … for this particular understanding of home, it's about being centred in something bigger than yourself. You know, Jesus left his HOME, but created all these scenarios where human beings were brought back into community and allowed HOME. Whether that was in continued journey with Jesus, or whether they were sent back into their own communities (allowed to return to temple; restored to community). That to know that HOME is not a place you have to get to, but a place within YOUR HEART that's attainable for everyone no matter WHO you are. No matter WHERE you are. No matter HOW you find yourself on the journey. NO ONE is without hope. NO ONE IS WITHOUT HOPE.[325]

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[323] The point of exclamation, which follows in the next two lines, signifies the tone I detected, in their words. This friend's comment is synchronous with the tone of Kearney's assertion that 'God is constantly waiting' so that (incarnate) human persons may supplement and co-create with Divinity (2001, p. 37).

[324] Andy had always already embraced life as an organic journey of discovery, curious to explore spiritual realities, even in the early season of his life, when he first met this friend.

[325] Rollins suggests that such a conversion is the outcome of persons' relinquishment of the 'Idols' they construct in an attempt to satisfy their deep need, their confrontation of the false 'self', the *Ego* which separates them from who they truly are. The effect of this is freedom, an encounter with the truth which tells

This admission is a sign of ‘transformation’, and *Dawn* uses a Greek term, *metanoia*, to describe this ‘movement’ of change. It signifies a ‘turning around’, a re-orientation toward her authentic ‘Self’ in the Divine, a turn that she describes as life-changing. McFague’s model of God as lover offered a fulsome understanding of the term, *metanoia*, which encompasses a person’s commitment to the ‘self’, Others, and the world in entirety: ‘a conversion or change of sensibility, a new orientation at the deepest level of our being – from one concerned with our own salvation apart from the world to one directed toward the well-being, the health, of the whole body of the world’ (McFague, 1987, p. 146). This ‘movement’ reifies Dawn’s belonging, a new sense of belonging *to her ‘self’*, the authentic ‘Self’ she is discovering in the Divine. ‘Transformation’ solidifies the ‘movement’ of ‘homesteading’, in the ‘self’ of whom she has become aware and accepted, the One for whom she has gained respect and love – it is her true home.

6.2.3.3 ‘Surrender’

This is an appropriate time to reiterate a few main points.

Desire finds expression in the context of communion with the ‘self’ and/or the Other. With its source in the divine *Eros*, (comm)union is a catalyst for the ‘movement’ of ‘transformation’ in the human ‘self’. Through ‘transformation’, the ‘self’ advances in the ways of awareness, acceptance, respect, and love, thus making it more available to open out into a new beginning, a ‘re-creation’ which includes the Other. Desire has been summarized as a, ‘movement toward an other-than-self and this other cannot be reduced

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them that fulfillment and satisfaction are not to be *found* or known *apart* from this truth (Rollins, 2012, pp. 49, 63, 68, 80, 86, 87).

to a thing that one needs or consumes' (Kearney, 2001, p. 63). From the writing of Emmanuel Levinas, in, *Totality and Infinity*, Kearney interpreted the desire of God as involving 'a yearning for an eschatological kingdom *beyond history* while welcoming the coming of what comes *in each instant!*' (Kearney, 2001, p. 63). This description of the Divine reflects a longing that is not bound to past or present, but that is progressing into the future. It is both transcendent and immanent, befitting a description of prosopon-persona (Kearney, 2001, p. 15). As a result of this grounding in 'self-love' and the divine *Eros*, participants feel freer to live authentically, as persons who are Becoming, through 'movements' of 'beginning', 'homesteading', and also, 're-creation'.

Still, for Dawn, it is clear that the call of *Eros* does not allow her to evade one particular fork on the road of her spiritual journey. This is one which requires her to embrace vulnerability, and accept that this path is touched by pain and incompleteness. Relative to this, Dawn shares the details of an encounter with an individual who did not respect her, in her vulnerability in a ministry context in her local church,

> There was … a VERY PERSONAL ATTACK on me … at a DIFFICULT time in my relationship and in my life … (I THINK MY VULNERABILITY IS MY STRENGTH. I've learned that) … When I'm before God as … human, as anything, I'M AS REAL as I ever am … THAT was brought up AGAINST ME (as to how I was overly emotional). [it] BROKE MY HEART, and made me realize that I was dealing with someone who was not an understanding person (whose vulnerabilities did not allow them to see someone else vulnerable [and it] was not healthy … at the time a friend … came to that meeting … I'm not a person that is defensive when things are being said to me, I'm reflective. So he [the friend] said to me after this - it was four hours … a tirade against how I was emotional: 'I can't believe how you stayed SO PRESENT and NON-JUDGEMENTAL' … There was nothing I could say! This person really needed to offload. And whether they were just in their offloading or not, they were feeling their feelings … I didn't have a response for what she [the person accusing] was saying! I REALLY DIDN'T. I DIDN'T! … it's sort of that deep knowing of [the reality that] I just [had to] let [her] be where she was … that's THEOSOPHY, that's the WISDOM of God … When THAT WISDOM steps in, that's not about me, actually – I'M NOT THERE YET! … But that wisdom IS THERE so that gets

> tapped, and immediately I KNOW, IMMEDIATELY I KNOW [to] let this person [be where they are] … I no longer have a personal stake in that.

In this instance, Dawn did not deny her vulnerability; nor did she apologize for it, or attempt to challenge the Other's feelings. Facing the truth about the situation in a way which included both her perspective, and that of the Other, she relinquished the desire to control the Other. She respected their feelings, and allowed the Other to respect their own, offering them both an opportunity to be engulfed by the love of God. For Dawn, her openness supported her rest into what she described, '*Theosophy*' - the Wisdom of God.

Dawn's motivation here, has been described as love, which does not eschew responsibility, it is 'empowered not to lord it over others, nor to settle into a serene and dispassionate piety, but to risk an adventure … go off on an uncertain journey … take untoward chances' (Keller, 2008, pp. 92-93). In actuality, she attributes her response to the Spirit of Wisdom – *Theosophy* - and its fruit, evidence of the claim that: 'every spacetime of the capacious process of creation, might become readable as a unique, holy and temporary embodiment of the infinite', for, it is an 'incarnation' which embodies love (Keller, 2003, pp. 219, 220). This 'third way', is an alternate way of potentiality, of rejecting binary options (Keller, 2008, pp. 43, 128). Remaining open to the truth of process, Dawn's choice reflects the love of God; it is neither controlling nor dispassionate, it exemplifies the 'movement' of 'surrender',[326] the vulnerable act of love, the eternal, generating potential of creation (Keller, 2008, pp. 92-93). Her 'being-for-the-other', a sign of

[326] Dawn's description of this individual's reaction to her vulnerability in the public Church is an example of Rollins' description of the attitude of dependency, cultivated between persons and their pastors or leaders. Leaders in some contexts assume the role of believing 'on behalf of the community', therefore, protecting

'prosopon-persona' which 'emerges in ethical relationship to Others, is evidence of Dawn's spirituality (Kearney, 2001, p. 15). It ushers in Divinity's 'endless rebirth' (Jantzen, 1998, p. 94; Kearney, 2001, p. 19).[327]

6.3 Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I introduced the lived realities of the participants in the categories of the grouping of 'movements' I name as, 're-creation'. I argued that the scholarship of these constructive theologians provide a sound interpretation of the 'movements' of this category, namely: Sallie McFague; Peter Rollins; Catherine Keller; Marcella Althaus-Reid, and Lisa Isherwood. I applied the epistemologies in their theories to the themes of 're-creation' found in the following 'movements': 1) 'Divine communion'; 2) 'transformation'; and 3) 'surrender'.[328]

I began my discussion of this grouping with the first question of my heuristic, specifically, first, by explaining how the abandonment of the false 'self' facilitates persons' experience of the 'movement' of 'Divine communion'; I used Andy's experiences , the fear of being 'outed', bargaining with God, and closeting his sexual

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congregants from entertaining doubts they may have about their spiritual journey (Rollins, 2011, pp. 65, 70). The result is that when doubt is expressed (particularly, by a leader), members do not feel 'protected' from the longstanding questions they ignored. They must confront the feelings of insecurity they had avoided (ibid.). Dawn's extension of an invitation to the Other to join her in relational *perichoresis*, was an opportunity for *them* to be engulfed by God's love. However it is a choice that is only theirs to make.

[327] Thus, it is clear that both Kearney and Jantzen have referred to 'becoming [divine]' as a process which involves an inter-relational way of living. Still, Dawn realized that while providing the opportunity for the Other to love is a significant part of his gift to them, it is the Other's prerogative to accept or reject it.

[328] It is important to point out that, unlike my organization in chapters 4 and 5, I have not included quotations from Franca's narratives in the grouping of categories in the theme of 'surrender' along with the other five participants. This is not a reflection of the absence of this theme in Franca's story. In fact, Franca's interviews demonstrated an incidence of categories of 'Divine communion', 'transformation', and 'surrender' that were as prevalent in interviews 1 and 3, as those found in narratives of other participants. My decisions concerning selected quotations for these chapters reflect my priority of utilizing participants' words which capture the themes in this grounded theory most vividly.

orientation - to illustrate this preoccupation. Then, describing each ‘movement’, I explained their contribution to ‘re-creation’, starting with the construct of ‘Divine communion’, and as I remarked in the ‘movement’ of ‘beginning’, ‘Divine communion’ includes multiple sites of encounter with Mystery. In the next category, ‘transformation’, I focused on how this ‘movement’ affects progress in self-awareness, self-acceptance, self-respect, and self-love. Last, I defined ‘surrender’, a category I considered as the epitome of ‘re-creation’; I emphasized that the codes and categories of this ‘movement’, refer to qualities such as: hope; disappointment; trust; and hardship, pointing to a life journey influenced by both challenges and gifts.

I progressed to the second question in my heuristic, exploring the nature of Divine-human relationship in participants’ narratives. I began with ‘Divine communion’, interpreting it as an extension of Keller’s, ‘beginning’, which ‘opens out’, and Kearney’s responsibility ‘in the midst of relation to the concrete living other’. Andy’s lived experiences were demonstrations of the significance of Divinity’s incarnations, which nurture him; while Summer’s path, provided her a heightened sensibility to the feelings of Divinity concerning the harm that is perpetrated against their creation. Thus, ‘Divine communion’ was shown to be a ‘movement’ inviting participants to engage in a Way of love with God and Others. Then, I identified ‘transformation’, and explained how participants’ humble embrace of God’s welcome, care, and love, enabled them to become self-aware, self-respectful, self-accepting, and self-loving. Here, I focused on the refinement of Andy’s *Ego*, and how, for Eva and Sophie, their growing love for their ‘self’ was one of the evidences of this theme, as they embrace the message that they are accepted, and worthy of love.

Ending my discussion of the second question in my heuristic, I explained the ‘movement’ of ‘surrender’, arguing that the category represents an opening up of potentiality, of multiplicities in Becoming, that have arisen from Dawn’s expression of *kenotic* faith. In ‘surrender’, Dawn’s sensibilities about her ‘self’, as One in dependence on God, have opened the way for the ‘movement’ of ‘re-creation’ to be ushered in. This has transpired because, in ‘surrender’, Dawn dares to expect of God the quality she had been expecting of her ‘self’ – i.e. faithful commitment to her lover. In actuality, ‘surrender’ potentiates multiplications of Becoming through ‘re-creation’, as it represents the uparalleled gifts of intimacy One may give to an Other – their expectation, and their trust. Finally, I remarked that in ‘surrender’, Dawn is free to offer who she is, in boldness *and* vulnerability.

Hence, the grouping of ‘movements’ in ‘re-creation’ demonstrate that ‘Divine communion’ and ‘transformation’ echo the perpetual ‘movements’ of Becoming in ‘beginning’ and ‘homesteading’, and finally, that in the faith-ful and vulnerable expression of hope, ‘surrender’ serves as a catalyst for ‘re-creation’. To wind up this significant discussion I offer a caution where persons attempt to apply kenotic theory when promoting the abasement of marginalized persons.

Finally, I engaged with the third question in my heuristic. I argued that the grounded *theopoeisis* in Summer’s story is echoed in words of her contemporaries. These relationships demonstrate that her life bears witness to spirituality which models authenticity on the Becoming journey, for LGBTQ persons in Western Canada today.

The aforementioned themes of ‘beginning’, ‘homesteading’, and ‘re-creation’ coalesce, as one theme. In **Chapter 7**, I discuss the main category woven through the narratives of participants, and to which I now turn.

CHAPTER 7

‘FREEDOM-*FOR*-LOVE’ –

HUMAN BECOMING IN TEN ‘MOVEMENTS’

7.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I argue, firstly, that the construct, ‘freedom-*for*-love’, is the main category arising from the narrative texts of participants in this study; as the main category, it is the primary theme in which all other ‘movements’ of Becoming find their meaning;[329] it is the concept connoting the purpose toward which ‘movements’ of spirituality in this grounded *theopoiesis* aim. Secondly, I argue that ‘freedom-*for*-love’ is a reflection of perpetual self-expression of cosmic Mystery, known as God, that is evident in ‘movements’ of Becoming in participants’ lives.

For the purposes of recapitulation, I have now provided an overview of ten categories of spirituality, their definitions, and their significance for participants’ Becoming journeys; these are the ‘movements’ of ‘beginning’, ‘homesteading’, and ‘re-creation’. I have made connections with similar themes, arising in the contemporary literature in ‘indecent’ and Queer theology, theopoetics, the philosophy of religion, and social science studies on LGBTQ spirituality, and I have used this scholarship to interpret the research findings. Now, my attention turns to considering how these ten themes are subsumed in the main category, ‘freedom-*for*-love’.

[329] I provide a fuller definition for the distinct phrase, ‘freedom-*for*-love’, in section 7.2.

I begin with my definition of ‘freedom-*for*-love’. I draw first on Richard Kearney’s interpretation of the name by which God expressed Godself to Moses in the Exodic account of God’s liberation of Israelites from slavery in Egypt. The second aspect of my definition is taken from Catherine Keller’s explanation of *Eros* and *Agape*, Greek words which represent the creative and responsive definitions of love, as God.

Then, I progress, demonstrating that Keller’s treatment of Divinity’s incarnation in the cosmos is a necessary fulfillment of love, as *Eros*, the ongoing potential for creation; and I reiterate how the lure of *Eros* beckons individuals to know freedom, which supports them in materializing potentiality.

I start my discussion on the relationship of ‘freedom-*for*-love’ as it relates to three ‘movements’ which mark the theme of ‘beginning’ in participants’ stories. They include: 1) ‘conscious self-awareness’; 2) the ‘call to life, pruning and growth’; and 3) ‘facing the deep’. These ‘movements’ depict various forms of attentiveness toward the ‘self’; with each ‘movement’, I demonstrate that ‘beginning’ is a ‘process of cosmic collaboration’ with the Divine, into which humankind is beckoned in a vocation of ‘freedom-*for*-love’.

Following this, I turn to the four ‘movements’ of ‘homesteading’, expressed in participants’ stories. Applying some practical theological insights concerning trauma, I illustrate that the ‘movements’ of ‘homesteading’ relate to the significance of an individual’s grounding in the ‘self’, and the Divine, facilitating ‘freedom-*for*-love’. These ‘movements’ are: ‘self-recognition’ and ‘self-identification’; ‘resistance’; ‘fluidity’ and ‘self-love’; and ‘secure attachment’.

Finally, I discuss the grouping of categories that I name as, ‘re-creation’, as represented in participants’ stories. I demonstrate that these ‘movements’ - 1) ‘Divine communion’; 2) ‘transformation’; and 3) ‘surrender’ - serve to transfigure *Eros*, embracing vulnerability, *for the sake of* reproducing love in Others. In the end, I demonstrate how ‘surrender’ is the climax of the ‘movement’, ‘re-creation’, and the journey of spirituality. It is evidence of the ongoing expression of *Eros* in humankind. The Figure 6, on the next page, is a summary of the interrelationships between all of these ‘movements’.



Figure 6 'Three Groupings of 'Movements' in the Main Category of 'Freedom-*for*-Love' '.

7.2 'Freedom-*for*-Love' - A Working Definition

The *motif* 'freedom-*for*-love', conveys two concepts about the *telos* of human Becoming, that are also related to movements of the Divine. These are: 1) 'to be free, or available for';[330] and 2) 'the administration of love'.

The first concept refers to Kearney's understanding of God as 'an I-Self *for* us' (emphasis mine), which concerns God's *purpose of the liberation* of human persons (2001, pp. 28-29). Kearney referred to an interpretation of God's revelation of Godself to Moses as a 'promissory note', as involved in the Hebrews' liberation from Egyptians who had enslaved them (2001, p. 28); he explained the significance of the relationship between God's name, and the salvific act of redemption (ibid.). The scriptural reference, 'you shall know that I am Yahweh, your God who frees you from the burden of the Egyptians … ', embodies who God is (ibid.), a signifier intertwined with the promise of freedom. At the same time, God and humankind are interdependent, and Kearney underscores this as a necessary component for the fulfillment of this promise, because *both* God and humankind have a part to play in the Hebrews' liberation (ibid.).[331] Furthermore, there is no presumption of control of the Other in this partnership, Kearney posited, the nature of their interrelation is one which commands respect, it is a sign of their eschatological perichoretic relationship (Kearney, 2001, pp. 15, 18).

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[330] The Random House Dictionary defines the preposition, 'for', as meaning 'with the object or purpose of'. Thus, the main category of my grounded theory connotes that human persons exist *'for the purpose of'* love, just as, I suggest, God, the Creator, does (The Random House Dictionary of the English Language, 2nd ed.).

[331] Kearney explained the delicate partnership this way, 'the double relation in turn carries a dual responsibility not to become too distant or too familiar with God. Moses, remember, is summoned to approach, but also to remove his sandals and keep his distance. A safe distance, a sacred reserve' (2001, p. 28).

The second concept in my *motif*, considers Keller's descriptions of God, as *Eros* and *Agape* – the *divine lure toward love*, and the *response of love*, respectively - and both words treat love as the *telos* of divine action (Keller, 2008, p. 99). Keller expresses the theology of 'becoming' as that which explains 'movements' of the Divine in the world, focusing on two actions, namely, *Eros*, or 'creative love', and *Agape*, or 'responsive love' (2008, p. 98),

> The *Eros* attracts, it calls: it is the invitation. The Agape *responds to whatever we have become*; in com/passion [sic] it feels our feelings; it is the reception. They are different gestures of divine relationality – yet their motions are *in spirit* inseparable, in constant oscillation (Keller, 2008, p. 99; emphasis mine).

In the context of the Genesis narrative, Keller states that *Eros* can be understood as, 'the cosmic appetite for becoming, for beauty and intensity of experience' (ibid.). It is not a force that is controlling, rather, it is a lure which compels, making space for humankind to choose, within boundaries promoting goodness, responsibility, flourishing, and freedom (Keller, 2008, pp. 88-91, 95, 99). *Agape* invites us to be in partnership, to exercise our unique will and hope, to choose 'a fresh possibility' or not (Keller, 2008, p. 100).

Kearney spoke of a similar theme, connecting the human motivation of *Agape* to God, writing, 'God refuses to impose on us or abandon us' (2001, p. 22). Humankind is promised a partner - the 'I am who may be' – that is, [One who is] the possibility to be (ibid.) This materialization of possibility is a distinct way of conceiving of incarnation in/with humankind, with love as its *telos*. Indeed, Keller refers to a radical love, a form of *kenosis*

displayed in the ‘radical freedom’, witnessed in the person of 12th-Century Beguine, Marguerite de Porete. As a spiritual leader, de Porete left her life in the lay religious order, setting aside the ‘ego and its illusions’, and relinquishing all her possessions (Keller, 2003, p. 203); and along with this, came a distinct self-assurance, one which arises from such self-emptying (ibid.).

My research examines the journeys of LGBTQ persons toward liberation of a similar form, it is a Way of life, an expression of ‘freedom-*for* [the purpose of]- love’. Indeed, their liberation is tied to God’s ‘commission’ to fulfil a similar purpose (Kearney, 2001, p. 22), a focus that does not end with them alone, for their Becoming reflects their progression along a Way of ‘being-*for*’ *‘self’* and *for* ‘the-Other’ (Kearney, 2001, p. 18). These concepts describe the main theme discovered in the ten ‘movements’, that are mapped in this grounded *theopoiesis*. I start with the grouping of ‘movements’ in the category of ‘beginning’.

7.3 ‘Beginning’ - The Genesis of Cosmic Collaboration and ‘Freedom - *for*-Love’

The lived experiences of participants, reflect the theme of ‘beginning’, the gift of life into which human beings are invited. The ‘movements’ of ‘conscious self-awareness’, the ‘call to life, pruning and growth’, and ‘facing the deep’, are evidence of the miracle of order out of chaos; they refer to the start of the cosmic journey of Becoming, reflecting the human response to the divine lure for union and love (Kearney, 2001, p. 58; Keller, 2008,

pp. 99, 103).[332] In his foreword to Urs Mattmann's book on spirituality, Franciscan priest and educator, Richard Rohr, refers to the unsteadiness of this journey of love.[333] Exhorting persons to 'surrender to the purifying process of learning how to love', Rohr asserts that, 'we are all losing our valuable time by trying to solve this 'love mystery' in our heads', because no one can ever be certain about rightness in such a matter (Rohr, 2006, pp. 12-13). Participants lives, highlight the terrific launch onto the journey of 'freedom-*for*-love' (ibid.). The sensibility required for the 'process of learning how to love' begins with One's attention to their body, their material 'self'.

7.3.1 'Conscious Self-Awareness'

It is difficult to separate the 'movement' involving persons' 'conscious self-awareness' from the physiological and chemical bodily processes which occur in the flesh. David Benner argues that persons' earliest sense of their 'self', which arises during infancy, occurs by way of physical stimulation of the skin (Benner, 2011, p. 78). Also, he has suggested that the body's role as the conduit for knowledge, whether about the 'self', Others, or God, is singular; in a material sense, One is no closer to the 'self' than One is to the body, also called, 'the primal home of the self' (Benner, 2011, p. 78).

While Sallie McFague argued that human persons are intimately connected to the perpetually changing, 'self-organizing' cosmos (1987, pp. 7-8), Keller adds the insight that they are more complex than specimens of organic matter, and that their lives progress in

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[332] Kearney and Keller suggest that human createds are caught up in a past, a present, and a future, and as participants in the eschatological 'movement' of the eternal Divine, they are Becoming other than what they were before (Kearney, 2001, p. 28; Keller, 2008, p. 99).

[333] Mattmann's book, *Coming In: Gays & Lesbians Reclaiming the Spiritual Journey* (2006) was the first book in German written for LGBTQ persons and their friends.

a manner that is purposeful (Keller, 2008, p. 99). The 'movement' of 'beginning', witnessed in participants' lives, suggests that their awareness of their 'self' by way of spirit, soul (psyche), and body, is an important means by which they attend to the messages around them (Benner, 2011, p. 103).[334] Furthermore, their sensitivity to their bodies can be likened to the Divine's attention to and care for the world (McFague, 1987, p. 74); and the different parts of the 'self' are endowments by which individuals are equipped to fulfil their role of potentiating their personal world (i.e. the body), and the cosmos in which they live (Keller, 2008, pp. 99-100).

For this reason, the 'movement' of 'conscious self-awareness' is a gift of grace. By way of this sensibility, participants attend to, and love the world - which includes their bodies - in order to encourage its flourishing (McFague, 1987, p. 73).[335] As LGBTQ persons, the expressions of participants' spiritual sensibilities are echoed in Mattmann's personal and therapeutic pastoral sharing. Mattmann identifies as a gay man, and he is an example of One who has expressed his experience of Christ's words, as spoken to him about the uniquenesses of his gifts to the world as One who self-identifies as LGBTQ,

> I, Christ, am fully present in you. Your homosexuality is fully embraced in Me. Your being gay nourishes the Source in the depth of your being. Your sexuality enriches you and is a gift to the world. Your gayness *opens up your consciousness* … (Mattmann, 2006, p. 17; emphasis mine).

[334] See narratives of Sophie, Dawn, and Summer, in section 4.3.2.1.
[335] As seen in section 4.3.2.1, in this way, Dawn, Summer, and Sophie transfigure the Divine.

Here, Christ reminds Mattmann that his sexuality deepens his own *consciousness*. This distinct sexual sensibility makes Mattmann conscious of the world, and in this process, *the Divine* is nourished and strengthened, for Mattmann attends to the world holistically as a result of having been *sensitized by* his sexuality. This statement of Divinity's presence *in* an individual's sexuality is one example of the significance the gift sexuality offers, and this is a point that is not always highlighted. In a similar way, participants' sexuality is key to fulfilling their vocations (Mattmann, 2006, pp. 63, 67).[336] Although every individual's sexuality will allow them to attune to life's realities uniquely, Mattmann's narrative signals Divinity's affirmation of nonbinary identities, those deemed subaltern, and lacking in importance, by the Western Christian religious hegemony.

Just as significant for LGBTQ persons is the powerful potentiality of apprehending their calling, and of increasing their lives' fruitfulness by integrating their sexuality as part of their journey of Becoming (Mattmann, 2006, p. 18). For createds born to flourish in community, spirituality offers the opportunity to become engaged in 'a love relationship', 'a love for and from God' (Mattmann, 2006, p. 33). Mattmann provides a useful clarification by adding that spirituality is, 'beyond race, gender and sexual orientation' (2006, p. 38), and it is for this reason that he does not favour the term, 'gay and lesbian spirituality'; he recognizes the limitations of overshadowing One's experience of the Divine's vastness by focusing on one dimension of a person (ibid.). Mattmann also views sexual orientation this way: [it is] 'more than a genital expression and even goes beyond a love relationship. Being queer [sic] has to do with our consciousness, which as a result may differ from that

[336] See section 4.2.

of the heterosexual majority' (ibid.). Just as it is with the person who identifies as heterosexual, Mattmann issues a reminder that an individual's spirituality is not defined by whether or not they enjoy a sexual relationship with another person, although it does shape the way they may (or may not) choose to embrace one.[337]

Sometimes, where non-binary sexual identity is concerned, an individual has developed an awareness of this early in life. But, for many (as it was, for example, for Franca), it can take years for their sexuality to become associated with a call from God which brings meaning to their quotidian experience.[338] Given their marginalization from heteronormative society, often those who identify as LGBTQ do not possess a clear concept of spirituality as a journey which involves actions of confronting the 'self' and engaging with the Other in a meaningful way. Instead, it is a confusing and conflicted pathway (Rodriguez, 2010, p. 9), where they experience a need to realize the following tasks: 1) identify the relationship between their sexuality and their choice to respond to the call to discover their authentic 'self' (physically, emotionally, sexually, spiritually, and relationally); 2) embrace their 'self' more fully; and 3) flourish as whole persons (Mattmann, 2006, p. 140; Rodriguez, 2010, pp. 17, 23; Smallwood, 2015, p. 75). These facets of the 'movement' of 'conscious self-awareness' are iterations of what Keller describes as the *ruach,* 'the breathing, pulsing, overing spirit – your spirit somehow, yet

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[337] The priority of integration is addressed in a holistic manner by researchers, Horn, Piedmont, Fialkowski, Wicks, and Hunt, who study sexuality and spirituality by using their '*Embodied Spirituality Scale*' (2005). These researchers found that the scale was a valid measure of 'spirituality and body comfort and intimacy', independent of personality, sexual orientation, and gender (Horn et al., 2005, pp. 95-96). It also suggests factors for further investigation which challenge Mattmann's assumption about the distinctiveness of the queer consciousness. Their results invite researchers to explore how embodied spirituality correlates with persons' embodied awareness of health and healing, within and between individuals (i.e. in relationships) (ibid.).

[338] Franca's progression toward self-knowledge is described in section 4.3.2.2.

somehow more and other than 'you', that which persons may feel 'drawn' into its rhythm, into the creative brooding, the oscillation of risk and promise' (Keller, 2008, p. 54).[339] Mattmann's writing supports the 'movement' of 'conscious self-awareness' as a means of attending to the bodily sensibilities with which persons are imbued and equipped to discern their vocation as createds who love with freedom. The motivation to discover who they are is a signal of the 'call to life, pruning and growth', another 'movement' of 'beginning'.

7.3.2 'Call to Life, Pruning, and Growth'

One of Summer's challenges involved an inability to experience love *for* God, whom she had been instructed by Others to embrace, despite God's purported rejection of queer love. Her difficulty was in summoning a love for God from whom (she had been advised), *rejection* was the only reality she could ever know; and this reality would only limit freedom,

> Like I felt like I just COULDN'T love and I felt really guilty about that because I couldn't DO that … it just strikes me: What kind of God would say that you can't love? … I COULDN'T LOVE GOD FULLY because I was just scared that .. that I would just get PUNISHED! Right? Or like, like it just seemed so CONDITIONAL. Like [I was struggling with the assumption that], I can only love you [God], on YOUR terms?! And your terms don't even MAKE SENSE to me! And if I don't love you [God], then you're gonna prove your love to me by sending me to eternal TORMENT?! That's just – MESSED UP!

[339] See Table 1.7a, and the codes connected to the coloured categories 1a, 1b, 1c.

Summer's conflict was borne out of religious teaching in her early years, which claimed that God demanded obedience from individuals, and furthermore, that failing to obey God's expectations would result in judgement and 'hell'. But, her refusal to force affection for God by loving God on *God's* 'terms', demonstrated Summer's presence toward *her 'self'*, compelling her to live with integrity, to the best of her understanding; this is a mark of 'conscious self-awareness'. For, *if* God existed, Summer was 'drawing the line' at loving God on 'terms' with which *she could* agree; she was *refusing* to feign love for an *Other* in the context of a relationship which respected *only* the terms of the Other. For her, the terms for true relationship needed to be in line with the honour and flourishing of the *whole* cosmos, one which included herself *and* the Divine.[340] Thus, Summer's refusal to ignore her sensibility is a mark of authenticity, her priority of 'holding out' for an encounter with the God she trusts will accept her sexuate 'self' – the God who loves her without placing conditions on her personhood. For her, this is 'being-for-the-other' (Kearney, 2001, p. 18).

The cosmic interconnectivity in which human beings are involved suggests that the *telos* toward which their spiritual journeys move concerns more than survival or ecological regeneration (Kearney, 2001, p. 58; Keller, 2008, pp. 99, 103). Actually, it is the divine lure for union and love which gives individuals the capacity to be present toward the 'self', the Divine, and other createds. Keller expresses this reality by saying: 'Creator and

[340] McFague's models of God provided a comprehensive reflection of the love she regarded as described in the Christian Scriptures. They imaged Greek words for love – i.e. *eros*, *agape*, and *philia* – which for this theologian, denote a unique power of a non-patriarchal kind (McFague, 1987, p. 21). In line with such non-patriarchal relating, Keller advocates a quality that is unlike a 'mere act or force', but rather, is 'an ability to receive, and to give place' (2003, p. 291). Her theology of incarnation expresses a creative panentheism, which suggests God as a 'thou' who/that is different enough, and intimate enough to love and to be loved' (ibid.). This relating resonates with Summer's desire.

creature create, effect, *each other;* not from a prior nothing but from their shared preconditions. Such radical interdependence takes place within infinite 'creativity' ' (Keller, 2003, p. 218). These words also provide justification for Melanie May's proposition that creature and Creator 'come alive' together (May, 1995, p. 70); they suggest that God and humankind exist for the benefit of each other, and, in this sense, the 'call to life, pruning and growth' points toward a path of Becoming in which both createds and the Divine share 'a call to actualize the possibilities for greater beauty and intensity' (Keller, 2008, p. 99).

Only actualized reality serves as a bedrock for lived experience. For Andy, this occurs by way of his deepening experience of God's love for him. While this reality enables him to receive and share love with others, his narrative intimates that he also had a sense of providing enjoyment to Godself; this led him to anticipate that one day, he and a future life partner would together, provide pleasure to Godself as well.[341] Among other examples, Andy's experience suggests that, 'God is someone who is as dependent on us as we are on him' (Kearney, 2001, pp. 29-30), and that therefore, God, who creates '*for* love', is also on a journey of Becoming '*with us*'. As Marcella Althaus-Reid asserted, true mutuality with God results in neither God, nor humankind remaining the same (2004b, p. 100), and Andy's confidence in the meaning of his intimacy with God reflects a story from which he has culled the personal truth expressed in Keller's incarnational theology as process - he

[341] See Andy's narrative in section 4.3.2.3. His proposition that God would enjoy spending time with him and a future spouse, assumes mutuality of enjoyment in a relationship (i.e. he likens God's enjoyment of him to the way a father enjoys his children). Although Andy's confidence in God's love hinges on emotional and relational warrants, what makes his proposition equally convincing is the *absurdity* of the *opposite* assumption – i.e. that human persons, non-human createds, and God, might thrive in relationships that are unidirectional, rather than mutual. While such relationships do exist, unless they exist expressly for the purpose of caregiving or hospitality, they are viewed as unbalanced, and not as necessarily healthy (Reaves, 2017, p.86). This highlights some of the assumptions which shape and underly certain theological constructions, not least, those concerning beliefs about the Divine.

and God exist for ‘greater beauty and intensity’ (Keller, 2008, p. 99). Their uniting is an example of ‘the mystery of active loving’ (Rohr, 2006, p. 12); it is a ‘third way, the way of Becoming in relation [which] depends on an alternative theo-logic’ (Keller, 2008, p. 87). Last, a ‘theo-logic’ of this form sheds entrapments of the construct of the ‘unchanging’, ‘immovable’ God, of historic Western Christianity. Andy’s lived reality has demonstrated that God does not remain static as createds with whom God is involved continue to thrive; this Way offers satisfaction to the Divine, and enriches the Becoming of human createds.

There is another reality which penetrates participants’ experiences of *Eros and Agape*, and their journey of Becoming with God. Marginalization and oppression in secular and ecclesial spaces, have presented them with practical theological dilemmas. In these domains, they have all faced the question of the costs and benefits of being true to their ‘self’ as a sexual- and gender-identified minority (Hattie and Beagan, 2013, p. 257). A sufficient response to this quandary requires an answer to this question: How, exactly, can the ‘movement’ of ‘facing the deep’, foster ‘freedom-*for*-love’ today? Eva and Andy approach this reality with sober thought and courage, recognizing the choice that is theirs to consider the nature of potential that exists for their taking (Keller, 2008, p. 54).

7.3.3 ‘Facing the Deep’

For some, the proposition that the ‘movement’ of ‘facing the deep’ can enable ‘freedom-*for*-love’, is a paradox. The One who identifies as LGBTQ, and who, in coming out, faces the choice of life or death, is justified in their desire to know whether this proposition can be known as a reality (Barton, 2010, p. 473). While the potential that underlies any ‘movement’ of Becoming is, itself, a mystery, Keller’s claim makes the

promise of this mystery accessible, for she claims that: ‘any creative activity from which we can draw theological analogies entails loss. Any actualization takes the form of a decision, a choice for this and not some other possibility. The loss may be bland or tragic, but it is inescapable’ (Keller, 2003, p. 160). The fact that loss is intertwined with potential is a sobering thought. But, Keller’s teaching on the term ‘to create’, can be promising for the nonbinary person who faces a life-altering decision, and who, in the midst of the ‘movement’, ‘facing the deep’, confronts this question: ‘What part of my lived reality am I being invited to ‘cut away’ in this circumstance, so that new life may arise in a new [third] way ?’[342] This interpretation highlights the *potentialities* inherent in *any* choice, in *any* situation, whether one is moving toward ends that are life-giving and loving, or *not*.[343]

In reference to Keller, I am contending that the ‘movement’ of spirituality in ‘facing the deep’ is a reminder that even in situations of chaos, such as, trauma and pain, ‘a cloud of missed possibilities envelops every beginning: it is always this beginning, this universe and not some other. Decision lacks innocence’ (Keller, 2003, p. 160). For the person on the journey of Becoming, circumstances of chaos are a context in which they can become increasingly aware of their distinct sensibility, to live out their human potential as an ‘agent’ of life, rather than a victim of its misfortunes. While it is unfolding, the ‘movement’ of the ‘call to life, pruning and growth’ is *inspiring*, prodding individuals, to seek out the potentials that are open for the ‘beginning’ and the ‘universe’ of their choosing (Keller, 2003, p. 160). Therefore, as a ‘movement’ of ‘beginning’, ‘facing the deep’ places persons in touch with

[342] Keller’s research notes that the medieval philosopher, Nachmanides, interpreted the word, *bara* (to create), in Genesis 1, as meaning, ‘to cut away’ or ‘to set a boundary’ (2003, p. 160).
[343] Keller makes the point that because of the unrestricted nature of interaction in the cosmos, humankind is exposed to both good *and* evil, and sometimes, discerning the difference requires wisdom (2008, p. 54).

the possibility of continuous starts for their spirituality, confronting outcomes of good, of evil, and of the range of options in between them. In the end, the option to choose represents freedom (Keller, 2003, p. 83).

At the same time, not all freedom is harnessed toward the purpose of potentiating love. For Eva, this possibility arose in one of her experiences, early in her first marriage, and during a season of personal chaos. At the time, a crisis in her mental health presented itself as a threat - one that might have altered her response to the 'movement', the 'call to life, pruning and growth'. It occurred during an offer to participate as a patient, in treatment for alcoholism in a psychiatric hospital. In the context of a support group, attended by other patients and medical personnel, Eva confronted this temptation - to be unfaithful to her personal truths, and to compromise her love for 'self' and for the Divine,

> I was court-ordered there for 28 days for alcoholism. Um, during that time, um, I became obsessed with knowing what happens after life. 'What happens next? Who's there? What's going on?' Um, I had people suggest to me that I was an atheist. And I said, 'No, if I'm going to label myself, it would be agnostic, because there's something'. [They were] medical professionals, people who were in my support group … Yeah, they said, 'we can fix what's wrong with you if you'll just admit that there *is* no God'. And I said, 'No I can't do that'. Um, there were folks in the group that were blaming God for what was happening in their lives, you know, 'God did this to me, and God did that to me', and I said, 'God didn't do that to you, you did it to yourself. Like I did what I did to myself. Nobody forced the alcohol down my throat … I chose to handle it in an unhealthy manner' … it [this situation] felt very similar to when I was on the ceiling [in my childhood]. To when I was being held in The Divine, in The Sacred. It felt very similar to that. I can be in a place where I have no control, but I'm not alone. I can be in that place where everything seems helpless, and hopeless, but I'm not alone.

At the time, there was a point of contention raised by some who tried to minimize Eva's commitment to living authentically in relationship with Mystery; it was that

persons in crises such as hers would pursue a 'utilitarian and self-centered' relationship with an Other who would 'save' them from accepting responsibility for their addiction (McFague, 1987, p. 134). But, had that been true of Eva, her orientation toward the Divine would not have been one of 'lovers [that] need each other', in a relationship to 'complete … and make us whole' (McFague, 1987, p. 133). Instead, she would have sought security in a relationship with the Divine, with manipulative and self-serving aims.[344]

But, Eva did not behave in a disingenuous manner, either to her 'self' or to the lure of *Eros* that had already arrested her. Her actualization manifested itself in her choice to face her abuse of alcohol (Keller, 2003, p. 160). Regardless of how unbelievable it might have appeared to the accusers in her support group, they were remiss in comprehending the profound impact of the knowledges gained by Eva while living in previous contexts of *tehom*, in relationship with Mystery (Keller, 2008, p. 54).[345] Much unlike her lived realities in her first marriage, and in other relationships, Eva's encounters with the Divine never

[344] A point of clarification is justified here, concerning the appearance of the phenomenon of utilitarianism in relationship with Mystery. Richard Woods, was priest of the Dominican Order of Preachers when he released his book, *Another Kind of Love: Homosexuality and Spirituality*, before John McNeill's (*The Church and the Homosexual* (Woods, 1978, pp. 12-13). Involved in ministry with LGBTQ persons for many years at the time, Woods sought to write for 'ordinary Christians who may or may not be gay, but who are concerned about the gay issue as it personally touches them or someone close to them' (1978, p. 13). He recognized that there were some LGBTQ persons who had experienced their own 'religious moment of faith' as a 'meaning-giving experience of acceptance from a source beyond themselves' (Woods, 1978, p. 33). Hurt by oppression and rejection, many turned to God in need of help. For example, one person who was Catholic and gay, shared this with Woods: '… in high school, as more and more of my friends became interested in girls and I had no such feelings, I turned to God more often as my concern increased. You might say that I used him as a shoulder to cry on' (ibid.). Today, the visibility of LGBTQ persons in social and communal spaces has increased, and what has been called the 'early days of gay liberation' have passed (Schneider and Roncolato, 2012, p. 6). In the Western Christian Church, there may be a few more places where LGBTQ persons may find 'a shoulder to cry on', with God remaining among them. Still, there is a distinct difference between One who is seeking solace during a time of chaos, such as the individual quoted by Woods, and One who is pursuing God with utilitarian ends.

[345] See Eva's narrative in section 4.3.2.3.

involved a perception of her will being overpowered, as a means of Divinity's control. Actually, her subjective experiences were suggestive of an 'obscene' God, who is 'perpetually inquisitive', and is remaining 'ignorant' where her intentions are concerned (Johnson, 2010, pp. 160, 161); this burgeoning relationship suggests that Divinity insists on knowing Eva (ibid.), and that she is one of their free and finite creatures (ibid.) Thus, knowing Eva involves 'falling in [love] with' her (ibid.), inviting her on a journey of Becoming, along with Godself (Kearney, 2001, pp. 29-30).

McFague's image of 'agapic' love as companioning presence resurfaces appropriately now, for, Eva's experience as shared here did not intimate God as a 'disinterested' Other, who creates, saves, and redeems for her own good (McFague, 1987, p. 101). Rather, her lived reality points to 'divine resistance to independence … [the Divine] calling us back, wanting to be more fully united with us' (ibid.). Her experience involves a love that is open for genuine intercourse, reflecting 'need, desire, and mutuality', rather than protection or control (McFague, 1987, p. 102; Sölle, 1990, p. 116).[346] This relationship of mutuality is defined by the prerogative of choice that is enjoyed *by God and Eva*. God who *desires relationship* with Eva, is defined by freedom in the way of: loyalty; commitment; provision; surprise; and pleasure; and furthermore, God's 'freedom-*for*-love', is accompanied by Eva's demonstration of the same (Johnson, 2010, pp. 160-161; Keller, 2008, p. 98).[347] Still, risk is ever present for Eva and for God,

[346] Sölle referred to a criticism of Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Christology, that proffered Christ as one who 'is there *for* others' (1990, p. 116). But women have recognized this image as oppressive, because it reinforces a way of 'living for' people, to the neglect of 'self' (Söelle, 1990, p. 116). In contrast with 'living for' others, Sölle argues that real love involves 'a giving *and* taking, a reciprocal relationship' (1990, p. 116; italics mine).
[347] Eva's narrative concerning the Divine bears a resemblance to that which was written by Helmut Gollwitzer, former prisoner of the German Gestapo, about whom Söelle has written. She noted that in a German publication in 1973, Gollwitzer transcribed a personal narrative about who Jesus was to him. Like

and this is because the Other's response to their love is not guaranteed. Hence, 'freedom-*for*-love' is a mark of categorical agency; it witnesses to a 'queer freedom', for a path of Becoming in a contemporary, postmodern world, which boasts in what is visible, rational, and practical – the antithesis of Eva's spiritual journey (Keller, 2008, p. 43). What is remarkable then, is that in experiencing the 'movement', 'facing the deep', persons can encounter the *desire of God* for relationship without coercion, a reality that might not have been evident apart from this experience. This is God, in whom Eva grounds her hope, anticipating perpetual life together, creating her true home.

7.4 'Homesteading' - Cultivating the Ground of 'Freedom-*for*-Love'

7.4.1 The 'Self' as Home

At this time in the Western Canadian post-Christian postmodern context, some persons of faith are sensitized to the Church's complicity with the oppressions of institutionalized religion, capitalism, and social stratification (Althaus-Reid, 2000, p. 27).[348] As a result, it has been a challenge for the Church to become engaged with these persons in an active spirituality which supports them in facing pressing contemporary issues, such as: the exploitation of the poor (Althaus-Reid, 2000, pp. 20-21; the misuse and destruction

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Eva, Gollwitzer's accounts of his experience of Christ described feelings of never being alone despite lived experiences which included times of loneliness, rejection, and being without help (Söelle, 1990, pp. 104-106). Söelle recorded that, what sustained Gollwitzer during his time of imprisonment, was a vivid sense of Christ's presence, a call to become better than he might have been apart from Christ, as well as a sense of meaning that he derived from Christ's invitation to join in his divine work of transforming the world. From this relationship with Christ, Gollwitzer derived freedom in the midst of bondage (Söelle, 1990, pp. 104-106). As a move away from a more dogmatic stance in the Christian orthodox tradition, Sölle reproduced part of Gollwitzer's account in English for her discussion on Christology (ibid.).

[348] Althaus-Reid (2000) explored the matter of the wealth of the Western Christian Church with the institution's status, power, and financial capital, and its neglect of the oppression of the poor. Among other issues, the Church ignores their divine calling by focusing on abstract theological construction, and profiting by creating a Christian market economy (Althaus-Reid, 2000, pp. 27-33); this includes theological education (Althaus-Reid, 2000, pp. 28-29).

of the earth (Waaijman, 2003, p. 12); and the perpetration of aggression and inequalities toward persons of different genders, races, and sexual orientations (Althaus-Reid, 2003, pp. 108, 114 - 115). In the face of this, for One who faces oppression, a queer 'freedom-*for*-love' is a countercultural expression of Becoming, a Way of life with Mystery, facilitated through the 'movement' of 'homesteading' - the grounding of the 'self'.

Regarding this process, Benner argues that, where Becoming does not have a grounding in the body, persons will tend toward forms of spirituality that are 'escapist and dangerous' (2011, p. 78). He reasons that this is because the body is the individual's 'primary home', and searching for an ideal 'self' in any place other than One's somatic 'self', serves only to distance a person from their 'self' (Benner, 2011, pp. 78-79). For example, people can become fixated with 'make-overs' of various forms, including bodily reconstruction, achievement, materialism, and a host of other preoccupations, which distance them from the 'self' they reject (Benner, 2011, pp. 78-79). Thus, he asserts,

> Alienation from our bodies lies at the core of our alienation from our deepest self and from the world. Until we can be at home in our bodies, we can never truly be at home anywhere. Until we can return to being grounded in our self as a biological organism, we will be forever vulnerable to looking for substitute anchors for our being (Benner, 2011, p. 79).[349]

[349] Benner explains that one of the origins of the Western valuation for the spirit and soul comes from the Greek philosopher, Plato, who suggested that the soul - the spirit of the body - leaves the body upon death to achieve union with God (2011, p. 79). The body was seen by Plato as temporal, as having served its purpose for a limited period of time (ibid.). Thus, as the essential feature of human selfhood, the soul (spirit) was preferred over the body (ibid.).

Benner's words highlight the role of the 'self' in creating an individual's sense of 'home'. He explains that this sense is derived from messages received from infancy onward, integrated with the body's knowledges of what is transpiring within and outside of it.

An individual subsequently relates information in the surrounding world to their identification of the 'movement' of a 'call to life, pruning and growth', but failure to achieve the integration of which Benner speaks results in alienation from the body's knowledges. For instance, he comments on the separation an individual may have from their body, where, rather than thinking of their 'self' as their body, they treat their body as an object, distinct from who they are (i.e. their 'self') (Benner, 2011, p. 79). This results in alienation from the 'self'.

To repeat, anchoring of the 'self' arises in 'movements' of 'beginning', 'conscious self-awareness', 'call to life, pruning and growth', and 'facing the deep'. In these 'movements', persons are creating a home in their body, the site from which physical sensations, emotions, thoughts, volitions, and behaviours, inspired by the divine *Eros*, spring forth (Benner, 2011, p. 78). Furthermore, May's words reified the claim that the category to which I refer as 'homesteading', can be understood as that which pertains to the respect, attention, and honour persons pay to their body's knowledges (May, 1995, pp. 107-109). Participants' stories of Becoming, illustrate the grouping of four categories of 'homesteading'. I now discuss how these 'movements' relate to the theme, 'freedom-*for*-love', and I begin with 'self-recognition' and 'self-identification'.

7.4.2 'Self-Recognition' and 'Self-Identification'

The 'movements' of 'self-recognition' and 'self-identification' are seen in Dawn's narrative of self-identification as lesbian, her embrace of her sexual orientation, and her 'coming out'. Dawn's life journey did not begin with a safe, predictable, caring environment where her body received the attention required to support her Becoming.[350] She was removed from her family of origin as a child, without a sense of personal mooring in her early years, and it took time for her to find a home within her 'self' (Shallenberger, 1998, p. 11).[351] As she grew older, this led to identifying and recognizing her 'self' as a multiform, created organism, and involved her embrace of her ethnic identity.

Sophie, presents a different example. In her teenage years, her inquisitive mind led her to make a decision to live as a follower in the Way of Jesus; and later, in her adulthood, she purposed to live authentically, as 'a woman of freedom', an ethical Way of being, a mark of her self-identification. When asked about it, Sophie described the effect of these choices on her life today,

> The first thing that came to mind is becoming a woman of FREEDOM. Which is actually the name of a book that we went through with that woman's group I had talked about. And, yeah, I think that's the continuation, the ongoing process of letting go of my own expectations about who I thought I was supposed to be as well as the perceptions of other

[350] See section 4.2, which describes Dawn's background.

[351] Shallenberger's interviews with gay and lesbian Christians revealed that identity integration is a process, and for many, coming out enabled a deepening of their identity, similar to being 'born again', but on a deeper level (1998, p. 11). For Others, it involved struggle, and resistance, although eventually, they became reconciled with who they were as persons who identified as nonheteronormative in sexual orientation (Schallenberger, 1998, p. 7). But, Rodruiguez discovered a notable anomaly in a study with Ouellette on the Metropolitan Community Church, New York (1999). Identity integration was not necessarily related to a 'positive' process. Some individuals possessed a tendency to become 'isolated' and 'sectarian' in their spiritual community, even if it was an affirming one, and they did not experience a life journey which included growing and openness toward the Other (Rodruiguez and Ouellette, 2010, p. 25).

> people, and who they thought – or what was placed ON me in that sense, and I think … as time went on, a lot of it was to do with self-acceptance and realizing (and I think I said this before about) I think I had some idea of who I was SUPPOSED to be, and how I was SUPPOSED to act once I gave my life to Christ. And I think for a long time it was a lot of ME just acting, and not really GIVING UP or LETTING GO of who I ACTUALLY AM to God so that I can BE.[352]

Sophie states that, now, in her adulthood, she is less inclined to pretend to be someone other than who she knows her 'self' to be. For Andy, replacing the unsatisfying habit of disloyalty toward his 'self', his spirituality has been grounded increasingly in his corporeal reality (Benner, 2011, p. 79). As a result, in social situations, he is less encumbered by untruths which hide who he is; and when asked how he feels about his 'self' today, he shared his thoughts, economically,

> I think the word to describe that would be ... whole – more whole … And so for me I had [gone] from this closeted person, to this REALLY closeted person, to being suddenly set free … in every sense of the word [I had] come home.[353]

Andy's sense of increased wholeness since he started 'coming out' is captured in two words: 'come home'. Years earlier, he had been missing this sense of belonging. But, in

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[352] Sophie expresses the tenor of words of Thomas Merton, who said, 'My true identity lies hidden in God's call to my freedom and my response to him' (1969, p. 47). This quotation highlights the power Sophie experiences by grounding her identity in the 'movement', 'call to life, pruning, and growth', and in the agency she experiences in her true 'Self' (ibid.). Also, because she is shedding pretense, the 'movements' of 'self-reconition' and 'self-identification' are evident in Sophie. Thus, she can 'BE'. She is 'free', for responding to her quotidian life situations for purposes which include risky creation, rather than self-serving protectiveness.

[353] In fact, contemporary British and French LGBTQ Christians of Anglican and Catholic faith, and who integrated their sexuality and spiritualty, experienced a positive identity which incorporated their beliefs and encounters with the Divine (Gross and Yip, 2010, p. 6). A more stable sense of 'self' enabled them to withstand discrimination and marginalization of various forms (Gross and Yip, 2010, p. 10).

our meeting, he reflected back on the way he had closed himself off to the world, and was convinced that his Becoming journey had unfolded *through* his sexual identity. It is now a legitimate path, and he has found a sense of belonging in his 'self', with his multi-faceted identity. It is because of his growing sense of legitimacy as a child of God, that Andy feels that he is ready to share his life with an Other, not in a self-serving way, but in a Way of continued refinement through giving, receiving - such is freedom-*for*-love.

Related to this, in 1998 and 2005, Martine Gross and Andrew Yip carried out sociological research with 565 and 395 LGBTQ Christians in Britain and France respectively, finding that the majority of participants viewed their sexual orientation as part of a divine creation plan (Gross and Yip, 2010, p. 6). The researchers described this perspective as one offering British and French LGBTQ Christians a 'theological and ontological anchor to their sense of being' (ibid.), and furthermore, a support in withstanding and challenging authority structures which prefer heteronormativity (ibid.).[354]

Now, despite her conviction of being accepted by God, the meaning and focus of the freedom Sophie feels now, requires clarification. This is particularly relevant for her story, because in the first place, her use of this word, 'freedom', does not correspond with the nature of her engagement in the church she attends. Actually, as a lover of music, and a musician, the congregation's choice to exclude her from ministry related to her profession, does not echo her claim of being 'a woman of freedom'. Consequently, her place there appears awkward, reminiscent of marginalization she suffered from the wider,

[354] I interpret these acts of justice as the effect of the 'movements', 'self-recognition' and 'self-identification', of 'freedom-for-love'. I suggest that the sense of 'home' experienced by these British and French LGBTQ persons, had the potential to lead them to share the liberty they found in 'homesteading' with their sibs.

White, Western European, heteronormative context in which she was raised.

As Sophie interacts with her 'self' and with the congregation, both the deliberations and the challenges involved in this 'movement', demonstrate that, as the theme of her spirituality, 'freedom-*for*-love' is not a matter of thoughtless whim or fancy; in actuality, her waiting for the congregation to live out justice carries the tone of Philip Tan's (2005) findings in his statistical analysis of 'existential well-being' (EWB), and 'religious well-being' (RWB) for LGBTQ persons of faith.[355] When he explored these phenomena in gay- and lesbian-identified Protestant and Catholic persons in the American Midwest, Tan found that persons who scored highly on relating to God (RWB), and having a high sense of purpose for their life (EWB), reported having a rich spiritual life (2005, p. 141). This was despite the social and religious oppression they encountered regularly (ibid.). Tan's research subjects reported, that they were, 'challenged … to look beyond the tenets of organized religions and to look more intensely for answers to the meaning of existence and of faith' (Tan, 2005, p. 141).[356] For Sophie, the 'movement' of 'freedom-*for*-love' that is related to themes of 'self-recognition' and 'self-identification', resembles that of a loving parent or pastor, whose vocation is concerned 'with the nurture and fulfilment of life, not just with birth' (McFague, 1987, p. 103). Sophie approaches the church as a caregiver, and the accompanying loss she feels, while experiencing the reality of an estranged relationship, is the reality of One who is 'free-*for*-love'; that is, her love is vulnerable. Hence, its giving is not always requited by those to whom it is extended (ibid.). Still, she

[355] See Sophie's narrative in section 5.2.2.4.
[356] Gross and Yip also found that, despite the low incidence of British and French LGBTQ persons who no longer participated regularly with a church, these individuals maintained their identity as Christian, and were committed to personal spiritual growth (2010, p. 12).

persists in it, daily, as she feels beckoned. Another metaphor used of God, which describes Sophie, is One who is 'useless';[357] she has not been 'doing', but, simply *being*, waiting, with patience and sadness; Sophie waits, open to signs of appreciation from those by whom she remains unappreciated (Johnson, 2010, p. 162). Being 'free-*for*-love' includes such tension, dependent on grace, as she confronts the actions of her oppressor.

7.4.3 'Resistance'

Nevertheless, the theme, 'freedom-*for*-love' is evident in more than the sense of security in One's 'self' as 'home'. Identifying with her true 'Self', Sophie is braced to stand in solidarity with other LGBTQ persons of faith. Her marginalization resulted from coming out, *stepping down* from the denomination's position as worship leader, and *identifying instead, with* her queer sibs – viewed as *spiritually* subaltern in the congregation's eyes.[358] Sophie's choices reveal the 'movement' of 'resistance'; and distinct from other 'movements', it impels her to make meaning of the oppression she experiences as a trauma (Tan, 2005, p. 141).

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[357] Johnson admits that the image of the Divine as 'useless' that he coins, is sympathetic with 'indecent' theology's priority of avoiding idolatry, and the construction of images of God which serve human purposes primarily (2010, pp. 162, 163). In this, Johnson demonstrates the value of holding multiple understandings of the Divine, and this opens up the possibility of moving more closely into relationship with the ineffable truth of Mystery, that is God (ibid.); In addition to being attentive to the local church, Sophie remains attentive to the Divine, who, in this case, is not like a 'benevolent' God, obliging her desire. Actually, it may be said that God is waiting *with* her, is 'useless', and hence, is 'free-*for*-love' (Johnson, 2010, pp. 162, 163). See Section 5.2.2.4; In a categorical way, Keller avers that where 'incarnation is going on, so is the carnage. Residues of loss drift up opaque, nameless, without even the dignity of crucifixion' (2003, p. 220). The aim, the lure then, is for new creation, which will be birthed from the womb of Sophie's forced liminality. Still, the question of whether Sophie's love has been misplaced or not, cannot be known until *she* discerns that her time of waiting is complete.

[358] As Eva argued, and as found in her narrative (section 5.2.2.2), this 'movement', is demonstrated in the way she lives. It involves, 'standing out', just as, 'Jesus was about speaking up, about doing for, about journeying with'.

When treating the subject of trauma and its effect on identity, practical theologian, Ruard Ganzevoort offers this definition of the term,

> [Trauma is] the psychological wound resulting from the confrontation with a serious event that shatters a person's integrity and induces powerlessness and estrangement … Whether or not a trauma occurs following a particular event depends on the content and seriousness of the event, but also on the person's personality, coping skills, attribution of meaning, resources, and so on (Ganzevoort, 2008, p. 20).

As Ganzevoort implies, trauma is an unfortunate element in the course of life on earth. It is also inevitable. Sophie's marginalization disrupted life as she knew it, and induced a degree of 'powerlessness and estrangement', because she could do nothing to prevent it (Ganzevoort, 2008, p. 20). Trauma also presented her with a conflict about her identity, for, she is treated by Others in a way that is complete opposition to her knowledge of her 'self' (Ganzevoort, 2008, pp. 20, 21, 22).[359]

There was another meaningful feature to the 'movement' of resistance in Sophie's life. Over time, it has included an emboldening, a refusal to allow trauma to overpower her; and though affected profoundly, she remains firm in her resolve. On this topic, Ganzevoort remarks on the work of Black feminist writer, Patricia Hills Collins, who introduces the idea of resistance to trauma as involving the performance of the following actions: 1) 'survival'; 2) 'leaving the situation and seeking refuge'; and 3) 'changing the

[359] This definition of trauma is, in some ways, similar in some ways, to my description of' 'the deep', which individuals encounter on their Becoming journey (See section 4.3.2.3). Ganzevoort includes the feature of confronting 'darkness and death' as an aspect of trauma (2008, p. 22).

situation' (Ganzevoort, 2008, p. 23). Meanwhile, Ganzevoort notes an additional set of responses, mentioned by professor of practical theology, John Swinton. This theologian promulgates Christian actions of resistance to trauma that is evil, namely: 4) 'lament'; 5) 'forgiveness'; 6) 'thoughtfulness'; and 7) 'hospitality' (Ganzevoort, 2008, p. 23).[360] These varied forms of resistance reflect actions that are suitable in situations ranging from life-threatening, to minimally innocuous.[361] Despite her demonstration of both 'survival' and 'lament', Sophie's ability to be 'well-adjusted does not mean that she is reconciled with a traditional religion or a theistic belief' (Tan, 2005, p. 142); it also does not deny the significance of her trauma (Ganzevoort, 2008, p. 23). Her deliberate action is a reflection of the faith that has been burgeoning quietly, amidst societal oppression. Althaus-Reid shared an image that can be used as a pungent illustration of Sophie's resolve, as someone whose life reflects the theme of 'freedom-*for*-love' in the 'movement' of 'resistance'. The image is that of a Latin-American Mexican divinity, to whom persons referred as 'WOMAN'.

Believed by the people to possess a dual nature, 'WOMAN' was personified as a menacing figure in the form of a serpent (Althaus-Reid, 2004a, p. 37). However, the female divinity was not known to be a type of 'all-powerful God', who could save the indigenous people from the threat of calamity posed by the Conquistadors of an earlier era; 'WOMAN' was said to be heard by the Latin-Americans of the time, lamenting by night

[360] Because of its significant 'threat' to persons' identity, Ganzevoort does not choose among these alternatives, but advocates resistance in whatever form a person feels called to take (2008, p. 23).
[361] Sophie could be seen as a candidate for taking actions such as: 'survival', 'leaving the situation and seeking refuge', 'lament', 'thoughtfulness', and 'hospitality', and these would be demonstrated toward those who accept her, and still remain members of the worshipping community (Ganzevoort, 2008, p. 23).

about impending disaster (Althaus-Reid, 2004a, p. 35). Althaus-Reid described her as: 'the intelligent warrior who knows when she is going to be defeated, and offers to *lead* the escape … her power or frailty expresses the boundaries of hope and desire among them' (2004a, p. 35, emphasis mine).

Thus, the divinity, 'WOMAN', was compared with Christ, 'a messiah, the product of a dialogical communitarian process in which men and women participated, both with their inner oppression, and to acquire new conscientization' (Althaus-Reid, 2004a, p. 35). As Sophie identifies with her LGBTQ sibs who are oppressed, and who are not experiencing progress in their respective religious contexts, she is mirroring WOMAN's resistance and compassion.[362] Like Christ, whom she experienced sitting with her during her mystagogic meditation, Sophie is living into the compassion of Christ for the oppressed; her whole life – i.e. the sexual, political, economic, and relational qualities – affects her *interpretation* of who Christ is *in relation to who she is today* (Söelle, 1990, pp. 102, 103).[363]

Therefore, the 'movement' of 'homesteading', that is serving to establish her home within her 'self', is teaching Sophie more of the painful realities of 'freedom-*for*-love' - those

[362] See section 5.2.2.4. Rollins' word to those who are considering the call to 'Crucifixion' is that, in so doing, humans share in the experience of God, who 'lets himself be pushed out of the world on to the cross', and he invites followers of Christ to join God in being 'weak and powerless in the world' (2011, p. 125). As Johnson argues, they are to be 'useless' (2010, p. 162).

[363] Both Söelle and Althaus-Reid criticized traditional theological constructions with which oppressed persons cannot identify, and which, consequently, cannot be liberating (Söelle, 1990, p. 41; Althaus-Reid, 2000, p. 49). The 'indecent' theologian shared one such example of the biblical figure, Mary, who experienced a virgin birth - an experience with which most Latin American women cannot identify. This is because most Latin American persons are born out of wedlock, and do not know who their father is (Althaus-Reid, 2000, p. 49). On the other hand, Mary, who experienced poverty, is like the majority of Latin American women, as she was also without a man who assumed responsibility for fathering her child. The biblical myth, which resembles a common Hellenic myth of a virgin who gives birth to a hero, removes the ideal of a mother with whom the poor cannot identify. It affirms the likelihood that Jesus would have been born of a woman who, like the women of Latin America, is poor (Althaus-Reid 2000, p. 49). This tells of the significance of Jesus' experiences of marginalization, oppression, and crucifixion, thus, in the eyes of LGBTQ persons, he has compassion for their struggle. Sophie provides a similar model for her sibs.

that are not foreign to LGBTQ persons of faith who face stigmatization, marginalization, and oppression, including violence (Smallwood, 2015, p. 76; Hattie and Beagan, 2013, pp. 250-257; Murr, 2013, 356-359; Nash and Catungal, 2013, 182; Barton, 2010, 474; Gross and Yip, 2010, p. 5; Kennedy, 2010, pp. 1063-1065; Robinson, 2010, pp. 109, 113; Mattmann, 2006, pp. 90-94; Korinek, 2003, pp. 527-545; Goss, 2002, pp. 36-37; Buchanan, Dzelme, Harris, and Hecker, 2001, p. 438). However, regardless, Sophie has been persisting in 'resistance', succouring the 'call to life, pruning and growth' with courage, embracing 'movements' of 'facing the deep', as well as 'freedom for love'. She joins LGBTQ persons who are admonished to muster up the effort to 'dig deep into our [sic] best possibilities, and not allow ourselves [sic] to become flat mirrors of our [sic] contexts, reflecting and reinforcing its self-perceptions' (Jantzen, 2001, p. 282); and she stands apart from the tendency to allow her spirituality to be shaped by, or to affirm the values and goals of a patriarchal, heteronormative, capitalistic society, which demonstrates marginal respect for difference, ecumenism, and humanity's interdependence with the earth as part of one ecological community (Waaijman, 2003, p. 13).[364] Sophie prefers to trust in her growing affinity for a Way that is distinct, a Way that is queer, a 'third way', a Way of Christ; furthermore, it is a Way that is inspired by a hope for which there are no guarantees, and which sustains her in the 'movement' of 'freedom-*for*-love', nonetheless (Johnson, 2010, pp. 162, 163).[365] The ability to persist in this Way

[364] In his lecture, 'Challenges of spirituality for contemporary times' (2003), among other world spiritualities, Kees Waaijman touched on the ecological spirituality 'movement'. Ecological spirituality began to gain momentum at the end of the 19 h century as the world's consumption and profit from the environment resulted in humankind's abdication of responsibility to care for the earth (Waaijman, 2003, p. 12). Ecological spirituality involves both a way of 'thinking and feeling', and focuses on the interconnections in the world's ecologies (Waaijman, 2003, p. 13).

[365] See the words of Sophie's friend and relative in section 5.2.3.

mirrors her engagement in ‘fluidity’ and ‘self-love’, the ‘movements’ on which I elaborate next in relation to the main theme.

7.4.4 ‘Fluidity’ and ‘Self-Love’

Summer’s capacity for living with uncertainty is critical for the challenging road she walks. It is enabling her to live authentically, in a manner that is harmonious with her Becoming. In addition to this, the love she is practicing toward her ‘self’ is neither vain in its preoccupations, nor driven by inner and outer compulsions;[366] more often, she is leaning into embracing her ‘self’, Others, and events, *just as they are*, not as she prefers them to be.[367] So, Summer is treating her ‘self’, Others, and life circumstances, with growing acceptance; meanwhile, she is attentive to the possibility of misappropriating any of these (Mattmann, 2006, p. 108). Summer describes her changing behaviour as it expresses ‘freedom-*for*-love’ in the ‘movement’ of ‘homesteading’, and comments on the challenges she continues to face, as they relate to ‘movements’ of ‘fluidity’ and ‘self-love’,

> YEAH! It’s hard. And that IS what life is. It’s just FIGURING things out [tears appear] that are challenging, and you just gotta’ stick with it, yeah … well, I dunno. I think it IS that, that I DO find lots of things in life hard and I LIKE to know ANSWERS and I like CERTAINTY [chokes up and tears appear], and that’s just not the way LIFE IS! And I DO find it hard, but I ALSO [pauses and says distinctly] .. I also CAN get to a point where I find it FREEING, and EXCITING, and yeah, it just kinda’ depends on where my mood is, and the day … if I don’t have to KNOW EVERTHING, if I don’t have to be doing it all RIGHT ALL THE TIME, then I can just BE, and that’s freeing … yeah! Like SOMETIMES – just for example with [spouse], you know I sort of REALIZED … ACTUALLY IT’S NOT YOUR JOB to change his mind. IT’S NOT YOUR JOB to control anything. He CAN THINK WHAT HE THINKS. You don’t have to think the same way, it’s like, WOW! It’s just these sort of little FLASHES of like [realizing]: “WOAH! I spend a lot of time and energy trying

[366] Mattmann notes that lack of self-love translates regularly into compensation for a felt loss, through sexual encounters and affairs, compulsive behaviours, yearning, self-loathing, and despair (2006, p. 108).
[367] Summer’s love toward her ‘self’ and the Other is a reflection of the way she has been received by God. This progress in accepting life *as it is* reveals her growing contentment, and the ‘movement’ of ‘fluidity’.

> to DO that!" And if I didn't HAVE TO or if I don't FEEL like I have to … 'cause it doesn't work anyway! … And if I can just HOLD them … if you can hold these two kind of opposites without kind of judgement or expectation, just observing, then it allows space for a third way to emerge.[368]

The freedom to which Summer refers in this description is not an arbitrary, whimsical, abandonment of morality, ethics, or concerns, in exchange for momentary pleasure. She describes the thoughtful attention paid toward her 'self', and toward her husband in the matter of their differing priorities on a commonly occurring point of contention; her awareness of an alternate posture of holding issues more loosely, encouraged her to hope for unforeseen possibilities in their relationship. Waiting for the appearance of a 'third way' reveals Summer's desire to embrace life in its entirety – the 'good' and the 'bad' (i.e. in 'fluidity) - less overwhelmed by her apprehensions. This points to her desire to cultivate her spirituality in the best way she can, to cultivate 'freedom-*for*-love' of the Other.[369]

There is another reality that cannot be overlooked. Spirituality as a Way, defined by the 'movement', 'freedom-*for*-love' is associated with a practice of resting in the Divine, the ground on which the 'movement' of 'homesteading' also unfolds. Sophie intends to

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[368] Summer's ability to hold onto her preferences and those of the Other more loosely, echoes the teaching of the renown Carmelite priest, St. John of the Cross (1542 - 1591). Friar John noticed that persons who were detached from the many creaturely things to which others were attached, were able to experience more joy. The priority of living in a way of detachment and freedom was a significant part of his writing (Kavanaugh and Rodriguez, 1991, p. 27).

[369] Because Summer has been experiencing isolation as a result of her husband's 'biphobia', her progression in the 'movement' of 'fluidity' and 'self-love' is significant (Niki, 2018, p. 49). In fact, she can be seen as facing multiple discriminations' (Niki, 2018, p. 50; Robinson, 2010, p. 109). Margaret Robinson, a professor of theology, is a Mi'kmaq woman who identifies as bisexual, and whose research adds some distinctiveness of Canadian trends to D. Niki's accounts. This is because Robinson claims that women who identify as bisexual are not a dominant part of the Western world's hegemony in the Canadian context, and that those who identify as transgender, women of colour, poor, or working-class status, experience particularly significant challenges (Robinson, 2010, p. 109).

'settle in' onto this divine ground, to secure the home she is preparing in her 'self' to embrace her Becoming.[370] This explains why 'secure attachment' is another 'movement' of 'homesteading'. Becoming literally hinges on it, for, it is a 'movement' which suits One with confidence as a human being with purpose, created in the Divine alongside other distinguished createds of the cosmos.

7.4.5 'Secure Attachment'

Three words in the Christian scriptures have been employed to define God using a propositional statement: 'spirit', 'truth', and 'love' (Keller, 2008, p. 33). Referred to as describing the essence of God, Keller explains that the words are proposed to represent 'the 'movement' of the holy spirit [sic] in the world. Spirit and truth together name the fluidity of a process we cannot possess, neither in propositions nor in practices … we belong within it. It does not belong to us … It is a way, not an end' (ibid.). In a New Testament letter, John the Apostle also offers this propositional statement: 'God is love. Whoever lives in love, lives in God, and God in him. In this way, love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment, because in this world we are like him' (1 John 4: 16-17). 'Being like God' intimates that persons 'belong within' the Way that is God. It is a Way that is fuelled by spirit, truth, and love (Althaus-Reid and Isherwood, 2007, pp. 305, 307; Keller, 2008, p. 33). The 'movement' of 'secure

[370] To describe the 'movement' of 'secure attachment', I liken it to Sophie's positioning in relation to the Divine as a tetherball. The Random House Dictionary describes tetherball as a game which is played by two persons, who stand on opposite sides of a post to which a ball is attached by a tether – a rope. The players use a paddle to strike the ball around the post, and toward their partner. The game continues as they direct the ball toward each other, and around the post (The Random House Dictionary of the English Language, 2nd ed.). In this 'movement' of Becoming, Sophie is remaining tethered, securely, to the Divine (the pole), and is also experiencing independence of will and purpose in her propulsions around and outward, thus, fulfilling her call outward, into the cosmos.

attachment' is a mark of those who 'belong within' God, and who, inspired by *Eros*, moving out toward the rest of the cosmos, reveal the divine story (Ganzevoort, 1993, p. 285). Consequently, this Way propels individuals like Sophie onto paths which further their Becoming. Remaining tethered to God, they are free to walk on new sod, which reveals their unique footprint.

Söelle shared her experience of a gathering she attended, held by Martin Luther King Jr., during which she realized the significance of persons' being grounded in the 'truth', which is God. She shared, 'I think that for the first time I then understood what beauty is: this feeling of worth, of strength, of knowledge, or being grounded in human worth … What is it that we call beautiful? … 'I am a child of God' was the foundation of this liturgy of liberation' (Söelle, 1990, p 96). Söelle's realization concerned the 'Black reality' of what it is like to be grounded in the 'truth' that is God, a 'truth' which reified Black Americans' identity, as persons of worth. The result of the 'movement' of 'secure attachment', living into 'truth' was 'liberation', and subsequently, Söelle concluded that the Becoming of these Black Americans was not linked to the physical qualities, or life circumstances by which they, as oppressed persons, had been defined. Their spirituality was a dynamic, transformational journey of liberation concerned with living *above* oppression (Söelle, 1990, p. 97). God was the Source of personal transformation for persons who faced oppression – their Becoming was not sullied by it. Thus, being tethered to God, they were able to move outward, spurring others on toward justice and freedom, a sign of the theme, 'freedom-*for*-love'.

More importantly, one catalyst is critical for oppression to realize its potential for

liberation. It is the 'dynamic of spirit', not retaliation (ibid.).[371] As Söelle stated: 'To go the way of Jesus means finding a different relationship to suffering from that of avoidance and denial, which is customary for us. It is a particular feature of Christianity that the cross, this sign of death, stands in its midst' (Söelle, 1990, pp. 120-123). This posture is seen in Sophie's description of 'press[ing] in', remaining grounded deep in God as she continues discerning her future amidst oppression.[372] It is by way of the 'movement' of 'secure attachment' that Sophie has embraced the way of the suffering Christ who lived, and identified with sufferers like her. In Söelle's words, 'Jesus identified himself with the sufferers … for the sake of the sufferers he was made to suffer, and to overcome death he entered into death' (Söelle, 1990, p. 120). He did not try to avoid the suffering which caused him pain. While he lived fully into his humanity, as One who was 'worthy of love', 'beautiful', and possessing 'strength', Jesus' commitment to 'spirit', 'truth', and 'love', which is God, supported him on his journey of 'freedom for love', to die while sharing God's message of justice, equality, and liberation (Söelle, 1990, p. 96). The 'movement' 'secure attachment' accomplishes the same for Jesus' followers.[373] The next category, 're-

[371] As it has been noted, retaliation is a common reaction to oppression, which is likely to result in more of the latter (Keller, 2008, p. 33). Furthermore, with retaliation comes the possibility of pain or harm. This is because, attempting to control the actions of one's oppressor makes One available to be controlled, which, in contrast to acting out of desire, is reactive. When, on the other hand, an individual chooses to act based on their convictions, considers the consequences, and makes preparation to bear the cost, they are embracing the *burden* of their choice, with courage. This embrace of suffering for One's convictions is where freedom lies – it is the liberty to choose in spirit, truth, and love, regardless of the cost (Keller, 2008, p. 33).
[372] See, Sophie's narrative in section 5.2.2.4.
[373] The 'movement' of 'secure attachment', while related to the 'movement' of 'Divine communion' which I treat in the upcoming section, is focused more on being settled or resting in God as the Source of One's being, rather than communing with God, which occurs in manifold ways. I have chosen to allow the metaphor of the tetherball game, the tether, and the post to speak for this 'movement'. I believe they provide a clearer image of this 'movement' than any additional writing on the category of 'homemaking' could contribute now.

creation', invites persons to progress more deeply in the Way of 'freedom-*for*-love'.[374]

7.5 'Re-creation' – Becoming, Like God

7.5.1 Recapitulation

I am at a place in this discussion to reiterate some important points for my argument. I began by demonstrating that the three 'movements' of 'beginning' reflected in participants' stories, express the divine lure, *Eros*, into a vocation of cosmic care and love. Furthermore, in the previous section, I showed that four 'movements' of 'homesteading' serve to establish human persons' recognition and identification of the 'self', supporting their resistance to threats which can undermine their creation of a home within the 'self'. It is now evident that persons experience the love of the Divine as their model of love toward their 'self'; and as a result of their encounters with this love (the Divine), they can embrace the fluid reality of life within the cosmos. With their 'self' and the Divine as sources of the 'movement', 'secure attachment', they enjoy a presence to their true 'Self', that is more genuine than the '*Ego*' they projected while in service to their false 'Idol' (Rollins, 2012, p. 49). Thereby, by progressing in the Way of 'freedom-*for*-love' through the 'movements' of 'beginning' and 'homesteading', persons experience the gift of release from the burden of forfeiting their 'birthright' as *imago dei* (Keller, 2003, p. 222).

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[374] Following up from my critique of the relevance of Hills Collins' and Swinton's theories of resistance, I am at a place to propose that in her present circumstance, Sophie is now in a position to set aside the priority of protecting her 'self' from danger, which existed at the onset of her trauma. This is because of supports which make this the case: 1) she is no longer a new resident, who has just recently relocated to her city; 2) she has been gainfully employed for a period of time; 3) she is known personally by some persons in her community, and is respected by them; 4) she is supported by her spiritual practices and friends. As a result, Sophie's resistance may incorporate a more complex examination of the many faces of love that One may show an oppressor (See section 7.4.3, Ganzevoort's references to Patricia Hills Collins and John Swinton).

Here, I examine the third and final grouping of categories in this study, represented in participants' stories. I name it as, 're-creation'. Like a variation on the theme of 'beginning', 're-creation' is a sound of re-genesis, a melody of re-birth, re-sounding in 'Divine communion', 'transformation', and 'surrender'. I demonstrate how the three 'movements' in this grouping both express, and are fulfilled in the main theme of 'freedom-*for*-love'. I start with 'Divine communion'.

7.5.2 'Divine Communion'

The theological construct of God as '*posse*', or 'possibility of being', provides a useful, new interpretation of the relationship of 'Divine communion' as it relates to the main category, 'freedom-*for*-love' (Kearney, 2001, pp. 2, 4). Kearney's words iterate the significance of the Divine's offering to humankind - the possibility to embody Divinity. *Persona* transfigures the Divine, making the Divine palpably present in incarnation. Furthermore, *persona* is a means by which individuals know transcendence, by embracing humility, in the admission of need. While I focus on humility in the section on 'surrender' that follows, here, I limit my comments to the issue of God's 'primordial powerlessness', as a reality met with human powerlessness (Kearney, 2001, p. 2). For this purpose, the matter of my focus is the transfiguring *interaction* that transpires through a state of *mutual vulnerability*, where 'Divine communion' is enjoyed.

Summer shares an example of her experience perceiving and communing with the Divine in a particularly upsetting situation, and this is significant,

> In THEORY, I'd like to have a practice of being sort of AWARE of those – kind of as an observer - and not necessarily taking them IN so DEEPLY … not easy though [chuckles] … but little steps on the path … it would be … probably good to be more intentional about that, inviting God in. I feel like I might have … I'm not quite sure why – but I can still figure it out too! … And that's what I think actually GOD IS. Like, or I think that's just HOW GOD WORKS! Like God just doesn't FORCE a lot. God DOESN'T FORCE! … in the world … that's not what JESUS did. AT ALL. CHALLENGED, but didn't FORCE … I think that kind of 'sitting with' and 'opening the space' is FOLLOWING more in that vein of just not forcing, just kind of ALLOWING even if it's not what I WANT, giving people the space to figure things out for themselves. Hm!

Summer testifies that, when she embraced her human limitations in a context where she challenged egotistic assumptions of control, she opened herself up to change. This change occurred in her relationship with another individual, and with God. Humility enabled Summer to appropriate the subjective truths which spoke into her circumstance (Keller, 2008, pp. 116-117). Practicing a posture of mindfulness in this challenging situation, and waiting with patience and expectation, she experienced clarity of mind and purpose so as to 'open the space' for God to commune with her.

What Summer's narrative intimates about God is just as important. In the context of her experience, the Divine was *Becoming* in vulnerability, communing with her as a human *equal*. Summer did not describe 'Divine communion' as a 'movement' involving God's *coercion of* her choices; rather, with silent presence, as One in the background, God offers her the *dignity of choice*. Summer 'open[ed] space' for God, and God responded, apart from control, allowing Divinity to be transfigured in her. There is give-and-take in this communion, and it resulted in Summer coming to an awareness of the reality about her – that of 'figuring things out' – and thereby, her *prosopon-persona* was witnessed by the Other who was

present (Kearney, 2001, p. 18). Consequently, the Divine was both *beyond* and *within* Summer; this was evidence of divine *transcendence* (i.e. separation) and *immanence* (i.e. *vulnerability*); and in this way, *Divinity became human* - in *her* (ibid.).

Althaus-Reid's indecent theologizing adds a deeper layer of interpretation to this discussion on immanence. Critiquing the patriarchal concept of *kenosis* as the 'abasement of God' in becoming human, this theologian averred: 'true *kenosis* [is] a *kenosis* where God does not grant Godself privileges and thus discovers the meaning of incarnation' (Althaus-Reid, 2003, pp. 38, 75). With this statement, Althaus-Reid was suggesting that when God enters into the fullness of humanity, without the luxury of being shielded from the realities of materiality, *God receives* the *gift of kenosis,* which is incarnation. The gift, is that God loses a part of Godself, and is displaced by a new 'God/man', who 'assumes the margins of the Other' (ibid.). *Kenosis* entails God's immersion into the full realm of carnal life. What this means is that One can find God 'amidst the sexual turbulences of human beings' in their intimate relationships, and in their prosaic moments, '[which are moments] of the excluded queerness in Christianity' (Althaus-Reid, 2003, p. 38).[375]

Drawn from Lisa Isherwood, a Queer theological example of the concept of *kenosis* and the 'sexual turbulences of human beings' in the company of the Divine, is also useful (ibid.). Isherwood documented the personal story of the English

[375] Applying an additional queer interpretation on the matter of persons' intimate spaces, one might argue that Althaus-Reid was speaking of, 'inviting God in', just as Summer had relayed about her own experience of Divine communion. The theologian may have been suggesting that God become vulnerable enough to join Queer persons on the margins as a Queer-God/man, and thereby, receive the Queer gift of communion that their children have to offer to Godself. As Summer expressed, 'it's like God would be SAD if that connection was gone, because God LIKES that CONNECTION TOO' (See section 6.2.2.4).

Christian mystic, Margery Kempe, and proposed that the incarnation of God in the life of Kempe, God's lover, contrasts with the reframe of the 'divine' as *impersonal* dynamic energy 'within and between and beyond people', seen in the writing of feminist theologians (Isherwood, 2004, p. 55). In fact, it is much more substantive. Isherwood highlighted Kempe's mystical account of her own physical, emotional, and sexually intimate encounters with God the Father and Son (Isherwood, 2004, p. 55). While this theologian discussed Kempe's expression of an awareness of a *separation that existed* between her (a human person) and the Divine, at the same time, there was *a mysterious interrelatedness,* that Kempe had described as, 'God is in you and you are in him' (Isherwood, 2004, p. 55).[376]

Summer's descriptions of her own experience of God also echo a distinct feeling of mutuality, for she enjoys Divine-human communion and the mystery of Divinity's transcendence and immanence. As it is with intimate friends and lovers, Summer expresses her sense of oneness with the Divine as a 'deep level of unification and love', an 'absence of a need to articulate';[377] furthermore, there is a 'higher plane of consciousness' that she shares with/in God. Her understanding of God's enjoyment of connection with the world, and God's desire for createds to share in this connection, intimates that Summer knows the reality of the *kenosis* of God (Isherwood, 2004, p. 56);[378]

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[376] In this chapter on 'radical equality', Isherwood did not elaborate on Margery Kempe's intercourse with the Divine in detail. Nevertheless, it was an experience described as involving Kempe's enjoyment of unity with God, while maintaining her separate, human materiality (Isherwood, 2004, pp. 55-56). However, what Isherwood mentioned briefly was the theological implications of such a union, namely, that this particular experience, which transcended boundaries, was a sign of the potential of Christianity in facilitating transformative change in the world (ibid.).
[377] See Summer's narrative, section 6.2.2.4.
[378] Ibid.

This appreciation of the Divine's desire for any form of intercourse with createds images a parent who hopes to be accessible to their children, to enjoy them in the most meaningful of ways (Althaus-Reid, 2003, pp. 38, 75).[379] This is a way that God becomes immanent to human persons, appearing to every One who seeks them, hence, leaving a 'sign of God' in createds (Kearney, 2001, pp. 18, 41).

In this sense, 'Divine communion' echoes the main theme, 'freedom-*for*-love', around which the 'movements' in Summer's narrative focus, because God's communion transfigures love to human createds; and this is understandable, since the transfiguration of love is an aim of God's encounters with humankind (Kearney, 2001, pp. 58-59), and incarnational love is the message of the Bible (Kearney, 2001, p. 59). Summer's enjoyment of God's love, and her desire to share her love for God, is reminiscent of Isherwood's vivid account of Kempe's mystical experience (2004, p. 55). It is, similarly, an example of God in Jesus, a sign of the incarnation of divine love. This is one of the gifts of Becoming - the pleasure of *expressing One's 'self' to the Divine*, *and of receiving the expression of Godself* in One's body (Isherwood, 2004, pp. 49, 52, 54, 56). This is an encounter of vulnerability between equals.[380]

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[379] Ibid., and section 6.2.3.1, where Summer's friend describes the sense of connection with the universe that they share.

[380] Another name Kearney used to expand on the concept of *persona* in relationship, is the Greek word *prosopon*, which, translated into English, is a theatrical, 'poetic personification, impersonation, or embodiment of some other 'self' ' (2001, p. 18). *Prosopon* also carries with it a sense of 'being-for-the-other', signalling a relational perichoresis, which Kearney described in this way: 'the *'prosopon-persona'* can never really exist on its own … but emerges in ethical relationship to others' (2001, pp. 15, 18). This reality also extends to the Divine, reflecting the type of communion referenced in the recorded words of the mystic, Margery Kempe, Jesus, and the six participants in this research; In a tenor which rings of Kearney's concept of *persona* (the part of the human person which transcends the perceptions of others), Barnsley recognizes the liberatory potential of accepting the *impossibility* of grasping the fullness of human *and* Divine personhood. She extrapolates on familiar feminist theologians' preferences for theologies of divine immanence, over divine transcendence, explaining that theologies of transcendence are often associated with ascetic practices, and favour

Here, some significant points from the aforementioned constructive theologians, and psychoanalytic theoreticians coalesce. As participants continue on their journeys of spirituality, they are less encumbered by what Benner describes as the '*Ego*'s' need to project a false image of his 'self' (2011, pp. 57-58); and, being more open to express their genuine 'Self' more freely, in encounters with Others and with God, individuals demonstrate more openness, less threatened by difference that is outside the realm of their experiences (Kearney, 2011, p. 6). Thus, just as important for Summer, is that she is able to receive the Other's expressions of their 'self' (Benner, 2011, p, 59).[381] These qualities relate to human priorities of self-presence, self-understanding, self-respect, and self-responsibility, cultivated in the 'movement' of 'transformation' (Goss, 2002, pp. 21, 22; May, 1995, pp.19, 20),[382] and such consolidation signals an individual who has started to establish a 'home' in the 'self'. Consequently, the potentiality of 'freedom-*for*-love' exists in increased measure.[383] Now, I explain the 'movement' of 'transformation', and how it reveals

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disembodiment, as well as having power over persons. They also minimize the realities of injustice, oppression, and harm which are perpetrated by social stratification. On the other hand, purporting that the Divine exists *within and between* persons, instead of *above* them, theologies of immanence represent an effort to oppose practices of dominance. However, Barnsley adopts Mayra Rivera's term, 'inappropriability' as a useful term, as it overcomes the aloofness of transcendence, and still, describes the elusive nature of persons *and* the Divine (Barnsley, 2012, p. 282). Finally, she argues against settling for these binary options, and presents a third option, recognizing the need for both; Last, Rollins is a theorist who argues that the term, 'immanent transcendence' is a more reasonable term for God (2011, p. 124).

[381] In contrast, Summer's false 'self' - propped up by the *ego* – would require her to turn to an 'Idol' to save her 'self' from living with the pain of primordial separation, thus creating distance from her genuine 'Self' in the Divine - and consequently, from other persons (Rollins, 2012, pp. 54-56).

[382] The priorities of presence, understanding, respect, and responsibility toward the 'self' are ones I consider to be active in a process similar to Goss' coming out to Christ (2002, pp. 19, 20). They, too, transpire in a relationship between equals.

[383] Participants' stories betray what might be considered an anomaly, a repetition of concepts that are present in different categories. For example, 'self-awareness', and 'self-love' are two concepts in the 'movement' of 'transformation'. Yet, they are also similar to two concepts found within the groupings of categories, 'beginning' (i.e. conscious self-awareness), 'homesteading' (i.e. 'fluidity' and 'self-love'), and 're-

this theme.

7.5.3 'Transformation'

Like many who identify as LGBTQ, and have been socialized to see themselves as subaltern members of their communities, Andy has struggled with self-acceptance.[384] For many years, he found it a challenge to love himself; and consequently, it was difficult for him to love another person, who self-identified as gay, in a wholesome way. It was not for lack of desire; however, due to his self-rejection, being with an Other who identified as he did, necessitated that he put a distance between his 'self' and their own – that is, because he was required to ignore his image in the Other's life.[385] This form of 'absent presence' is antithetical to being with his 'self', or Others, in a way which reflects love that is honoring of persons (May, 1995, pp. 69, 70).[386]

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creation' (i.e. 'self-awareness, self-acceptance, self-respect, and self-love). But, an important remark is that, while 'self-awareness', and 'self-love', are constructs recognized in three different groupings of categories, they refer to the reification of the 'self', who, over time, finds its grounding in the 'Self' and in the Divine. This apparent transposition of constructs illustrates the importance of appreciating the *progressive* nature of spirituality, and also, the limitations of 'theorizing' concerning mysterious human life. While regarded in relation to the category of 're-creation', here, 'self-awareness' and 'self-love' are features of Becoming transpiring throughout *several* 'movements'. Thus, the focus of this constructive *theopoiesis* is an effort to conceptualize an *organic, interactive, and fluid* phenomenon of Becoming, *not* to isolate a *static fact* or *uniform process*. Christian Hutchins might refer to these findings of categories as, 'repetitions with a difference' (2006, p. 132).

[384] See section 6.2.2.1.

[385] I do not intend to suggest is that it is untenable to see a divided 'self' enjoying an Other (including the Divine). Actually, to a large extent, every person represents a 'self' whose affections are divided, and persons are able to enjoy an Other to some degree despite this reality. Sean Homer remarks that G.W.F. Hegel's (1770-1831) philosophy of dialectics represents a philosophical postulate which concerns such a paradox, namely, that opposites *can be* one, and that their relationship can produce something new, resulting in an 'endless process of transformation' (Homer, 2005, p. 23). Also, the theory of linguist, Emile Benveniste (1902-1976) had an influence on psychoanalyst, Jacques Lacan, in that, Lacan suggested that the 'I' of which a person speaks, is an entity that is in flux, with multiple entities, rather than one entity that is stable (Homer, 2005, p. 45). As a result, space for endless possibilities for relating exist, regardless of personal limitations that may remain.

[386] Using Rollins' language, what is at issue in this situation is that Andy had constructed an 'Idol' of heterosexuality. As prayer and exorcism failed to validate the false image of the (straight) 'self' he had been pursuing, he remained separated from his true 'Self' (Rollins, 2012, pp. 54, 60, 61, 75). Rollins refers to the false image persons maintain regarding their 'self' as, their 'Unbelief', and this is seen in the 'masks' they present to the world (2012, pp. 54, 55). Furthermore, for LGBTQ persons, this separation from their 'Self'

Andy realized that he no longer wished to merely survive in the non-affirming, binary, social environs he had tried to make as his 'home' (Rollins, 2012, pp. 86, 89). His encounters with divine love brought him to a place where he could embrace the concept of a Christ who identified with and loved a gay person. Grateful for knowing (experiencing) God's love for him, his altered perspective is that he is entitled to be One among God's children who can progress legitimately on their journey of spirituality.[387] Thus, with boldness and humility, Andy has confronted his sense of an existential 'gap' in his heart (Rollins, 2012, p. 25), and has chosen to step off the well-trodden road, in pursuit of the false 'Idol' of heteronormativity. He stepped onto a path of liberation, and opened up to grace, which he admitted he needed to live (Rollins, 2012, pp. 47- 48). This is self-acceptance.

Today, in Dawn's reality, one outcome of her life-altering walk in the labyrinth is a sensibility and motivation of 'being-for-the-Other'. The divine *Eros* has freed her to demonstrate liberating love to others;[388] and in response to the third question in her interview about the person she is Becoming, she states,

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sometimes results in closeting who they are, and 'passing' as heterosexual (Mollenkott and Sheridan, 2003, pp.18, 57, 62). In *Transgender Journeys* (2010), Vanessa Sheridan shares unique challenges related to closeting her gender variant way of being, and the unique social taboos which accompany persons' secrecy concerning their practices as a transgender, transsexual, cross-dresser or intersex person. She sheds light on the additional hostility transgender person can encounter from heterosexual persons who have felt 'deceived' after experiencing an attraction to them (Mollenkott and Sheridan, 2010, pp. 59, 63, 81-82).

[387] See Andy's realizations in section 6.2.2.5.

[388] See section 6.2.3.3 for an illustration of Dawn's 'movement' of 'surrender', an act of self-giving, which honoured her 'self' and the Other.

> I think I'm coming into learning, figuring out where I am in my own skin, and um, feeling strengths in the gifts I do have to offer. And I think in some of the struggles being here and with [work context] (kind of lost some footing in regards to feeling confident and COMPETENT), and I can kind of sense that that's shifting. I think that's part of why [I am] in conversation with YOU, in conversation with FRIENDS, and then to be wanting to have this conversation with [name] that I'm going to have. It's easy to tell yourself negative things that aren't necessarily true. And I think God working in me and through me. And the gifts specific that I have to give to the [work context] are WORTHY of my service. At one point, I had said to someone, 'If the only reason why I went to [school], and got my [name of degree], and came back out into the world … was that I learned that GOD LOVES ME; if I had to spend that money for a [name of degree] to know that God loves me … I'M GOOD WITH THAT! That's ENOUGH. NOW …. I DIDN'T SPEND THAT MONEY just to discern that God loves me, because in discerning that 'God loves me', [I learned that] YOU'RE CALLED OUT. You don't get to just sit in God's love! [smiling] You don't get to STAY THERE, right? It's the same as a labyrinth journey. You walk inward. You have all the stuff you carry with you. You are unpacking it as you walk. When you get to the centre it's representative of union with God, or God with you. And that BEING in that light, and that love, and that presence CALLS you BACK OUT! You don't get to STAY IN THE MIDDLE … because NOT EVERYBODY KNOWS THAT LOVE. It is your responsibility to teach that love. I do it every day in … I do it everywhere I go. I do it every interaction I have. THAT IS MY HOPE.

For Dawn, 'transformation' had begun. However, she has also gained an awareness of something else, that is just as significant; this concerns the meaning of her status as One created in God. Because the *purpose* of this love, and its effect on her is becoming her passion, she cannot live in freedom without learning from it, and sharing it (McFague, 1987, pp. 16, 21). Conscious of being 'called out' to 'teach that love' she has experienced, Dawn appreciates her partnership with createds of the cosmos (McFague, 1987, pp. 8, 9). By apprehending the love, that is God, Dawn's self-offerings have begun to multiply, through its reverberations in createds who are responding to love in like manner.[389] These

[389] It is understandable that Dawn is not at ease in leading a spiritual life that focuses on individual salvation, while disregarding the flourishing of the ecological planetary community. In her estimation, a theodicy of individual salvation echoes motivations of competitive and oppressive social structures, much unlike those of an ecumenical one (Söelle, 1990, p. 102; see section 6.2.3.3). These social structures include: paternalism, capitalism, racism, sexism, heteronormativity, classism, ableism, and ageism, among others. Söelle's assertions explain Dawn's feelings because, as she argued, a person's experience of Christ relates to their whole life, that is, their sexual, political, economic, and relational encounters, since all of these

behaviours demonstrate the 'movement', 'freedom-*for*-love'. Dawn is Divinity incarnated for the purpose of 'movements' of 're-creation' in the Other.

As seen in the 'movement' of 'Divine communion', the aim of Andy's 'transformation' relates to a purpose which reaches far beyond his own well-being and security. Moreover, a posture of *metanoia* complements his more robust spirituality. This is in stark contrast to the meagre accoutrements of his false 'self' – ever vying to satisfy the requirements of the 'Idol' – One who was less available to be known, loved, and serve the needs of the Other. Transformation involves Andy's *turn* toward self-awareness, self-acceptance, self-respect, and self-love, enabling his *'freedom for love'* of the world.[390]

As I move to the third 'movement' in the grouping, 're-creation', it is important to emphasize that 'surrender' can be expected to be of a different nature in a circumstance where the 'self' is not engaged in 'transformation'. This is because 'transformation' is a significant turn, fostering openness and vulnerability, enabling persons to embrace and enjoy their humanity, and making 'freedom-*for*-love' possible.[391] I address this next.

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domains affect persons' *interpretation* of who Christ is *in relation to who they are* (1990, p. 102). She posited, 'belief in Christ concerns our whole life and does not draw us out of history into a private salvation history, but connects us more deeply and unavoidably with the others around us' (Söelle, 1990, p. 103). This relatedness is seen to be a more pronounced feature of Dawn's journey of spirituality.

[390] See Andy's narrative in section 6.2.2.5.

[391] Building on the 'movement' of 'homesteading', 'transformation' is an accessible and easily understood category. As some of its features share concepts which I have already mentioned in other 'movements' (i.e. 'self-awareness' in the category of 'beginning') and 'self-love' (in the category of 'homesteading'), 'transformation' does not require additional room in this discussion.

7.5.4 'Surrender'

Melanie May provided an alternate lens that I used to examine the personal reality of vulnerability; it is one to which I now refer for the understanding it contributes to the relationship between 'freedom-*for*-love' and the concept of 'surrender'.

By examining the posture assumed by Jesus in the company of persons who were treated as subaltern, May argued that Jesus embraced 'tax collectors, prostitutes, and sinners of his time', in a way that was significant; she argued that his decision involved something more radical than hospitality, that is, inviting these persons to share a table with him, as customary in the culture of the day (May, 1995, p. 51). In her purview, Jesus was not as concerned with providing a hospitable reception to those Others had rejected.[392] What was more remarkable, she proposed, was his decision to surrender himself *to be loved* by the marginalized persons who were his friends (May, 1995, p. 51). In giving his 'self' to *be received by these friends*, Jesus demonstrated confidence in being *vulnerable* with them - *just as he was.* Integrating Rollins' psychoanalytic lens, I interpret Jesus' behaviour in this way: the Nazarene was not relying on the false sense of significance that is often secured from an 'Idol' of status, or alternate *persona* that many persons pursue in precarious situations (Rollins', 2011, p. 168). [393] Jesus' security derived from a 'Self' who had embraced interdependency, his need to live in community. The

[392] Public theologian, Jayme Reaves, also explains that in the Abrahamic traditions during Antiquity, hospitality served a number of cultural functions, including ethics. Given the desert climate and culture, it was common to be given food, shelter, drink, protection and rest, for without it, extreme exposure to the elements could result in death (Reaves, 2017, pp. 72-83).

[393] Rollins explains, 'This is why the experience of the Cross can be called a sacrifice rather than a mere loss, for there is something within us that must be courageous enough to let go' (2011, p. 31). What human persons must let go is the very *way* they have *experienced* their lives - their way of *being* which, by virtue of their process of socialization, has provided a false sense of stability' (Rollins, 2011, pp. 93, 94).

grounding about which Rollins teaches, is something May had experienced, thus, she concluded ‘I see that accepting the hospitality of strangers, being with others, is first and foremost about accepting myself and being with myself’ (May, 1995, p. 57). Hence, she explained the significance of accepting the hospitality of the Other,

> The problem I - and others … would project out there belongs within ourselves. Unless addressed, it will – like cancer – kill us from the inside out … it is only as we are with others – most of all as guests of those we think are unsavory [sic] strangers – that our own identities are clarified. It is a vision of mutuality, radical and risky – even dangerous – inasmuch as it will threaten what we have known (May, 1995, p. 58).

May saw in Jesus a human model for persons – one that is relevant in this contemporary age. This is because there are those who employ numerous manners of props of status (including those used to oppress), and who clothe their ‘self’ in layers of falsehood and deception (May, 1995, p. 58),[394] and May recognized the need for known realities to be dismantled, so that ‘mutuality’, that is ‘radical and risky’, will prevail (1995, p. 58). When an individual chooses to set aside pretence with which they have clothed their ‘self’, they become more vulnerable, available to be seen and received by an Other – just as they are; and they are free to acknowledge and accept the Other in like manner. If entered into lightly and without attention, such a risk has the potential to introduce danger to the ‘self’ who is unprepared for existential threats heretofore unknown (May 1995, p. 58). However, the risk also holds the potential for drastic, mutual Becoming, which touches the essence

[394] Gross and Yip found that a sample of LGBTQ persons in Britain and France, expressed being moved by the love of God through Jesus. They saw Jesus as someone who could identify with marginalization, and who, despite this, lived to challenge injustice, and to encourage his followers to do the same (Gross and Yip, 2010, p. 10).

of One's identity as a follower of Christ (ibid.).

But the issue of vulnerability experienced by Jesus becomes one that is more critical than opening the 'self' to others, and Peter Rollins elevates it to the trauma of the 'Crucifixion'. He claims that the 'Crucifixion' is an event that has held a superficial function for the Christian Church, for as a mythology, it is a narrative which, while marking Jesus' death, has pacified persons who wish to feel that God is in control of all that happens, especially where securing their salvation is concerned (Rollins, 2011, p. 22). This control extends to the death of Christ (ibid.). Rollins counters that, on the other hand, eternal security is not the significant point of the 'Crucifixion' account; what it reflects is exactly the opposite of that – it is Jesus' confrontation with insecurity. Rollins interprets 'Crucifixion' as that which occurs when the truths One holds to be immovable are discovered to be otherwise (Rollins, 2011, p. 21), and he contends that Jesus experienced 'Crucifixion' as abandonment by God, with whom his life was intertwined. Furthermore, in 'Crucifixion', Jesus relinquished both his human desire *for* God, and his desire *to be loved by* God (Rollins, 2011, pp. 20, 25, 27),[395] and Jesus' encounter of this reality is what psychoanalyst, Jacques Lacan, referred to as 'the Real'.[396]

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[395] Psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan formulated the construct of 'desire*'* as a way of referencing an essential quality of the 'self*'*. Senior Lecturer, Sean Homer describes this desire as 'the very core of our being' (2005, p. 72), and describes Lacan's appreciation of 'desire*'* as, 'something beyond basic human needs which cannot be satisfied' – needs such as hunger and thirst (ibid.). Therefore, desire is representative of 'lack', relating to an insatiable, existential longing (ibid.). Applying Lacan's theory to Jesus' experience of 'Crucifixion', Rollins claims that Jesus' experience is best understood as an encounter with 'the Real'.

[396] Lacan employed a number of concepts to explain persons' motivations and relationships with Others, which, he postulated, arises from their unconscious structures. 'The Real' was one of them (Homer, 2005, pp. 53, 83). Refer to section 3.3.4.1 to review my explanation of 'the Real'.

For Lacan, 'the Real' did not represent a physical entity. It is a construct, describing the nature of 'trauma', a form of psychological alarm, arrest, or confusion, that is perpetrated by an *encounter* with an incomprehensible event or trauma (Homer, 2005, p. 83). Furthermore, Lacan hypothesized that persons will persevere in ruminating about a 'trauma', unable to articulate its full effect, and that such rumination is focused on 'the *impossibility* of the encounter with the *Real*' (Homer, 2005, p. 84). In Rollins' view, Jesus' experience of God's absence can be explained as an example of such a trauma.[397] More importantly, in his estimation, this experience is a reflection of the *very spirit* of the Christian faith, the unanticipated potentialities that are available in a situation where God's presence is experienced as absent (Rollins, 2011, pp. 24-25). Potentiality, in the midst of being forsaken by God, is the hidden gem Rollins offers for the taking – one that can only be experienced if a person is willing to experience 'death' in the context of their circumstance (Rollins, 2011, pp. 29, 108, 111).[398]

As it was for Jesus, for human persons in the contemporary world, the 'movement' of 'surrender' involves the embrace of this paradox. For Dawn, it came by welcoming her humanity, her vulnerability, and her need of the Other (including God), and setting aside any striving to be *other than* who she was to survive in the social world. In this way, her *embrace* of this paradox was the gift she offered God on her labyrinth journey; hence,

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[397] Although an encounter with 'the Real' may be difficult to appreciate, especially if One has not experienced the disabling reality of life experienced as separation from God, the concept of existential abandonment of this kind represents a trauma of infinitesimal proportion. I posit that a willingness to submit Oneself to such abandonment is, therefore, cataclysmic. As Keller claims, a redemption of this magnitude 'infinitely exceeds human capacities' (2008, p. 147).

[398] See Dawn's narrative in section 6.2.2.6.

surrender was an unparalleled genesis, a re-creation of the Divine in Dawn's life.[399] This form of semination is the *telos* of LGBTQ Becoming in this contemporary *creatio ex profundis* (Keller, 2003, p. xvi). It is a re-birth, a re-beginning, a sign of the continuous propagation of life (Keller, 2003, p. 232). The 'movement' of 'surrender' in the face of Mystery is a willing sign of vulnerability, an expression of Christ, which erupts in an incarnation of God in the world. At the end of her writing on the *tehom*, Keller appreciates the enigma of the theology of creation, stating that the claim that Jesus is the only possible incarnation of the *logos*, denies the continuous nature of creation as the expression of God (2003, pp. 226-227). Andy, and the other participants in this study are examples of divine incarnation for this contemporary age (Kearney, 2001, p.2), and 'freedom-*for*-love', is known in the world (McFague, 1987, pp. 60, 91). As 'God's palpable presence in all space and time', its fruit remains in the relationships in which participants have shared in their lifetimes on earth (McFague, 1987, p. 60); and when they experience bodily death, and transition from this reality, they will be resurrected, for in their memory and legacy, they will be 'still around and leave traces in history … traces of life and everyday little deaths, the frustrations and pains of everyday life, in communities … neighbourhoods and workplaces' (Althaus-Reid, 2000, p. 123),[400] 'little deaths and rebirths that testify to the unfinished nature of the Way – that reject the finality of a static and explicable cross' (Cornwall, 2010, pp. 100, 111, 112). God Becomes in human lives that embrace

[399] Keller affirms that regardless of death and crucifixion [sic] which occur in life, the *telos* of the divine lure is always new creation, incarnation (2003, p. 220).

[400] In the terms that are used in this thesis, 'surrender' can be understood as the ultimate form of the expression of hospitality, in the sense that it extends the vulnerability of the host [the 'self'] to a significant degree, something that is needful in an age of pluralism and multiculturalism, where marginalizations pose a threat to interdependence and flourishing of life on earth.

vulnerability; and they enjoy the partnership of re-creation (Althaus-Reid, 2004, p. 120; Cornwall, 2010, pp. 100, 112).

7.6 Final Thoughts - Becoming as an Interactive Phenomenon

Before concluding my argument, I now address a few challenges inherent in my effort to use ephemeral terms to conceptualize systematically a phenomenon I consider as fluid and eternal. There is a need to clarify some assumptions this qualitative *theopoiesis* may have raised.

The first, is that, despite my appreciation for the Western tendency toward systematization, I do not envision Becoming as a process, that is either linear, or readily grasped.[401] My effort to treat this subjective matter in a straightforward, respectful, yet comprehensive manner, highlights but one of the delicate, putative contradictory elements of this task of writing on qualitative mystagogic research. But contradiction is not sufficient as a point of exemption from scientific research, not least, when studying cosmic mysteries.[402] In order to construct my grounded *theopoiesis* in a way that can be grasped, I have organized these concepts into three major groupings, expounding on the themes in an order that I can explain with some clarity.[403] Although I have progressed in only one direction of flow while explaining the 'movements' I have presented, multiple directions and/or angles, as well as permutations and combinations, might have been considered

[401] Despite my interest in and awe of the workings of the universe, and my burgeoning sensibilities for justice and planetary ecology, I admit that this tendency is one by which I continue to be challenged.
[402] Writing on the topic of contradictions, Jennie Barnsley quotes Simone Weil as expressing simply that contradiction is an element of life as we know it. Furthermore, Barnsley states that 'contradictoriness and impossibility' are qualities which remain within God, and thus, engaging with them opens up the possibility of insight (Barnsley, 2013, pp. 253, 254).
[403] Refer to Figure 6, an image of all of the 'movements' corresponding with the theme, 'freedom-*for*-love'.

and explored. However, the limitations of time and space have made such an endeavour beyond the scope of this thesis. I consider the arrangement of these categories as fluid, and their flow, interactive.

Related to this, is my second point. While I contend that Becoming reflects an invitation originating in Mystery known as God, on a journey of 'freedom-*for*-love', it is also important to clarify what I am not claiming. Despite my orderly approach to progressing through these ten 'movements', I am not promulgating spirituality to be a journey which unfolds in an orderly manner, expressed, first, through 'beginning', then, 'homesteading', and last of all, 're-creation'. I suggest that spirituality be considered to be like a *perpetually flowing* stream of tributaries, whose multiple 'movements' are leading into a river of 'freedom-*for*- love'. Located on the second page following this one (page 329), Figure 7 represents a photograph of a painting commissioned to portray the grounded *theopoiesis* of Becoming in this thesis. The artist, Deborah Stephan, introduces an image of a relationship between creation and 'movements' of Becoming out of 'the deep', what I imagined in the form of the womb of God, expressed in the form of a human uterus, and in which the 'key' to the Becoming journey floats. This painting is her interpretation of the *tehomic* waters from which the life of createds sprouts, and it images Keller's reference to the 'key' to human Becoming.[404]

[404] Keller states: 'in the primal waters is hidden, like treasure, a key not just to what we are but to who we are Becoming' (2008, p. 46). See Figure 7, that is located on the second page following this one. This is a photograph of a painting I commissioned to represent the grounded theory of human Becoming constructed in this thesis. The painting symbolizes the relationship between creation and the 'movements' of Becoming out of 'the deep', the womb of God (Keller, 2008, pp. 99-100).

In addition to this, I envision 'freedom-*for*-love' as a tapestry, each 'movement' represented by threads of yarn, woven into a pattern which contributes distinct colours and textures to the tapestry. Continuing with this metaphor, my third point follows from this. I do not envision this tapestry as one that is all-encompassing, or capable of representing the spiritualities of *all* nonbinary persons. As Schneider and Roncolato emphasize, the ideal of constructing a Queer theology reflective of everyone who identities as Queer, is not only impossible, it is antithetical to Queer theology's valuation of what is 'unsaid, unseen and left out' within the range of human experience (Schneider and Roncolato, 2012, pp. 7, 8). It is just as significant to discuss what has been discovered as it is to draw attention to what is still to be understood. Therefore, I approach these categories as *tools* in a *process* of theological construction that is not permanent, as in a body of established principles. I consider myself to be engaged with Mystery in a process of discovery, which, as McFague has suggested, leads to a better understanding of what 'is not', rather than making pretentious claims about 'what is' (1987, p. xi).

Fourth, in this thesis, I focus on issues I consider meaningful for LGBTQ persons in a Canadian context today, and I emphasize how the theme of spirituality is relevant for their lives. I have not treated all of the 'movements' with equal breadth, or depth. But, this is not a concern, for variation is common in the course of qualitative research (Corbin & Strauss, 2015, p. 199). On the occasion where I have discussed a category briefly, compared to others, I have indicated why I did this.[405] In the end, I interpreted the phenomenon of human spirituality by drawing on epistemological scholarship with insights

[405] For example, see section 7.5.2, Note 383 and section 7.5.3, Note 391.

that are distinctive for launching mystagogic research in constructive theopoetics. The metaphors I have proposed are those I have deemed as particularly relevant for a distinctive investigation in qualitative experimental theology on a numinous question.



Figure 7 ‘Creation and Becoming Out of the Deep’ [Acrylic on canvas]. Untitled landscape (2022) by Deborah Stephan. Commissioned and entitled by Sheryl Metzgner. Source of photograph: Artist.

7.7 Chapter Summary

This chapter provided an interpretation of the main theme of this grounded *theopoiesis* as discovered in ten categories of human Becoming. I coined this main theme as, 'freedom-*for*-love'.

To begin, I provided a definition of 'freedom-*for*-love', based on Richard Kearney's description of God's expression of Godself to Moses, in the account of the liberation of the Israelites form Egypt. To this, I added Catherine Keller's explanation of *Eros* and *Agape*, Greek words which describe creative and responsive love. I further extrapolated on the usefulness of Keller's concept of incarnation in demonstrating human persons' manifestations of 'freedom-for love, as *imago dei*.

I reviewed each category in three groupings of 'movements' of Becoming, namely: 1) 'beginning'; 2) 'homesteading'; and 3) 're-creation'. I started with the theme of 'conscious self-awareness'. I argued that individuals' attentiveness to their material 'self' is the only location from which to move out in love into the world; therefore, I supported the theme of the priority of the body for spirituality with psychoanalytic and theological writings of David Benner, Sallie McFague, and Catherine Keller. Echoing Keller's process theology of 'becoming' on the theme of incarnation, I explained the evidence of 'freedom-*for*-love' in the life of human createds who are reflections of God. Here, I underscored the role of persons' sensibilities to the cosmos in which they live, connected with other createds, and in which they play a role in loving for the sake of the flourishing of the world.

Then, I turned to the writing of Urs Mattmann. His pastoral writing on the spirituality of LGBTQ persons as a vocation expands on the significance of the sexuality for equipping them to live into Becoming as 'freedom-*for*-love'.

I explored the 'call to life, pruning and growth'. I drew from the theologies of Marcella Althaus-Reid, Catherine Keller, and Melanie May, to underscore how the intercourse that develops between human persons and God, originates from the lure of the divine *Eros*. Using examples from the lives of Summer and Andy, I demonstrated how the expression of this call fosters mutual Becoming, such that both God and humankind would not be the same apart from it.

Next, I expanded on the 'movement', 'facing the deep', and specifically, on how the responsibility of choice highlighted in this category emphasizes the oft-hidden matter of human agency, regardless of circumstance, including chaos; more so, this 'movement' illustrates the potential that lies latent in the *tehom*. Using Eva's life as an example, I showed how the decision to respond to situations of challenge, and to exercise 'freedom-*for*-love', becomes a testament to persons' capacity for progression into life with Mystery – it is one of unknown possibility, rather than of mere apathy or death.

From the 'movements' of 'beginning', I progressed to the grouping of categories I entitle as, 'homesteading'. I began by demonstrating the significant grounding found in the 'movements', 'self-recognition' and 'self-identification'. I employed Sallie McFague's and Jay Johnson's metaphoric and Queer theological perspectives, respectively, extrapolating on the interpersonal realities within participants' life contexts to support my claim. These details included the reality of Sophie's efforts to negotiate discrimination as a woman of a sexual minority in the Christian Church. I showed how 'homesteading' reifies her sense of

'self', equipping her with the confidence to resist oppression which undermines Becoming, and choosing instead, to progress in the Way of 'freedom-*for*-love' through the 'movement', 'resistance'.

I ended my discussion of the category, 'homesteading', with a brief reference to the 'movements' of 'fluidity' and 'self-love' and 'secure attachment'. I underscored that 'fluidity' guided Summer's journey of spirituality, as someone who engages with life today with more flexibility, and less insistence on controlling its outcomes; this is recognized in her love of 'self' and Other. 'Secure attachment' was seen as the source of Sophie's grounding in God, understood as 'truth', 'spirit', and 'love'. Referred to as propositional descriptors of the Divine - the One in whom persons originate in *creatio ex profundis* - these descriptors from Keller's incarnational theology, and Dorothee Söelle's Liberation theology, were seen as the impetus for 'freedom-*for*-love' in Sophie's quotidian life.

In particular, the lived experiences of Andy and Dawn demonstrated the last grouping of 'movements', the category of 're-creation'. 'Re-creation' provided a key layer of meaning to the main theme. Starting with the 'movement' of 'Divine communion', I expanded on a theopoetic which engages with the motif of God's vulnerability *within* and *in relationship* with human persons. I adopted theological constructions by Richard Kearney, Lisa Isherwood, and Marcella Althaus-Reid, which concern God's encounters *in* and *with* human persons, including the human person of Jesus. Finally, I underscored the pleasure Andy experiences, and the potential joy he furnishes to God in the course of 'Divine communion'; I also emphasized the role of 'Divine communion' in inspiring 'freedom-*for*-love'.

‘Divine communion’ is also a basis for the ‘movement’ of ‘transformation’, the category that followed, in this discussion. I acknowledged that ‘transformation’ is a progressive unfolding, a ‘movement’ of self-confrontation, initiated in ‘beginning’ and ‘homesteading’. Dawn’s transformative labyrinth walk was a demonstration of this; it was seen as key in the development of attitudes of openness and humility which facilitate the ‘movement’ of ‘surrender’, potentiating ‘freedom-*for*-love’.

As the last ‘movement’ in this category, ‘surrender’ was the culmination of my discussion. Applying Melanie May’s interpretation of Jesus’ hospitality, I demonstrated how this ‘movement’ reveals a gift of the ‘self’, as offered to an Other, including God. In return, persons embrace God’s affirming love for the ‘self’ who is becoming known. Furthermore, ‘surrender’ represents a bold ‘movement’, framed within the term, *kenosis*; and I reiterated the words of Althaus-Reid, that, when living in the ‘Way’ of the Divine, ‘surrender’ is the catalyst for other ‘beginnings’ in the cosmos; like an act of intimacy, propagating fertilization, love, and life are perpetuated. As the distinctive mark of freedom, this love re-creates, forever, without end.

CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSION

> 'Humans aren't alone with no greater power in the universe. I really think *love* is the main thing going on and it's what we have to promote to make it work, and to help it work' (Supplementary Participant, British Columbia, Canada).

8.1 Introduction

In the preceding chapter, I provided an analysis of the findings of this research as they relate to 'freedom-*for*-love', the main theme of this grounded theory. I traced this theme in ten 'movements of spirituality, that I have defined as a journey of human Becoming. To begin, I review the purpose and argument of this thesis, the research findings, and the distinct contributions of this qualitative project. Following these comments, I share my main concluding statements, which focus on the practical theological and scholarly implications of the study.

8.1.1 Contributions and Summary of Main Research Findings

Embarking upon a scholarly adventure of constructing a theopoetic theory of LGBTQ Becoming has been one component of my life vocation, percolating within me for at least ten years prior to this project. However, the most telling predictor of my theological journey into qualitative research was evident at the age of four, when contrary to the majority of children in my kindergarten class, I embraced and befriended a schoolmate who chose to sidestep heteronormative prescriptions for childhood play. Therefore, I do not consider it uncharacteristic for me to follow the passion for justice that had begun to

burgeon in my adult years. I wish to investigate the synchronicity between the terms, 'LGBTQ' and 'spirituality', which, over time, had been bandied about as antithetical and irreconcilable.

The purpose of this research was to examine the spiritual journeys of persons who embrace their identity as LGBTQ, and consider themselves engaged on a journey of human Becoming, that I define as their 'spirituality'. The thesis has argued that Divinity can be traced in the lives of nonbinary persons, and that it is evident in ten 'movements' of human Becoming, which epitomize a theme of 'freedom-*for*-love'. This phenomenon is observed in three groupings of 'movements', with themes of: 1) 'beginning'; 2) 'homesteading'; and 3) 're-creation'. I have coined the term grounded *theopoiesis* for the constructed theory.

I recognize three strengths of this project in constructive theology, which extends previous research. Its original contributions are: 1) its novel *theopoietic* quality and methodological advances; 2) its interdisciplinary epistemological underpinnings; and 3) its prioritizing of LGBTQ lived realities for the purpose of theological construction which embodies justice. These features add to my study's multifaceted potential for building on knowledges gleaned from nonbinary persons of Christian faith,[406] and this potential encompasses what McFague referred to as 'remythologizing' theology (1987, p. 33).

[406] I wish to clarify that my use of the descriptor, person 'of faith', acknowledges my position that, where theology is concerned, 'faith' is more evident as a matter of action than of orthodox belief. As I have contended, human persons are created in relationship with the Divine, in *creatio ex profundis*, and their lives demonstrate 'movements' of Becoming that progress in ways that are idiosyncratic to each One. Therefore, their expressions of 'faith' can be considered a statement of their choices regarding how they will live in relation to the Mystery of the cosmos.

Just as important as offerings for the academy and for ecclesial theological praxis, is my intent in undertaking this research. It is because I espouse the claim that theology exists to serve human persons, and not vice versa.[407] My research furthers this aim.

8.1.2 Overview of the Chapter

To this end, this chapter leads with insights on the practical theological relevance of this study, due to its contribution of a novel methodology with which subjective theopoetic experience can be measured (Schneiders, 2016, p. 426). Citing the writing of practical theologian, Hans-Günter Heimbrock, I explain the significance of the interdisciplinary practice of knowledge-seeking, aimed at equipping the Christian Church for ministry in a contemporary world - it is one which respects insights concerning relativity, subjectivity, and human persons' lived experiences grounded in the body. As a researcher, whose domains of study include practical, constructive, and Queer theology, my interest is to provide an insightful analysis of theopoetic narratives in a way which respects my value for pluralistic scholarship, including psychology and psychoanalysis.

I progress, sharing knowledges for the benefit of the Christian ecclesia. Next, I direct these comments to individuals who wish to integrate the findings of this research in interactions with LGBTQ persons in contemporary contexts - specifically, in supportive ways. In relation to this, by drawing on the writing of Christina Hutchins, I comment on the significant matter of Western Christian theology's focus on God as a metaphysical entity,

[407] When human persons live in service to theology, fundamentalisms, and 'Totalitarian Theologies' become their focus (Althaus-Reid, 2003, p. 8). Then, individuals exist to support social stasis, which functions by restricting, controlling, and dismantling contrary personal beliefs and behaviours (Althaus-Reid, 2003, pp. 140-141). Theologies become the object of devotion, while human Becoming is stymied.

explaining how this is problematic for a *theopoiesis* based on realities of LGBTQ persons who engage with Mystery in their quotidian lives.

Next, I highlight the contributions of my qualitative project for future scholarship, demonstrating the strength of its practical theological emphases, and its sound, qualitative experimental processes (Waaijman, 2002, pp. 3-4). The benefit of this is an ability to isolate limitations, and points of creative advancement, that might be addressed in future studies on this topic. I also include next steps for comparative, collaborative research on Becoming, and finally, summarize the main conclusions of the chapter.

The realities and prospects of perpetual human Becoming *in* and *with* cosmic Mystery have erupted in the lives of the six participants of this study to furnish their spiritual journeys with meaning. I have examined these with an interpretive lens, shaped by a Western Christian tradition. These participants share a history with Others who practice this tradition, as well as Others who are outside of it, some who view themselves as secular. For this reason, my research is significant for the Church, and contemporary academic scholarship, the subject of the two sections that follow.

8.2 Becoming - Practical Theological Significance for the Ecclesia

What insights can qualitative ethnographic scholarship in theology provide for the Christian Church? This is an important question for those who are considering the global impact of the phenomenon of spirituality today (Waaijman, 2002, p. 5). Despite his efforts to explore spirituality, Kees Waaijman argued that the subject has not enjoyed ‘a place of its own in the academic world’ (2002, pp. 3, 4), this lack inspired my qualitative practical theological investigation. One unique feature of my project is its contribution of a novel

qualitative interview method with which individuals' subjective spiritual experiences can be measured (Schneiders, 2016, p. 426), and which may benefit theological scholarship and the ecclesia.[408]

The prospect of a marriage between theological and social science research motivated me in actualizing my goal of 'measuring' spirituality practically, even before I had a clear vision of its form. The writings of several scholars in these domains encouraged me toward this end, namely: Kohli (1981); Strauss and Corbin (1990); Ganzevoort (1993); Lawler (2002); Waaijman (2002); Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2004); Ganzevoort (2008); Heimbrock (2011); Scharen and Vigen (2011); Ganzevoort (2012); Campbell-Reed and Scharen (2013); Corbin and Strauss (2015). Mining the benefits of their pluralistic knowledges, I selected a methodology with which to study the phenomenon of spirituality, and a hermeneutic approach to interpret the data (Waaijman, 2002, p. 309). In addition to practical theologians I reviewed, constructive theologians had been known for raising awareness of theology's relatedness to quotidian realities, including questions of how life in the context of Mystery affects justice and planetary flourishing (McFague, 1987, p. 17; Althaus-Reid, 2000, p. 6; Isherwood and Althaus-Reid, 2004, p. 4; Grau, 2020, pp. 57, 58; Grau and Wyman, 2020, p. 3; Thatamanil, 2020, p. 34; Wyman, 2020, p. 11).

[408] When discussing my project with participants during the screening process, all expressed interest in *experiencing* a research context that involved more than, 'being asked to answer questions' in a 'yes or no', or a simple descriptive format. At the conclusion of their interviews, they shared how they had received affirmation and meaning from their qualitative interview experiences, including being helped to progress to the next steps in their spiritual journey.

Although the focus of my work is theological construction, its purpose, and integrative approach also reflect priorities of practical empirical theology, a discipline which began with 'the analysis of ordinary people's religious experience' (Heimbrock, 2011, p. 155).[409] Like practical theologian, Hans-Günter Heimbrock, my research aimed to combine social science methods and theological inquiry, to 'break through the edges of our linguistic structures', and to better 'understand the thickness of practice' (Heimbrock, 2011, p. 157). It demonstrates the utility of social science methods to provide theologians with 'insight into reality via experience-based methods', which capture individual realities grounded in the body (Heimbrock, 2011, pp. 160, 161). Indeed, participants' narratives have demonstrated the 'special way in which reality imposes itself on us', supplementing the 'dynamic and mysterious structure of life … inspired by the theology of Christ's cross' (Tillich, 1947, 27, p. 17, cited in Heimbrock, 2011, p. 167). It was evident that the 'task' of my sibs, has been 'to take part in God's ongoing creation of the world', and that 'empirical theology' has 'contribute[d] some intellectual tools to reconstruct this process' (Heimbrock, 2011, p. 169).

Today, because theology has 'pushed beyond academic boundaries into the language of communities of faith and into the enquiries of individuals alienated from any church, temple, synagogue, or mosque' (Keller, 2008, p. xi), the constructive theopoetic hermeneutic I developed reflects epistemological integration on Becoming.[410] Also,

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[409] Practical theologian, Hans-Günter Heimbrock locates an appearance of empirical theology with Douglas Macintosh at the early Chicago School at the start of the 20th Century (2011, p. 155). Heimbrock states that in Europe, Werner Gruehn was the first person to coin the term, 'empirical theology' (ibid.).

[410] Waaijman explained that once a researcher addresses the matter of the methodology they will use to study the phenomenon of spirituality, a hermeneutic approach must be chosen to interpret the meaning of the data acquired (2002, p. 309). I followed this approach once I had determined to carry out a qualitative mystagogic investigation.

scholarship in spirituality, the social sciences, and qualitative research methodologies guided my procedural decisions, while integrated epistemology directed my engagement in this hermeneutic experiment, to advance what McFague described as, ‘talk about what we do not know how to talk about’ (1987, p. xii).

Contemporary trends in Christian belief and spiritual expression in post-industrial societies, demonstrate that different definitions of secularization, and hence, post-secularism exist (Wilcox, 2012, p. 640). Despite the reality of ‘religious individualism’, and the trend of, ‘believing without belonging’, Melissa Wilcox reports that post-secularism in different parts of the world reveals that religion is being transformed, rather than dying out (2012, p. 641). In fact, LGBTQ persons practicing Christian, Islamic, and Jewish religious traditions struggle to reconcile their sexuality with their religion, resulting in some blending their identity within a religious context, and others moving outside of traditional religious communities (Wilcox, 2012, p. 650). Thus, the question of spirituality warrants commentary in practical theological scholarship.

Ten themes concerning human Becoming in the context of cosmic Mystery have been introduced into scholarship through the stories of six persons who are the focus of this research. In the next section, therefore, I discuss practical theological considerations for a Christian Church that is prepared to consider the implications raised by this practical theological scholarship, especially one that acknowledges the mystery and fluidity of the cosmos to which the narrative themes of these participants point.

Theology exists for the purpose of meeting the needs of human persons, who are understood as createds of mind, body, and spirit. However, based on the writing of scholars on the significance of the body in human experiences of sexuality and spirituality,

it is questionable whether theology will remain relevant in the eyes of the contemporary society, by avoiding discourse on the body, and the materiality of life (Goss, 2002, pp. 14, 16; Mitulski, 2002, ix; Pears, 2004, pp. 142, 143; Horn et al., 2005, p. 81; Benner, 2011, pp. 78-91). In fact, Daryl White and O. Kendall White Jr. have remarked that the Western Christian Church has tended toward compartmentalizing the 'pleasures of sex', and procreation, which is regarded as the 'function' of families (White and White Jr., 2004, p. 210). I contend that if Christianity is to speak effectively, with increased measure, to the global realities confronting individuals today, the transformative truths it promulgates must be *known* (experienced) by human persons (McFague, 1987, p. xi; Smith, 1913, p. 32, cited in Grau and Wyman, 2020, pp. 15-16; Ten Broeke, 1914, pp. 248-249, cited in Grau and Wyman, 2020, p. 17). The words of the participant, Eva, point to this need,

> British Columbia, and increasingly the rest of Canada, is a post-Christian province, a post-Christian country … assumptions that were made fifty years ago will no longer hold still. And so the country club church of the 1950's doesn't exist anymore. People don't go to church …. like people who went to church in the 1950's. Some of them went because they were pious, but many of them went because there was nothing else to do and when your mother said, 'Get dressed and go to church', you got dressed and went to church. Now, we can't be complacent in our faith, we need to stand up and say, 'We are the hands of Christ. We are the face of Christ. We are the feet of Christ in the world … in representation after representation after representation, Jesus was always about speaking up, about doing for, about journeying with.

Eva identifies the priority of engaging life's realities in the Way of Jesus, rather than of maintaining the rules and decorum of the Church of yesteryear. Practical empirical theology's potential for adopting social science methods, to 'break through the edges of

our linguistic structures' and deepen theological praxis, reflects the theme of Eva's words; it is relevant for this age (Heimbrock, 2011, p. 157).

The intention of this research is theological construction which values the lived experiences of LGBTQ persons. Thus, its purpose and integrative epistemology may be used to potentiate analyses of spirituality which foster this reconstructive effort (Heimbrock, 2011, p. 169). Moreover, the Church would benefit from such reconstruction, for, its embrace of uninformed, unchanging concepts of God who/that is not Mystery but, instead, is predictable and finite, is inadequate for a global context where new knowledges are entertained and explored continually (McFague, 1987, p. 10-11; Keller, 2003, pp. xvi, xviii; Althaus-Reid and Isherwood, 2007, p. 309; Grau, 2020, p. 55).[411]

Notably, and related to this, Catherine Keller contends that the Church has, historically, been resistant to concepts of relativity, preferring instead, claims of 'truth', stability, and certainty (2003, p. 15). Yet, this position has been met with resistance from contemporary citizens of the world, who feel called to live in a way which recognizes shifting social and scientific trends in knowledge (Gross and Yip, 2010, pp. 10-11).[412] As

[411] Early in the 20th Century, the words of theologian, Newman Smyth in 1913, also expressed an openness to new knowledges pointedly: 'We should seek to understand anew what the Spirit hath to say to the churches in the progressive revealings of nature. The spoils of the natural sciences wait to be utilized by a new natural theology … The reconstruction of systematic theology, which is desirable, requires a broad and deeply laid foundation in natural theology' (Smyth, 1913, p. 32, cited in Grau and Wyman, 2020, pp. 15-16).
[412] For example, see section 3.6.6, describing the history of *creatio ex nihilo* and its questioning by Justin Martyr in the Third Century; In her summary about theology, Dorothee Söelle expressed and compared the assumptions of three different Christian paradigms, namely, the orthodox, liberal, and Liberation theological schools of thought (1990, pp. 7-21). She explored how these paradigms expressed key theological principles (described as systematic theology) about significant questions of faith. In effect, what Söelle was exploring was thinking about God, proposed as 'systematic', concerning questions about: creation; grace; who Jesus Christ is for persons today; the cross; and the resurrection. This involved examining the meaning of these concepts within these schools, and how they are interpreted (Söelle, 1990, pp. 21, 31, 53, 65, 77-94; 102-119; 120-135), and they demonstrate variation within the Christian Church in the embrace of developing scientific knowledges; Even as theologians had started to harvest fruit from social science scholarship, later in the 20h Century, sociologist, Martin Kohli drew attention to ground-breaking work on

Keller has asked, what is the purpose of theology if it does not 'keep the future wide and *opening'* (Keller, 2003, p. 19), and if, in trying to impose order, it falls short of its potential?[413] To continue to do so, would represent irresponsible praxis.

Ordained minister, Christina Hutchins, substantiated my point with her article, 'Unconforming Becomings: The Significance of Whitehead's Novelty and Butler's Subversion for the Repetitions of Lesbian Identity and the Expansion of the Future' (2006). While exploring a constructive partnership between Alfred North Whitehead's process philosophy and Judith Butler's identity deconstruction, what is evident in Hutchins' theorizing is that investigations on the theme of Becoming would be significant for 'the expansion of the future' (2006, p. 126). Her argument relates to the phenomenon I name as, Becoming (Hutchins, 2006, p. 122). While for this ethnography I have defined Becoming in terms of fluid interactivity that is expressed in 'movements' of 'beginning', 'homesteading', and 're-creation', Hutchins' alternate and significant point clarifies a

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'symbolic interactionism' as it related to the creation of narrative biography. Kohli (1981) was writing on the issue of subjectivity as a social process, and quoting the words of Thomas and Znaniecki in their 1958 book, *The Polish Peasant in Europe and North America*, Kohli agreed with their claim about 'social becoming', where they postulated that 'all social becoming has to be viewed as the product of a continual interaction of individual consciousness and objective social reality … *the human personality is both a continually producing factor and a continually produced result*' (Thomas and Znaniecki, 1958, p. 1831, cited in Kohli, 1981, p. 63; italics mine). Whether a person's life narrative is documented in oral or written records, Kohli argued that their 'consciousness' about their lived experience (i.e. their 'objective reality') is a social interaction between their *'self'* and their *subjective appraisal* of their *experience* (Kohli, 1981, p. 62). These writers presented a compendium of support for my project, and my interest in inquiry into mysteries Divine and human. For more detail, refer to Kohli's chapter, 'Biography: account, text, method', in the edited book by Daniel Bertaux, *Biography and society: the life history approach in the social sciences* (1981).

[413] Recent scientific research suggests that human beings are fundamentally defined by their relationships, including relationships with all forms of matter (McFague, 1987, pp. 8, 9). For instance, McFague explained that biological science has demonstrated that the human mind is dependent on stimuli such as air, light, smells, and heat from the sun, and these are needed elements for healthy social and ecological functional development (1987, p. 8). Furthermore, a significant shift in 20th Century scientific thinking has accepted relativity as a useful concept for envisioning these relationships (McFague, 1987, p. 10). Consequently, McFague believed that a theology which appreciates the nature of such interdependence is a necessary component of a contextual constructive theology in this epoch (1987, p. 9).

possibility concerning the course of the three 'movements'. This is that '*unconformity (nonconformity + unconventionality)* by which repetitions of [nonbinary] identity are performed, *destabilizes* the very institutions and cultural categories in and by which the identity is shaped' (Hutchins, 2006, p. 122). Hutchins' point was claimed by the writers, Thomas and Znaniecki 50 years previously, that 'unconformity' itself, instigates the 'becoming' of the identity constructions which constantly work to bridle it (Thomas and Znaniecki, 1958, p. 1831, cited in Kohli, 1981, p. 63). Today, these institutions include religious ones, which marginalize, control, and oppress individuals using the identity categories these social powers have created.[414] However, in the course of these misdemeanours, a dynamic stream of multiplied Becomings are instigated and, consequently, the work of theorists such as Hutchins, and Thomas and Znaniecki, invites contemporary constructive and practical theologians such as I, to follow new tributaries shaped by post-Newtonian physics.[415]

Such is the outcome of my research. As process philosophers are increasingly considering the cosmos as 'composed of open-ended, plural processes', there is much less today than in previous years, which can be claimed as absolute and fixed with certainty (Hutchins, 2006, pp. 126-127). This includes claims concerning the Divine; and it includes nonheteronormative gender and sexual identity. Hence, the possibilities arising from these mutual Becomings are inconceivable (Hutchins, 2006, p. 122), and thus,

[414] For an explanation of this process, refer to Michel Foucault's, *The History of Sexuality* (1978, pp. 34-37).
[415] In Hutchins' purview, these new paths include the concept that, 'what seems to be substantive matter can be understood as dynamic interplays of energy' (2006, p. 126). A suggestion such as this introduces an alternative perspective of concepts that are deemed 'reality' or 'fact'. As a result, the arguments in which persons within the Christian ecclesia engage concerning matters mystical, may become richer using a multi-modal hermeneutic. In my opinion, the possibilities for theological imagination here are endless.

'destabilizations' do not delimit Becoming; rather, they provide opportunities for accentuating human potential (Hutchins, 2006, p. 122). This is evident in the narratives of the six participants in this research.[416]

This ethnography provides a rationale for the displacement of essentialist arguments, including those which continue to be promulgated by the Western Christian Church; for its insistence on a metaphysics of substance - a philosophical system of 'singular origins and linear relations of cause and effect' [sic] - denies a 'process-oriented' Becoming (Hutchins, 2006, p. 127). As a means of rationalizing complexities of human identity in the context of cosmic Mystery, the Church's adoption of a 'Cartesian subject/object split such as this, as well as singular cause and effect relations' [sic], is insufficient to progress into a future which sheds 'binary oppositions' and 'oppressive dualisms' (Hutchins, 2006, p. 121, 122); these restrain explorations of the unknown.[417]

8.2.1 Applications of this Constructive *Theopoesis*

The stories of the six persons on whom this theory is based, point to this potential. I repeat my opinion that the Church – its ecclesial leaders, members, and adherents – would benefit from reflecting on the human dependence on a metaphysics of substance to facilitate an appreciation of God; for, as Whitehead claimed, it is a 'fallacy of misplaced concreteness' (Whitehead, 1978, pp. 7-8, cited in Hutchins, 2006, p. 122). McFague has argued that in the Judeo-Christian tradition, the concept is seen most often in 'the

[416] For example, see the words from participant narratives, in sections 4.3.2.3, 5.2.2.2, and 6.2.3.3.
[417] For example, for human persons, God as Mystery can be defined by a divine desire to know and to be known by other createds in the cosmos. Likewise, intimate knowing and connectedness to Others is a form of expressing One's sexuality and a knowing of God (Goss, 2002, pp. 14 -16). Appreciating these realities as mysteries is a function of openness, fluid thinking, and humility.

assertion that God is present, fully and completely, in one human being. Jesus Christ, fully God and fully man … the ultimate assurance that the universe is not blank emptiness' (McFague 1987, p. 24); and furthermore, this certainty is derived from 'the Book, the Text of texts' (ibid.). However, nurturing this premise undermines a respect for difference and diversity, because the preference for uniformity, stasis, and 'normalcy' undermines the complexities of a universe in a mysterious cosmic community; this community includes individuals who identify as LGBTQ (Cornwall, 2011, p. 2).

The spiritual journeys of the individuals who have shared their stories in this research affect and complement each other. While a new symbolic reflects potentials of Divinity that human persons already possess, the potential to 'become what we are' cannot be realized completely (Jantzen, 1998, p. 92). Being fluid, Divinity continues to unfold based on the conditions and potentials within and about individuals. Thus, my aim in the sections which follow is to offer recommendations for ministers and laity in the contemporary Western Christian Church to support informed engagement with persons who identify as LGBTQ. These comments are starting points for conversations with individuals whose contemporary experiences possess features described in the quotidian life realities of these six participants. Still, to be formulaic in these suggestions would be to disrespect the mystery and depth of each individual's personal experience of their spirituality. This is not the intention of this offering. But, where LGBTQ persons express a desire for the presence of a community of allies on their spiritual journeys, and where these allies are willing, this writing offers points for reflection and communication, as they seek to make this journey together.

Also, I have argued that to be meaningful in the lives of persons today who wish to respond to the call of *Eros*, the ecclesia must become both comfortable and competent in engaging with issues pertinent to the lived realities of a changing, global community (Keller, 2008, p. 151). This includes making efforts which: 1) reflect 'change, growth, and development … positive attributes [and] characteristics of an evolutionary view of the universe'; and 2) 'heal', rather than 'hurt' (McFague, 1987, pp. 3, 25, 134). Furthermore, the Church can avoid the error of 'containing uncertainty', by building communities of persons who engage in conversations with a focus on shared ethics, rather than insistence on homogeneous membership or 'right-wing' prescriptive behaviour (Schippert, 2006, pp. 289-290, 293). The next three sections represent my suggestions of an approach.

8.2.1.1 'Beginning' – learn to be comfortable with questions

For some who belong to a faith tradition mirroring a heteronormative hegemony characterizing much of Western Christianity, the questioning, exploration, and experimentation of nonbinary persons, while responding in the 'movement', the 'call to life, pruning and growth', is perplexing.[418] This is because, it bucks claims of an established, static, order to life. However, it is important to understand that persons such as Franca and Andy, who have tried to discern whether their desires for relationship are legitimate in the eyes of a religious community, do not set out to undermine faith traditions and their polity. Their actions are, in actuality, an issue of the wrestling and exploration that are

[418] One of the themes I observed, which characterizes the spirituality of non-heteronormative persons is 'beginning'. The names of the categories concerning 'movements' of Becoming are: 1) 'conscious self-awareness'; 2) 'call to life, pruning and growth'; and 3) 'facing the deep'.

involved in being true to their Becoming 'self'.[419] This path can be a difficult one, especially if One has found or developed a sense of purpose in, or respect and affection for a particular community of persons. But, trying to ignore their 'self', or 'pass' as One who is other than who they are, would be equivalent to being untruthful about the mysterious reality of their 'beginning'.[420]

Psychologist Joel Kushner (2022) has explained some four ways that persons who identify as heterosexual, and those who identify as nonbinary, have been observed to react to LGBTQ persons' desire to integrate their sexuality and spirituality; these are: 1) hostile; 2) indifferent; 3) tolerant; and 4) inclusive (Kushner, 2022).[421] Therefore, Kushner recommends that, when developing relationships with individuals who are trying to embrace their identity as LGBTQ and spiritual, professionals who identify as heterosexual be conscious of their 'own cisgender privilege, and endeavour to use this privilege for good and not evil' (Kushner, 2022). This honours both the professional's and the LGBTQ person's growth process (ibid.). He recommends learning 'cultural humility', as well as developing a habit of self-examination which promotes cultural competence; in that way, there is less of a possibility that the support person's heteronormative culture dominates that of the nonbinary person (Kushner, 2022).

In Franca's case, her manner of expressing her experiences may be multiple, and may include: 1) uncertainty about her sexual identity; 2) periodic, brief, or extended

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[419] See sections 4.3.2.2 and 4.3.2.3, for Franca's and Andy's situations, respectively.
[420] Also, while 'beginning' represents a key site on the journey of Becoming, it is not the only location from which Becoming can arise. For, as a grouping of 'movements' which are interconnected, points of newness may arise from any location among them. 'Beginning' is neither an inferior, nor an insignificant location, although, at times, its presentation may appear unsteady.
[421] These ways are mentioned in section 4.3.2.3, in participants' stories.

seasons of worry about her acceptance by God; 3) questioning and bargaining with God concerning her sexual and/or gender identity; and 4) anxiety about 'coming out'. These are all signs of the 'movement' of 'beginning'.[422] As a result, the actions of Franca and Andy should be viewed in a well-meaning way by those in their ecclesial community, appreciated as their best efforts to manage the risks and costs associated with saying 'yes' to the 'movement', the 'call to life, pruning and growth' (Keller, 2008, p. 100). These 'movements' also indicate the nature of encouragement which will support them in living into their calling. Keller clarifies the effervescing natal journey,

> Amidst the mess of our past stuff and present inclinations, God calls. Love lures and lets be. Our mess becomes our potential. And we creatures Be-come, come forth. You this moment come forth, a wave freshly breaking on the face of the deep. In an ocean of overlapping waves, all new, all different (2008, p. 100).

Because no 'beginning' is the same as another, there are as many forms of this 'movement' as there are potentialities; they are as infinite as the Mystery in/with whom 'beginning' arises (Keller, 2008, p. 100). From among these potentialities, every One who is Becoming is entitled to choose *how* they respond to the divine lure (Keller, 2008, p. 100); and those who say 'yes' to God's call, have a unique *say* in *how* they will proceed

[422] As infancy is a period of multiple, internal bodily formations, 'beginning' is a 'movement' which gathers together many 'movements' which seem unformed, irregular, changing, and insignificant. Within an infant's fragile body lie layers of complex, essential, neuronal pathways which potentiate growth in many directions. Similarly, no 'beginning' stage should be dismissed, neglected, or demeaned. Every 'movement' of 'beginning' deserves to be valued. For a description of some details of this 'movement', see section 4.3.1.

'in this moment, this time, this place' (Keller, 2008, p. 100). Because human persons are involved in a process of creation that is an 'open-ended', 'creatio continua' (Keller, 2008, p. 48), patience, forbearance, and non-judgemental acceptance are qualities which model assurance to them as they embrace their 'beginning' as legitimate in the Divine.

8.2.1.2 'Homesteading' - learn to offer the gift of presence

Where a person has an experience that is markedly aversive, like that of Sophie, a wholly different experience related to acceptance arises.[423] Sophie is engaged with a Christian community which does not affirm her sexuality; nor do they affirm her spirituality. As her Becoming progresses, through, 'self-recognition' and 'self-identification', the other 'movements' - 'fluidity' and 'self-love', and 'secure attachment' - will support her progression in 'homesteading'; for, these 'movements' will reify her identity as someone who is beloved of God. This love strengthens her in the 'movement' of 'resistance', in situations that arise, posing a threat to her Becoming. On these occasions, it is conceivable that personal confidence in her truths as she experiences them, will collide with those of the religious community, which, conversely, rejects them; the eventual result will be the experience of 'Crucifixion', a trauma that may end in some refinement of her *Ego*.[424] During this process, whatever Sophie identifies as her 'Idol', will most likely give

[423] The lived realities of Sophie symbolize the significance of progression in 'homesteading', a grouping of categories which refers to the grounding and preservation of One's identity, their home in the 'self'. 'Movements' of 'homesteading' are: 1) 'self-recognition' and 'self-identification'; 2) 'resistance'; 3) 'fluidity' and 'self-love'; and 4) 'secure attachment'.

[424] Some examples of such circumstances are the following: 1) an issue may arise regarding the image of the 'self' Sophie is nurturing, one that is in opposition to the person she is Becoming; or 2) Sophie may hold an expectation of an Other, which concerns a significant issue to be resolved - a belief she may be 'idolizing'; or 3) Sophie may be nurturing an assumption in relation to the Divine, which is consuming her devotion. All of these examples provide occasions for her to confront an 'Idol'. For further clarification, see section 3.3.4.1 on Benner's description of the *Ego* and differentiation.

way to her truth, for it will be in conflict with her Becoming (Rollins, 2012, p. 79);[425] it cannot likely be supported without significant repercussions to her 'self' (Waaijman, 2002, p. 466). According to Waaijman, there are two possible outcomes of an individual's choice where their relationship with Mystery is concerned. The first option is for their soul to return to God, where they become one with God; this possibility is viewed as a human tendency that is common (Waaijman, 2002, p. 459). The second, is for the individual to 'finitize' themselves, and consequently, to 'finitize' God; this represents a personal 'un-doing', which affects the Divine, and leads to 'in-human' actions and 'un-Becoming' (Waaijman, 2002, p. 460).

The possibility of personal 'undoing' is a reality that is echoed in the comments of clinician, Chuanfei Chin, who is involved in counselling with LGBTQ persons, and who attends to their processing of trauma and loss. For this reason, allies who wish to be supportive to LGBTQ persons in the 'movement' of 'homesteading', will be sensitive enough to *remain with* them during an experience of 'Crucifixion'. In contrast to other onlookers, who might use 'Crucifixion' as an opportunity to attack, or blame, what they regard as the source of an individual's 'untruth', persons who seek to encourage them, will support them with thoughtful attention to the options available to them, and to the consequences. This approach can strengthen persons' decisions to relinquish their 'Idol'. However, if such reflection is missing, an LGBTQ person may miss a particular opportunity to face and embrace the 'Real', that is part of their experience of 'Crucifixion'. Relative to this process, Chin discusses the significance of helping LGBTQ clients process their

[425] In this case, Sophie's 'Idol' would be an untruth she has created, and nurtured as her assurance for living.

experience of discrimination and prejudice (Chin, 2022); he explains that, without this important aspect of psychotherapy, a person can easily direct unrecognized and unresolved feelings of anger, shame, loss, and grief they have experienced, onto their 'self' (ibid.); this is significant to minimize occurrences of 'attacking' their 'self'.[426] Working through loss is an important part of healing (Chin, 2022). In this light, the stability of the presence of another, that is not of an emotionally dysregulated nature, but, which models compassion and kindness, will be welcome, to counter the trauma of persons' religious oppression (ibid). For One such as Sophie, a responsive ecclesial community will be one which offers her an unhurried rhythm of sensitive, patient, companionship (Rollins, 2011, pp. 112, 118). Addressing her needs for belonging is a significant addition to the therapy that is crucial for healing (Chin, 2022).

8.2.1.3 'Re-creation' - learn to welcome criticism

Summer's lived experiences provide a third example from which to learn.[427] She is One whose experience of Becoming demonstrates growing, intimate engagement with createds, and with Mystery.[428] Her spiritual journey reveals a circle of care, and a sensibility that has been expanding. As her spirituality progresses in relationship with a community, her affection for, and awe of all forms of life and Mystery, have increased. Like Jesus, who, as a human, attended to the lilies of the

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[426] Chin attests to the reality that personal 'attacks' against the 'self' are evident in psychological symptomatology and distress, which appear in LGBTQ persons who do not process these feelings (2022).
[427] The third category of spirituality demonstrates persons' engagement with Mystery through a grouping of 'movements', whose theme is 're-creation'. These categories are: 1) 'Divine communion'; 2) 'transformation'; and 3) 'surrender'.
[428] See Andy's narrative in sections 6.2.2.1, and 6.2.2.3.

field, the sparrows of the air, the children, and the marginalized persons who were his neighbours, Summer's *persona/prosopon* transfigures Christ; her life demonstrates Divinity incarnated (Kearney, 2001, p. 18).[429]

There is another facet of spirituality, though, which poses a challenge for the community which does not share this path. To them, the 'movement', 'surrender', the abandonment of a *preoccupation with the 'self'* in Sophie, her progressive self-giving, exercised with an aim of the growth of the Other, is true *kenosis*, a way that is at odds with a contemporary culture consumed with the worship of the 'self'. In contrast with her social contemporaries, the outcome of Sophie's encounters with the 'Real' are less of a preoccupation now.[430] This is not because she is immune to risk. She is simply *undeterred* by it. Her actions are the epitome of the 'movement' of 'surrender', because the *kenotic* faith undergirding her quotidian choices is observable evidence of what she has already established as her truth, it is an exercise of *trust*, a sign of a *future eternity* which is transpiring *into the present time* (Heb 11:1) (Kearney, 2001, p. 81); and, for its realization, Sophie is prepared to wait. This is the reason she is an anomaly in the eyes of an ecclesial institution, which remains preoccupied with its own preservation, shirking its responsibility to care for the vulnerable createds of the world,[431] for, to them, Sophie is a stumbling block, as they have idolized their preferred images of human ideals regarding gender, race, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, ability, and other marginalizing identifiers

[429] Jesus' references to the lilies of the field, the sparrows, little children, and those who were marginalized, are found in Luke 12:27, Matt 10:29, Mark 10:13-16, and Matt 8:2-3, respectively. His way of living reflects caretaking, attention, and compassion for all forms of life.
[430] See Sophie's realizations during the mystagogic imaginative exercise, in section 5.2.2.4.
[431] Among these are non-human, inanimate, and animate createds who are citizens of natural ecosystems, the others that are a preoccupation for Summer. See her words in section 6.2.2.4.

of their own social construction (Althaus-Reid, 2004b, p. 2). Consequently, this 'form' of Church fashions images of God, and their own theology, ignoring the knowledges of the Other whose ways are foreign (Althaus-Reid, 2004b, p. 2).

Andy's lived experience demands respect from the Church. The 'movements' of 're-creation' in his reality suggest that his spirituality is not immature, and that he will not hesitate to speak his truth - even to God.[432] In a culture known for its 'absent-presence' (May, 1995, p. 73), the Church can expect Andy to challenge them toward justice, for he is One who identifies with being marginalized, while he grows confident in his sensibilities concerning injustice and the culture's worship of the 'Idol'.[433] Waaijman contends that 'marginality is a position that is marked by a double loyalty' (2002, p. 215).[434] As a gay male, the gender-based privilege Andy has enjoyed in the Church enables him to use both his esteemed *and* his subaltern status to criticize heteronormativity from the inside (Waaijman, 2002, p. 215). For this reason, he should be extended opportunities to be heard, consulted, and to lead the Church. The insights he offers are a gift that few can provide. As he gains the trust of Others who share his passion, Andy's circle will be extended, and he will be accompanied in allyship, which affirms his Becoming, and theirs.

I contend that in the event that the participants of this research continue on their journeys of Becoming in life-giving ways, the actions of religious and secular groups, who erect and worship false 'Idols', will bear less of a resemblance to the

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[432] See section 6.2.2.2, for Andy's forward invitation, where he invites God to 'wrestle' with him.
[433] Ibid. See also sections 4.3.2.1, 4.3.2.3, and 5.2.2.4, regarding oppression confronted in the Church by Summer, Andy, and Sophie, respectively.
[434] Marginality is a location where persons are members of both a 'prestigious' group within society who enjoys privilege, and at the same time, remain on the 'outside' and 'underside' of society (Waaijman, 2002, p. 215). Waaijman explains that this includes groups such as women, second-generation immigrants, and children of parents who are of lower social caste (2002, p. 215).

'freedom-*for*-love' transfigured in these six LGBTQ lives (Waaijman, 2002, p. 456; Althaus-Reid and Isherwood, 2004, pp. 7, 8; Rollins, 2012, p. 72).[435] Multiple potentials exist in any given moment for them. They may reflect fulsome Becoming, or not (Keller, 2008, pp. 54, 107), but as they actualize their choices, the possibility of gains and losses remains (Keller, 2003, p. 160).

To summarize, themes of 'movements' that have been witnessed in the participants of this study, have these foci: 1) being called to partner with God in assuming their unique role in the care and co-creation of the cosmos ('beginning'); 2) living in conscientization through relationships with other createds, in ways which consolidate their authentic 'Self' in love ('homesteading'); and 3) demonstrating 'communion' and 'transformation' of the 'self' (in)to God, toward 'surrender', as a human person ('re-creation') (Kearney, 2001, p. 10; Waaijman, 2002, p. 463).

Nevertheless, the uniquenesses of this study also raise legitimate questions about its generalizability to other nonbinary persons, especially as they vary by domicile in Canadian provinces and territories, and by denominational or spiritual community. Are there similar themes of human Becoming to be uncovered in the stories of LGBTQ persons in other spaces? This is the issue I address now.

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[435] I qualify this statement concerning participants by using the word 'should', because, as both Waaijman and Rollins acknowledge, individuals possess autonomy in their choices. They may determine to embrace ways that are 'in-human', by moving further away from unity with Divine, thus, turning inward against their true 'Self' in God (Waaijman, 2002, p. 460; Rollins, 2012, p. 134).

8.3 The Uniquenesses of this Study and Future Research

Since I espouse queer theory's social constructivist understanding of concepts such as gender, sexuality, the sacred, and the Divine, I steer away from suggesting that Becoming appears the same across human persons (Wilcox, 2021, p. 33). In fact, it has been acknowledged, that, with the exception of religious traditions that are more recent, or small, when it comes to sexuality and gender, no traditions view gender variance and same-sex eroticism in the same way (Wilcox, 2021, p. 73); thus, Wilcox cautions, when speaking of the sacred, 'boundaries' can be 'blurry' (2021, p. 62), for stories of Becoming represent sensitive, and holy matters (Wilcox, 2021, p. 49).[436] Multiform methods of investigating spirituality have been proposed (Waaijman, 2002, pp. 212-303). But, what I am examining is a *phenomenon that is transpiring* in the lives of six persons. They share significant qualities, including their identification as LGBTQ. Nevertheless, I have been concerned with the form of spirituality, which, despite the commonalities among them, may also unfold in a way which reveals the distinctive features of this sample. Some of these may affect the generalizability of the findings of this *grounded theopoiesis*.

8.3.1 Participant Sample

One issue of this research which affects its generalizability is the size and composition of the sample I engaged. A distinctive marker of this project was the travel-intensive component of driving to communities across the province of B.C.[437] For an ethnography such as this one, involving in-person mystagogic interviews, as well as

[436] Wilcox introduces the philosopher, Paul Tillich's term, 'ultimate concern', as one which refers to individuals' espoused truths concerning the sacred (Wilcox, 2021, p. 49).
[437] See Table 1.1.

regional and population diversity, it is unlikely that a significantly larger sample could have been acquired. The three mystagogic interviews in which each primary participant engaged, and the supplementary interviews which enabled theoretical sampling, involved significant time in preparation, transcription, and data analysis. However, a simplified form of interviewing may be employed, if an amended research question and qualitative interview method were used. Still, I attained diversity in sexual orientation, gender, ethnicity, marital and parental status, city size, region, denominational background, and other demographic features. Of these six primary participants, all were self-selecting, and highly educated, with at least one university degree or specialized training after high school; these qualifications were held in the fields of liberal arts, business, and the social sciences. Additionally, the guest, and supplementary participants, who were invited by primary participants to provide data to supplement their own narratives, presented as: 1) literate; 2) contributing members of their communities; 3) possessing an interest in the well-being of their LGBTQ friend, acquaintance, or family member; and 4) persons from whom primary participants derived significant support. Thus, the sample on which this grounded theory is based, represents a peculiar social stratum. They are Canadian citizens and residents of B.C., who are: 1) literate; 2) gainfully employed; 3) trained in theology, Bible, or ministry formation; and 4) interested in spiritual and vocational development.[438] At the time of the study, only one LGBTQ participant was unemployed, due to their recent completion of an educational program. While the sample was also ethnically diverse, only one individual was a member of a visible minority. Since all of the

[438] Refer to Table 1.2 and Table 1.3 to review demographics of the primary participants who identified as LGBTQ.

primary participants had ethnic backgrounds which revealed family histories of immigration within one generation, it is possible that this particular sample was familiar with discrimination, a theme within the narratives of multiple ethnic minority groups in Canada; this, too, may have contributed to participants' sensitivity to the issue of marginalization.[439]

Another significant characteristic of this sample was that no one was known to be at imminent risk of abuse, addiction, or violence, despite this finding among populations of nonbinary persons (Morgan, 2017, p. 44). While these participants had experienced sexual and/or gender marginalization, oppression, and various forms of abuse, at the same time, they have had access to resources which contributed to their resilience; this finding is similar to what has been documented with LGBTQ persons who have overcome marginalization and oppression (Tan, 2005, pp. 139-142; Hattie and Beagan, 2013, p. 262). All of these factors are experienced as life stressors; and they may have had a significant effect on participants' participation in this research, not least, the content of their narratives (Okpodi, 2011, pp. 51-52). Supports notwithstanding, the sample of persons with whom I engaged was transparent about their life experiences, which included mental health, addiction, marriage, divorce, and relationship challenges.

Finally, there were some qualities regarding participant suitability, that were not mentioned in recruitment advertisements; yet, these were significant criteria which determined the individuals who could be involved in the study. Apart from identifying as

[439] This factor might have been even more significant than in a less diverse sample, that did not share the experience of multiple generations who have encountered social oppression.

LGBTQ, and being engaged in a relationship of Becoming with God, participants were required to possess: 1) Canadian citizenship; 2) a family, friendship, or collegial network; 3) literacy and computer skills; and 4) material resources, such as telephone, internet, and access to transportation. Due to standards related to researcher-participant confidentiality, privacy, and safety, two of the six participants were not free to be interviewed in their place of residence. These qualities and criteria point to the quotidian realities of participants who enjoy a socio-economic position where their most basic physical needs for living have been met (i.e. food; safety; clothing; a personal dwelling; and health). The Canadian contextual reality in which participants live affords them social services, such as publicly-funded education until the age of 18 or 19, and socialized health care. These are notable resources for living, and depending on individual personality factors, their lives contrast with members of the LGBTQ community who experience more isolated, and vulnerable lives.

Despite their experiences of marginalization, risk, and vulnerability, the participants on which this theory of spirituality is based possess a sense of community, purpose, or belonging where they live. They are: professional helpers or artists; respected; and are considered intelligent, highly ethical, principled, motivated, skilled, and caring contributors to their communities – and for some, this includes the ecological community with which they engage. These characteristics of their quotidian lives influenced their spirituality, and the possibility that these are factors that might be ‘deterministic’ or ‘selective’, warrants further study.[440]

[440] See also Note related to research by Wienke and Hill (2013), section 2.2.8, Note 55.

8.3.2 Replicating the Ethnography

While exact lived experiences of individuals in cultural groups can be neither replicated nor generalized (Court, 2018, pp. 32, 33), the aforementioned characteristics of this sample suggest that a researcher would be required to make accommodations to replicate this study with LGBTQ individuals whose social ties are not as significant, or whose literacy, education, and economic standard of living afford them fewer resources. However, were future researchers to conduct a study based on the 'audit trail' from this research (ibid.), some anticipated changes might involve: 1) adequate time to explain, and discuss the interview, and research process in its entirety; 2) safe, accessible, non-threatening spaces to interview those persons who are less familiar with an interview setting; 3) an amended consent and feedback process that does not require skills in literacy, computer, and technology; and 4) altered requirements to furnish names of a guest mystés, or supplementary participant in relationship with primary participants.[441]

Accommodations such as these would result in more collaborative mystagogic interviewing, and hence, qualitative research process; thus, conducting a research project of this nature would require more time and funding, as procedures would assume a significant transformative tenor (Creswell, 2014, pp. 70-75), a qualitative philosophy that is sensitive to barriers for persons who are significantly marginalized. A study of this nature would offer an opportune occasion to conduct research where more accessible, less exclusive, and hence, more justice-oriented theological praxis is a priority.

[441] If a researcher wished to use a similar ethnographic method, or to have access to supplementary data, the latter option would require the use of alternate sampling procedures, such as snowball and/or opportunistic sampling (Court, 2017, p. 34).

To repeat, this research derives from a question concerning ‘movements’ of human Becoming in the lives of LGBTQ persons who have a belief in the cosmic Mystery they know as God, and who have been touched by a Christian religious tradition. This novel grounded theory ethnography resulted in the creation of what I have coined, a ‘grounded *theopoiesis*’. The poetic grounded theory I constructed highlights ten ‘movements’ of spirituality in persons who have long been marginalized by the Western Christian Church. In the service of capitalistic heteronormative hegemonic practices and discourses, by claiming that LGBTQ persons are not legitimate children of God, the Church has perpetrated a plethora of transgressions against these nonbinary sibs. With justice as its focal point, this study contends that ‘movements’ of spirituality *do* exist in the lives of these persons. But, it must go further.

Apart from amendments to methodology in the name of justice, in the paragraphs that follow, I outline potentials for extending this research, in three distinct ways. These are: 1) investigating Becoming in new, and still-unrecognized populations; 2) exploring individuals’ lived experiences of Mystery as metaphysical and non-metaphysical subjective realities; and 3) mapping and applying the Lacanian psychoanalytic process of *jouissance* as a catalyst for the *kenotic* ‘movement’ of ‘surrender’.

8.3.3 Relevance of this Grounded Theopoiesis for New Populations

8.3.3.1 Exploring spirituality in Christians and ‘nones’

In a Western, post-Christian context, where fewer persons identify as religious, it is worth noting that religion and spirituality remain topics that are relevant for personal well-being (Waaijman, 2002, p. 1; Waaijman, 2003, p. 7; Tan, 2005, p. 142; Keller, 2008,

p. xi; Kennedy, 2010, pp. 1063-1070; Swinton and Pattison, 2010, p. 233; Hattie and Beagan, 2013, pp. 245, 265; Murr, 2013, p. 370; Morgan, 2017, p. 40). Where religious belief is concerned, an increasing number of persons in the U.S. identify as 'nones' (i.e. nothing in particular) (Morgan, 2017, p. 40). For instance, in 2017, 'nones' represented 23% of the U.S. population, and they attested to 'think[ing] about the meaning and purpose of life' weekly (Morgan, 2017, p. 40). In addition to persons possessing spiritual practices, practical theologians John Swinton and Stephen Pattison have reframed spirituality as that which is observed in the actions of persons, despite their definitions of it as 'thin' and 'vague' (2010, p. 233); this is something these researchers acknowledge as possessing significant social and clinical implications in the nursing field (ibid.). Furthermore, writing about spirituality as 'primordial' (i.e. that which affects human persons and society in general), Waaijman has noted that spirituality in indigenous peoples around the world holds a significant social role in supporting persons as they move through different stages of life in family and community (2003, pp. 2-4). Another study in which Waaijman was involved examined the topic of secular spirituality. In 1996, of the persons in the Netherlands who were polled, the majority considered themselves religious, even though they do not attend a church (Waaijman, 2003, p. 7); they also believed that 'life of the institutional church and those in personal religiosity do not run parallel' (ibid.). Despite this, for Dutch participants, personal faith was more important in 1996 than it was in 1979 (Waaijman, 2003, p. 7). Hence, in the Netherlands, in nursing and business management contexts studied, trends demonstrated a growing importance of spirituality (Waaijman, 2003, pp. 10-15).

Today, Wilcox notes that there has also been a change on the religious landscape in communities of nonbinary persons, where alternatives to traditional ‘straight- and cisgender-dominant religious communities’ are places to which LGBTQ persons turn, seeking welcome and recognition (2021, pp. 153-162). In-person gatherings are present among some religious faith communities, including Christian, Jewish, and Muslim contexts (Wilcox, 2021, pp. 153-162); and in addition to these, virtual and online forums exist (ibid.). Nonetheless, amidst these trends, in terms of what is private, and what can be shared, differences remain in the ways in which certain forms of sexuality are seen (Wilcox, 2021, p. 165). Although all of the participants in my study had, at some point in their lives, been regular attendees or members of a Christian church, at the time of their interviews, they were involved in spiritual connections of different forms. Table 1.13 demonstrates these various types, and represents the degree of restricted access or participation of the spiritual activities to which participants were exposed.

Table 1.13 Number of participants who participate regularly in a spiritual activity by type of restriction (out of 6).

Member of church that affirms same-sex blessing, but restricts marriage	2
Restricted membership at church that is non-affirming	1
Visits/unrestricted access to affirming LGBTQ meeting	1
Visits/unrestricted access to friends, online resources, literature	2

These data suggest that of the six participants in this study, only one enjoys unrestricted access to a spiritual community. Regardless of this reality, there is another issue that remains important, albeit hidden.

There are Others, who hold stories, replete with lived experiences in, and with the Divine. These individuals, too, are *persona-prosopon*, transfiguring the Divine in their quotidian realities.[442] Therefore, the potential exists to extend this ethnography to a broader population, in Canada, and other countries. Furthermore, lived experiences of some LGBTQ persons have been formed in what has been referred to as 'secular', not formally religious settings; their journeys of Becoming can also serve as sources of insight about potentials of human Becoming (Jantzen, 1998, pp. 65-71; Waaijman, 2003, p. 14). Waaijman refers to these experiences as 'primordial spirituality', a form of 'primal', 'original' spirituality, that is connected to the 'primordial processes of life' as indigenous, or natural (Waaijman, 2003, p. 14). In addition to being of benefit to the *ecclesia*, interdisciplinary partnerships among constructive theologians, philosophers of religion, and qualitative and quantitative social scientists, would be fertile ground for enriching theological understandings about the spiritual experiences of these individuals. Such praxis would reflect an orientation toward justice.

8.3.3.2 Experiencing God as metaphysical and non-metaphysical

In this contemporary, post-Christian, postmodern era, I am proposing an additional novel comparison, which might also offer potentials for philosophers with an interest in constructive theology. The point of comparison to be explored concerns persons whose subjective experience of Mystery is metaphysical (and onto-theological), versus Others, who encounter God as non-metaphysical (Kearney, 2001, p. 1). On one occasion, the participant, Summer, referred to God as a 'deep level of unification and love', and a 'higher

[442] See section 3.6.3.2.

plane of consciousness'; a guest participant also referred to spirituality in a manner that did not involve deity, referring to her 'fluid' reality and cosmological frame of reference.

Yet, *both* metaphysical *and* non-metaphysical constructs of God existed in the narratives of participants. The phenomenology of the Divine as *posse* was seen more frequently in *certain* categories of 'beginning', 'homesteading', and 're-creation' than in others. A traditional understanding of the incarnation of God in the human, Christ suggests a concept of the Divine as '*esse*'. However, I point to the potential that exploring an onto-eschatological concept of the Divine as *'posse'*, in different contexts, would offer for a constructive *theopoiesis* on Becoming. Is it possible that exploring both metaphysical *and* non-metaphysical concepts of God might offer an expansive concept of Becoming in persons, across regions, cultures, and spiritual traditions?[443]

One might assume that *either* the metaphysical *or* the non-metaphysical *must* represent One's subjective experience of the Divine. But, this expectation has a distinct Cartesian flavour. If the Divine as Mystery *can*, indeed, be appreciated in *non-metaphysical and transcendent* ways, the expectation that One's experience of Divinity itself, will remain unchanged, is erroneous. Summer's experience demonstrates this, for she acknowledges that her knowledge of God is ineffable, at best.[444]

Moreover, referring to the realities of persons whose lives express 'Resurrection', God has been conceived, not as *One who is loved*, but as *encountered in the process* of loving (Rollins, 2011, p. 123). The concept of God as 'immanent transcendence', as opposed to '*presence',* suggests that God is *discovered* and *experienced* in the degree to

[443] See section 3.5, which describes the work of researchers who value novel theological constructions..
[444] See section 6.2.1 regarding the codes discovered for this 'movement'.

which persons love God's world, which includes all createds; [445] this non-metaphysical construct of God, too, was used by Dawn, to express her spiritual story (Rollins, 2011, pp. 124, 125, 127); her experience included persons who are alive, as well as those who have transitioned from this life.

Now, the question remains: What distinguishes persons who experience God as metaphysical, from those who do not? In the participants' narratives, the phenomenology of Divine as *posse* was evident in categories of 're-creation'.[446] But, the question of what contributed to this finding cannot be examined readily at this time. Nevertheless, the concepts of *persona/prosopon* may be a starting point from which to investigate the mystery of immanence/transcendence, and *esse/posse*, as evident for humankind. Last, as I move toward the end of this section concerning future research, I acknowledge that both metaphysical and non-metaphysical concepts of God play a role in persons' Becoming, and, insight into what contributes to persons' encounters of with realities deserves attention.

A final set of questions has arisen. They are of both a psychoanalytic, and a theopoetic nature. The first, is this: what, exactly, are the processes by which LGBTQ persons, like Eva, Any, Dawn, Sophie, Franca, and Summer move through the painful experience of 'Crucifixion' toward actions of 'surrender', 'decreation', and *kenosis*?[447] Can

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[445] See section 6.2.2.3, where Andy refers to persons whose lives have demonstrated Divinity to him.

[446] The construct of God as *esse* was more dominant in the following narratives: see Andy, 4.3.2.3; Eva, Franca, and Dawn, 5.2.2.3; and Franca, 6.2.2.4. Additionally, the construct of God as 'posse' was seen in the following sections: Summer, 6.2.2.4 (i.e. 'maintaining that CONNECTION and … that WONDER'); Dawn, 6.2.2.6 (i.e. 'EVERYBODY … WHO EVER SHOWED ME AN OUNCE OF LOVE'), and 6.2.3.3. (i.e. 'that's THEOSOPHY, that's the WISDDOM of God'); Summer, 7.5.2 (i.e. 'that's just HOW GOD WORKS').

[447] I include Franca in this question, despite the fact that the theme of 'Crucifixion' was not a part of the narrative themes selected for use in this writing. But the category of self-giving was among the same category employed in the stories of the other participants.

this human phenomenon of self-giving be encouraged? Can it be taught? If yes, what are the characteristics of persons for whom ‘re-creation’ can be a reality? My next point is a place from which to begin.

8.3.3.3 Jouissance and the future of Becoming

Jouissance, a Lacanian construct, which relates to the way persons manage ‘the *Real* as an impossible encounter’, is the focus of this section (Homer, 2005, p. 88). The ‘Real’ refers exclusively to that which is experienced as ‘lack’, something that is missing, perpetually; as a result, it is impossible to articulate exactly what it *is*. In using this construct, Lacan was able to conceive of a ‘self’ who comes to a point of accepting the elusiveness of ‘the Real’ by ‘separating’ from it; it is a process by which the ‘self’ can remain, *apart from apprehending* a trauma (Homer, 2005, p. 72-73, 81, 84-85).

On the journey of Becoming, I use *jouissance* as a term for the process of coping with the elusive ‘something’ that is always sought (Homer, 2005, p. 90). For participants, this means that, in the midst of their lived realities, they possess a perpetual sense of desiring ‘something’, and it is never fulfilled completely (Rollins, 2012, p. 25). As a form of responsibility exercised toward the ‘self’ - a matter of ‘defence’, so to speak – *jouissance*, is, essentially, a process whereby imaginative ‘fantasy’ allows the human ‘self’ to tolerate the ‘pain of the trauma of the Real’ – it does so by anticipating that its desire will be satisfied in some way, someday. In effect, *jouissance* provides the ‘self’ with motivation to look for what can be described as ‘pleasure *in* [the midst of] pain’ (Homer, 2005, pp. 88, 89).

At this point in my thesis, I am applying Lacan's construct of *jouissance* to propose its expansion onto Rollins' theoretical insights concerning 'Crucifixion', and to explain the main category, 'freedom-*for*-love'. What I am suggesting is that *jouissance* can be considered a necessary passage toward the realization of 'freedom-*for*-love', the *motivation to experience 'pleasure in pain'*, and to persevere in what can be understood as the 'passion' of love. In the course of the experience of 'Crucifixion', the concept of 'passion' is applied to the life of Jesus, who engaged in the process of resolving 'the Real*'* when he was abandoned by God the Father. This concept of 'passion' is equally relevant for my research participants, who are living in liminal spaces of unjust oppression.

My imaginings for future research include continued interdisciplinary epistemological study, for the purpose of theological construction concerning an intrapsychic and spiritual principle operating in *jouissance*. It may be explored as a phenomenon of its own, or perhaps, as an operational principle permitting the psychological re-organization which mobilizes the 'movement', 'surrender', in 're-creation'. In addition to this, research which compares the capacity of those individuals who *embrace* 'Crucifixion', and those who do not, is a question with potential to isolate the mechanism by which *jouissance* is the 'key' to a door which leads to the 'movement' of 'surrender' - to 're-birth', 'freedom for love', multiplications in Becoming.[448] Lacan postulated a form of 'separation*'* from 'the Real' in *jouissance* as a sign of the *agency* of the 'self' in sustaining itself apart from having its (existential) desire satisfied. This gift, which enables *kenosis* prior to desire's fulfillment, promises dividends for human

[448] I repeat my emphasis in section 7.6, which refers to Figure 7, the image of the painting 'Creation and Becoming Out of the Deep', one in which the 'key' to the Becoming journey is suspended.

Becoming in oppressed and marginalized persons (Homer, 2005, p. 72-73, 84-85).

To image Becoming, I commissioned a painting based on Keller's reference to the 'key' to the human 'Self' persons are Becoming. In the painting, this 'key' is the 'treasure' I recognize in Lacan's construct, *jouissance*; and it is one that is often hidden. Keller states: 'in the primal waters is hidden, like treasure, a key not just to what we are but to who we are Becoming' (Keller, 2008, p. 46). This study witnessed six LGBTQ persons, who are depending on grace to sustain them, and learning to rest into the unknown. They constantly seek the heart of Mystery, in a way they have not done before, and experience what it is to live in this liminal space - in *jouissance*. They are 'free-*for*-love', and God is incarnated in humankind.[449]

Of course, at least one other alternative exists for persons such as Eva, Andy, Dawn, Sophie, Franca, and Summer. They may choose to abandon hope in Life's provision of grace. Instead, they may create an 'Idol' of cultivated, human prowess, avoiding the discomfiting confrontation with Mystery for a temporary period of time. But, in this act, 'the anxiety of death, meaninglessness, and guilt' will not be removed (Rollins,

[449] As Christ is said to have borne the scars of the 'Crucifixion', so, participants will 'bear the marks of the death they had to undergo' (Rollins, 2011, p. 111). Ganzevoort explains that when One has passed through a trauma, their scars and stigmata will need to be integrated into their identity, including their resilience and overcoming (Ganzevoort, 2008, p. 35). He marks trauma as an experience which shapes identity, and appreciates the traumatic event as one that requires integration into the individual's sense of who they are. This treatment of trauma prioritizes the personal validation of the traumatized person's scars, and the honouring of their survival of the wounds they have known. It also offers prospects for their use as stigmata, which mark their resistance to victimization and annihilation (Ganzevoort, 2008, p 25). This experimental practical theologian appreciates the significance of viewing of stigmata as a living testimony of One's unique expressed life force (Ganzevoort, 1993, p. 279, 285). The benefits of communicating the significance of this paradigm to those who have been oppressed supports their journey of healing and identity integration. Ganzevoort's (1993) work highlights the utility of a narrative approach in research and counselling; it provides encouragement to the theological researcher to appreciate opportunities that exist to explore developmental and life crises as hallmarks on persons' journeys, where they may change their life narrative.

2011, pp. 62, 111, 112), 'the Real' will remain, and the burden, which is the cost of avoiding it, will not be eliminated (Rollins, 2011, p. 131). The mechanism which leads to this choice is worth investigating.

One supplementary participant articulates the theme grounded in this theory of Becoming; it is one I am suggesting *jouissance* may facilitate: 'Love,' she asserted quietly, 'is the greatest thing going on in the universe'.[450] As multiform transfigurations of Mystery, the *personae* witnessed in these six LGBTQ lives are more than 'flesh and blood' (Kearney, 2001, p. 13).

This grounded theopoiesis is the journey of their spirit.

It is their spirituality.

It is the journey of God.

[450] This participant's quote is found on the first page of this chapter. I add to these wisdoms of lived experience, the words of 'indecent' theologian, Marcella Althaus-Reid, who summarizes the tenor of this thesis: 'To talk theology is to talk about a loving style of relationship. Theological themes are themes of love, even if perhaps this has been obscured by centuries of using a terminology which may have lost its original transparency. Redemption, for instance, is the work of giving freedom; salvation, of deliverance from suffering and danger. Grace is the work of freeing and delivering people and nature for free; conversion, the transformation of a person into a great lover of justice, equality and peace. It is in this frame that we would like to present queer theology as a radical form of the 'love-talk of theology', that is a theology which introduces a profound questioning into the ways of love in our lives as individuals and as society; and the things love can do in our world. Queering theology provides us with more than a reflection: it is a Christian praxis which aims to rethink alternative and radical ways of transformation in our present world so shaken by the contradictions of globalization' (Althaus-Reid and Isherwood, 2004, pp. 2, 3).

8.4 Chapter Summary

After reviewing the main contributions and findings of this study, this chapter has focused on the applications of this research for the Christian ecclesia, and the academy, with an emphasis on scholarship in higher education. This began with the significance of practical theology, for, I have contended that theology exists to serve human persons. I expressed my intention to make the learnings of this research available for the benefit of the Western Christian Church, the academy, and the global community of createds.

The utility of this research for the ecclesia was a point I emphasized, quoting constructive theologian, Sallie McFague, and practical theologian, Hans-Günter Heimbrock. This focus explained how an interdisciplinary practice of knowledge-seeking can equip the Western Christian Church to minister in a contemporary world which respects insights concerning relativity, subjectivity, and persons' lived experiences, grounded in the body. I supported my claims with Christina Hutchins' treatment of the issue of 'unconforming Becomings', integrating Judith Butler's writing on gender, and Alfred North Whitehead's process thought. I presented this as a significant pairing for the ecclesia, because Hutchins highlights how subjective interactions shape systems' constructions of gender and of God, thus, pointing to the errant human practice of the Church of treating both gender and the Divine as unchanging, permanent entities. She suggests potentials that may arise for social and religious systems that are open to expanding their views on flourishing; this encourages future research.

For me, it is important to emphasize respectful reception and acknowledgement of the needs and priorities of LGBTQ persons by the Christian ecclesia. I represented this

priority for practical theology using examples of stories of participants. I applied theological reflection for the Church who wishes to support persons who may present issues similar to those described in the narratives of the six participants.

Following this, I underscored findings of this study which hold potential for future scholarship and collaborative academic inquiry. This was a significant point on which to focus, particularly in view of suggesting research with a focus on transformative justice. Based on the unique features of this study, I commented on limitations posed by these characteristics, including how they might be overcome, and what they revealed about the peculiarities of my Canadian sample. These participants represent an educated, motivated group of persons, who, despite the challenging realities of their life contexts, have built significant social supports in the midst of oppressions of various forms.

Based on my analysis of these data, I introduced new questions, acknowledging a need to extend this study to other populations. My reasons included these facts: 1) marginalization and oppression is a reality for LGBTQ persons who are non-religious. Like the participants in this study, many of them are deemed subaltern members of their respective communities, but still, their spiritualities may have beneficial interdisciplinary learnings to offer; 2) where theological questions concerning the Divine and human Becoming are concerned, the Church's insistence on a metaphysics of substance is not only a contradiction, it represents a juvenile understanding of matters mystical, fostering irresponsible theology and praxis. This practice results in marginalization; 3) the Lacanian psychoanalytic construct of *jouissance* is one I am conceptualizing as functioning as a catalyst for the 'movement' of 'surrender'. A psychoanalytic or psychological concept like this, is an example of a social scientific tool that might be applied in constructive

theological theorizing that might extend the potential for Becoming and flourishing for humans and other createds. To this end, I have proposed new avenues for research in human Becoming.

I summarized my research simply: This grounded theopoiesis concerns an overarching theme of 'freedom-*for*-love', a main category regarding spirituality, grounded in ten 'movements'; together, these 'movements' coalesce in three groupings of Becoming, referring to: 1) the invitation to collaborate in the propagation of creation; 2) the consolidation of individuals' home in the 'self'; and 3) the re-genesis of love in the cosmos. Spirituality in LGBTQ lives is a 'movement' of God's Becoming.

EPILOGUE

I follow this thesis with an epilogue. My purpose is to express my gratitude as a researcher, for an experience of growth on a topic both intellectually stimulating, and personally transformative. I celebrate this work as my own *poiesis*, expressed through the art and science of qualitative research, offered to the Mystery I know as God - the ineffable Other experienced on this memorable academic journey of Becoming.

This research represents my introduction to qualitative grounded theory. The writing of Juliet Corbin, in her last publication with Anselm Strauss, was a rare gift, furnishing both motivation and quality tools for this interdisciplinary adventure. Very often, I progressed in reading through participants' narratives, anticipating the still unseen *theopoiesis,* hidden amidst sentences, codes, and categories that I was unearthing, and shaping into theory. At times the task was daunting, and in other moments, exhilarating. But mostly, it required faith, hope, and love.

This project represented my commitment to Becoming as a researcher, a constructive theologian, a mystagogue and psychotherapist, who, through the spiritual journeys of six persons, was growing in her understanding of her 'self', the Other, and the Divine. Indeed, I found that qualitative research can be both science and art; and constructive theologizing toward *a new Queer theopoetics*, may be approached with a spirit of excellence, creativity, humility, vulnerability, and risk. I do not pretend to have succeeded in all I intended to achieve. But, like the participants in this study, in my subjective experience I have encountered God in this grounded *theopoiesis*. I have even had *a taste* of 'freedom-*for*-love' through many frightening acts of 'surrender'.

In closing now, I say, ‘grâce à la *jouissance*’![451]

[451] In French, the idiom *grâce à*, is used to express gratitude for something. It can be translated as ‘thanks to’.

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Appendix 1

Historical, Socio-legal, and Geographic Context of Research in British Columbia, Canada.

By introducing the historical, socio-legal, and geographic setting of Canada, this appendix provides information on the context in which participants' stories have been shaped, and in which this ethnography occurs.

Canada's Legislation - Rights and Freedoms of LGBTQ Persons

Gary Kinsman, Queer socialist activist and sociologist, has suggested that Canada is already a 'queer nation' (2001, p. 209), and in his essay, 'Challenging Canadian and queer nationalisms', Kinsman claimed that 'the equality rights' section of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms provides a vehicle through which our [sic] rights can be fully established' (ibid.). The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms was instituted by the Canadian government as 'those rights and freedoms that Canadians believe are necessary in a free and democratic society' (Government of Canada, 2022c). The Charter is a part of the Canadian Constitution, the 'supreme law of Canada', with which all other legislation must be consistent (Government of Canada, 2022c); and legislation which violates an individual's charter rights or freedoms may be rendered invalid (ibid.). After the Charter's inception in 1982, there was a period by which different levels of government in provinces and territories were required to have their laws comply to the equality rights listed in section 15. It states: **'Every individual is equal before and under the law and has the right to the equal protection and equal benefit of the law without discrimination and, in particular, without discrimination based on race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, sex, age, or mental or physical disability'** (Government of Canada, 2022a). Later, sexual orientation was included in this list (ibid.).

Despite the statement by Kinsman, the act of guaranteeing the rights and freedoms of the Canadian populous remains a reality requiring mobilized effort. This is because rights and freedoms are not 'absolute', and can be restricted in the face of other 'rights or important national values' (Government of Canada, 2022c). For example, the Charter allows Canadians 'freedom of conscience and religion' (Government of Canada, 2022b). Consequently, many individuals who identify as LGBTQ, embrace a religious tradition that

must be governed by the values of the dominant majority within their community. For them, the Charter does not guarantee participation without exclusion as enjoyed by their heteronormative peers whose sexuality is sanctioned by their tradition's polity. Examples of denominations with opposing polities concerning sexuality are The United Church of Canada and The Anglican Church of Canada.

Some years after Canada's Confederation in 1867, a national movement seeking to reform the Church began. Its hope was to form a unified Church, representing Canadian Protestant denominations, with an aim to work towards justice and unity (Noll, 1992, p. 281). While this vision was not realized in full, in 1925, the United Church of Canada was inaugurated (ibid.). Canada currently boasts of diverse Protestant denominations. Among them, The United Church of Canada is known for its respect for foundational tenets of the Christian tradition and its affirmation of persons of all persuasions, backgrounds, and sexual orientations. It is one of the few mainstream Christian denominations in the country with longevity whose denominational polity upholds the rights of non-heterosexual persons to marry (The United Church of Canada, 2022b). Still, it is the majority of the membership of every congregation which determines whether or not congregants are expected to act in accordance with this polity.

In contrast, the General Synod and House of Bishops of the Anglican Church of Canada has entertained the question of same-sex marriage since 1978. Today, this governing body affirms ordained priests who identify as LGBTQ and supports LGBTQ clergy who have been married in a civil ceremony (Anglican Church of Canada, 2010). However, ordained Anglican clergy are not permitted to perform marriage nuptials between two consenting adults who are not heterosexual. They may conduct same-sex blessings and celebrations of civil marriages, which includes administering the holy eucharist in church buildings (Anglican Church of Canada, 2010). As is the case with some other civil unions, although polity does not permit non-heterosexual marriage within the Anglican communion, in provinces and territories across Canada, congregations' freedom

of conscience permits variance in position on this matter (Anglican Church of Canada, 2023).

In 2005, the government of Canada amended its legislation, extending the right to marry to two consenting adults who identify as LGBTQ (Government of Canada, 2022d). Still, nonbinary members of Canadian society encounter multiform marginalizations and oppressions in their communities inside and outside of religious circles, and few Christian denominations adopt an inclusive polity – Korinek (2003); Marple and Latchmore (2005); Sullivan (2009a); Sullivan (2009b); Kennedy (2010); Robinson (2010); Okpodi (2011); Hattie and Beagan (2013); Muller Myrdahl (2013); Nash and Catungal (2013); Logie and Lys (2015); Hulko and Hovanes (2017); The United Church of Canada (2022a); The United Church of Canada (2022b). Legislative changes notwithstanding, professor of liberal arts and professional services, Terry Goldie, remarks on the scarcity of written LGBTQ histories in Canada (Goldie, 2001b, pp. 2, 6). Her comments may be one explanation for the few narratives concerning LGBTQ spiritualities in the Canadian record (ibid.).

In her introduction to 'theoretical discourse' on LGBTQ realities in Canada, Goldie argued that nonbinary persons reflect a characteristically Canadian tendency toward non-uniformity (Goldie, 2001b, p. 6). Regional differences aside, the participants in this research have articulated narratives that are equally 'complex and varied' (ibid.). The cultures represented in their stories reveal qualities of Canada's West, which possesses a history of its own, and which marked the ethnographic fieldwork for this research.

Fieldwork Site – Urban and Rural British Columbia

British Columbia (B.C.) is the most western region of the ten provinces and three territories forming the nation of Canada today, second only to the Yukon Territory, which extends to the north and west of it (see map of Canada on the 'Relief elevation map of British Columbia' located on this appendix). The province represents 95% of 'unceded'

Appendix 1

Historical, Socio-legal, and Geographic Context of Research in British Columbia, Canada.

Aboriginal territory, land that the Aboriginal Peoples did not 'legally sign away' 'to the Crown or to Canada' (Open Text B.C., 2022). The Aboriginal First Peoples who lived here were an autonomous, functioning society, prior to exploration by the British and the French (Chartrand, 2011, p. 125; Knafla, 2011, p. 12). Nevertheless, the assumption of 'terra nullius' (i.e. 'land without owners') was an excuse for the colonization which began thereafter (Knafla, 2011, p. 3); and by the end of the 19th Century, 94% of the North American Aborigines had died as a result of disease and war in the course of their colonization (ibid.).

After First Peoples had been assimilated into the Dominion of Canada, and considered wards of the nation state, the priorities of the Dominion included settlement of the West, among other matters (Knafla, 2011, p. 6). Whereas, in eastern parts of the country, the need to exert control of the Dominion resulted in the government's pursuit of treaties with the First Peoples, in the West, no treaties between the government of Canada and the Aboriginal Peoples were ratified for the majority of B.C. (Chartrand, 2011, p. 130). Over time, B.C. was settled by pioneers who travelled west, first, to settle the land, and later, to pursue opportunities for wealth during the gold rush.

Today, the province is comprised of villages, towns, and cities of various sizes, including rural ones (Province of British Columbia, 2019a). The Mainland, often referred to as the Lower Mainland, is the most densely populated urban hub in the province, with regional districts comprised of smaller cities of various sizes, and an age distribution of residents comparable to other regions in B.C. (Province of British Columbia, 2019a). In contrast with smaller centres, 82% of the Mainland's workforce is employed in the service sector (e.g. healthcare, public administration, tourism, and accommodation), and in the head offices of businesses which employ people throughout the province (e.g. financial services) (Province of British Columbia, 2019a). In other regions of the province, the fields of agriculture, mining, logging, forestry, and tourism are among the most dominant sources of employment (ibid.). The participants in this research represent three of the

eight regions in B.C. today. These regions are listed in order of population size on Table A on this page (Province of British Columbia, 2019a). A 'relief map' follows on the next page of this appendix, with a reference to a map of Aboriginal territorial names and regions in B.C. in the list of references to this thesis (Opentext B.C., 2022).

Table A. Population by regions of British Columbia, Canada.

Mainland/Southwest	2,747,000
Vancouver Island/Coast	881,700
Thompson-Okanagan	609,300
Cariboo	169,600
Kootenay	163,100
North Coast and Nechako	99,800
Northeast	72,300

Source: Province of British Columbia (2022) *Welcome B.C.: Regions in B.C.* Available at: https://www.welcomebc.ca/Choose-B-C/Explore-British-Columbia/Regions-in-B-C

Appendix 1

Historical, Socio-legal, and Geographic Context of Research in British Columbia, Canada.

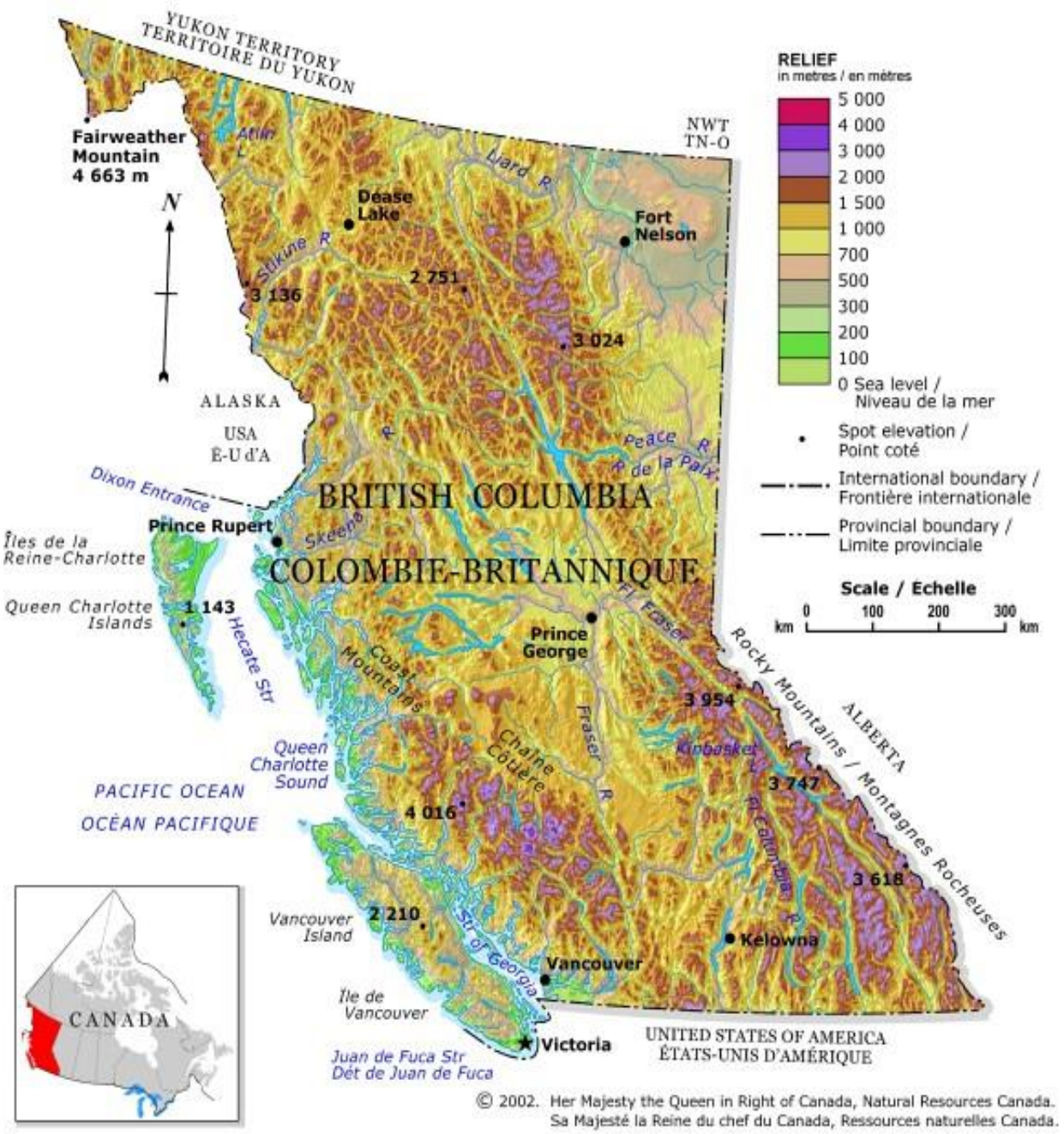
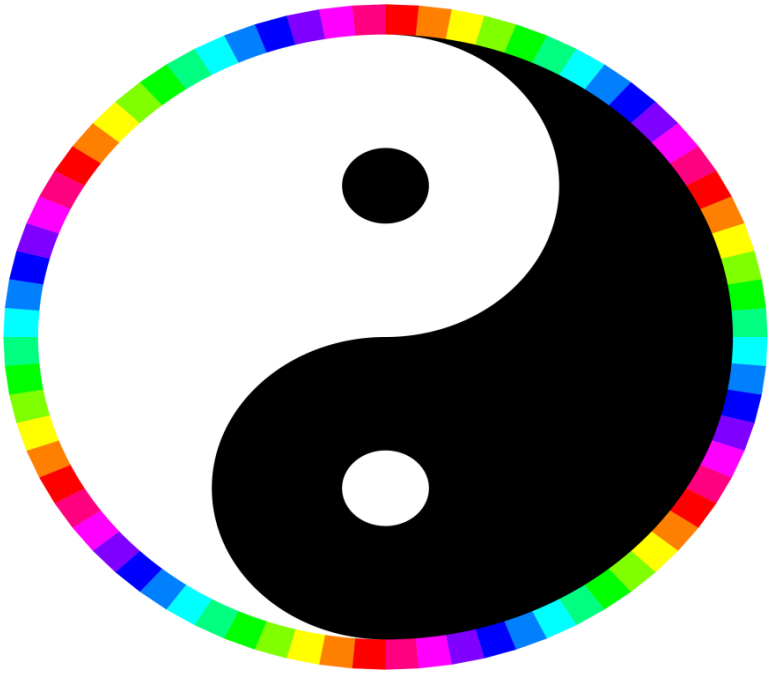


Figure A. 'Relief elevation map of British Columbia'. Source: Natural Resources Canada (2002). Free for public use.

Appendix 2

Recruitment Advertisement/Poster Card.

LGBTQ/Queer Spirituality



Do you identify with these descriptors?

- **Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transsexual, Transgendered, Intersexual, Asexual, Queer, Questioning, Two-Spirited.**
- **On a spiritual journey of growth.**
- **Have been involved in a Christian religious tradition during your lifetime and presently make room for God/The Divine in your life.**

If so, please consider this invitation ...

If you have an interest in joining me in a conversation to talk about the ebbs and flows of your spiritual journey, and if you have someone you trust who is willing to participate to share how your life story has affected theirs, I'd love to have you contribute to my PhD research project in British Columbia, Canada.

To talk further, please contact me at: [redacted]

Appendix 3

Telephone Script – Demographic Screening Form.

……(……)…….……

Subject's name & initial Phone Email Skype contact

Hello, (name), my name is Sheryl Metzgner and I'm a PhD Researcher in the Department of Theology and Religion at the University of Birmingham, England. I'm calling to follow up on your expressed interest in the research I'm conducting on Queer Spirituality. Is this a good time for you to speak?

[If the response is no, offer to call back and arrange a suitable date and time. If yes, proceed].

I appreciate your willingness to speak with me. I'd like to take about 10 minutes to ask you some questions to help me determine whether your experience fits with what this research is exploring. I have a few quick questions to ask. Please answer as best as you can. Does that sound okay?

[If the individual replies 'yes', proceed. If 'no', inquire about any questions or reservations].

	Demographic Questions	Guideline
1.	Do you identify with any of these terms as a way of describing your sexual orientation: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transsexual, Transgender, Intersexual, Asexual, Queer, Questioning, Two-Spirited?	Yes/Other
	How do you describe your sexual orientation? ……	Non-heterosexual
2.	How do you describe your gender identity? ……	-
3.	Do you view yourself as someone who is on a spiritual journey?	Yes
4.	Do you identify with the descriptor, Christian or believer in The Divine/God [If yes] Is there a term that describes your spirituality? [If no] Clarify …….	Yes
5.	During your lifetime have you participated in or been affiliated with a Christian denomination, or a spiritual community? If yes, for how long? ……..	2 years minimum
6.	What was the name of the group(s) and when were you involved? …… ……	-

Appendix 3

Telephone Script – Demographic Screening Form.

Demographic Questions		Guideline
7.	Today, does your spirituality involve participating in a Christian church or denomination, a spiritual community, or meeting with others who share an interest in spirituality? If so, is there a name or descriptor you use when referring to this community? ……	
8.	Do you have a safe and caring relationship with someone (e.g. spouse, close friend or companion; member of your family-of-origin), who you could invite to join you in an interview that is focused on spirituality – someone who could speak about the influence of your life on them?	Yes
9.	In which Canadian province do you permanently reside?	British Columbia
10.	What is your town/city of residence and its population? …… How long have you been residing there?	- 2 years minimum

Thanks for taking the time to answer these questions. Based on your responses, you **would** ***I*** *or* **I am not sure that you would** be able to participate in this research.

If they are eligible to participate: If you'd like to go ahead, I'd like to send you the Participant Information Sheet by email or mail for review. It will give you an overall picture of how you will be involved in this study. Once you've read it, please begin to think about the person you would like to ask to join us as a guest in the second interview. And when we meet, I'll ask you, (and later, your guest) to sign it as your consent to participate in this research.

[Prior to concluding the conversation, ask]: Do you have any questions for me right now about the study? *[If there are any questions, respond to them honestly and with the detail required.]* If anything comes up in the meantime or if you change your mind about participating, don't hesitate to send me an email or give me a call.

[Set an approximate date for a follow-up phone call. Check that they have my contact details. Mention lack of remote cell coverage if applicable. Confirm confidentiality of messages received. Arrange to send form by email/mail for their review. Conclude with thanks on a positive note].

If they are not eligible to participate: [*Clarify details of their response to confirm their unsuitability based on the guideline in question. If they are not an appropriate candidate, thank them for their call].*

Appendix 4

Participant Information and Consent Sheet



UNIVERSITY OF
BIRMINGHAM

COLLEGE OF ARTS AND LAW
SCHOOL OF PHILOSOPHY,
THEOLOGY AND RELIGION

Project Title:

'Queer Freedom': Poststructural Christian Spiritual Transformations in LGBTQ Persons

This project is being partially funded by The University of Birmingham's College of Arts and Law Distance Learning Graduate School Scholarship and has been approved by The College of Arts and Law Postgraduate Progression Panel and the Humanities & Social Sciences Ethical Review Committee.

Contact: Sheryl Metzgner, B.Sc., M.Ed., M.Div., C.C.C.
PhD Researcher, Department of Theology and Religion
Email: [redacted]

If you have not received a response within 48 hrs of contacting me,
please feel free to try again, as it is likely I did not receive your message.

Principal Investigator: Dr. Deryn Guest, Senior Lecturer in Biblical Hermeneutics
Email: [redacted]

Background to this Research

You are being invited to volunteer as a participant in a research project I am conducting to further understanding about the spirituality of LGBTQ persons. As the primary participant in this research, I will be requesting you to share about your spiritual journey as a person who has been influenced by a Christian tradition and describes them self as a Christian or a believer in God/The Divine. I want to learn about how your experience of belonging to a sexual minority affects your spirituality.

LGBTQ spirituality is a growing area of interest in the social sciences. Over the years, it has been a subject that has been both welcomed and misunderstood. Yet in the fields of psychology, sociology, and religious studies, no one has focused on the actual processes of spiritual transformation in persons who identify as LGBTQ. My research will be unique in using a method that will allow this to be explored.

Persons hold views about their spirituality that are unique and there will be similarities and differences among your stories. My intention is to propose a theory about spirituality based on what you and others have shared. I will write what I learn in a final report called a 'dissertation' and it will remain available to the public through the University of Birmingham. I may also use the data for related publications or books and the knowledge gained from your participation will be able to be shared or used to further research in the field of LGBTQ studies. There will be no financial gain to you by participating in this study. This sheet provides you with details so that you can make an informed decision about participating.

Appendix 4

Participant Information and Consent Sheet

The Responsibilities of the Supervisors, Researcher and Participants in this Study

From the beginning to the end of this project, I will be supervised by two of the faculty of the University of Birmingham, Dr. Deryn Guest and Professor Ben Pink Dandelion. Both are aware and remain updated about the details of this research. As the Principal Investigator, Dr. Guest has the responsibility of ensuring that the study is carried out in an orderly way and that both you and the information you share are respected.

I will be digitally recording all audio interviews with you as primary participant and with your invited guest (friend/companion/family member) who will attend our second meeting. I will maintain written records of all supplementary information I obtain. Your personal information and the data I create from these sources will be confidential and will be securely maintained in my personal possession for a period of 10 years. In order to protect your identity, I will assign you with a personal ID code which will be kept in a locked file, separate from the information that you share in our interviews. I will be the only person with access to it. Throughout the research process, your data will be kept on a secured and laptop computer and an encrypted flash drive which I will regularly back up.

Within 4 weeks of our final meeting, I will ask you to review my written transcription of our verbal interview for accuracy. If what you have shared is likely to make you identifiable to others in your community, we will discuss my changing your personal details to maintain your anonymity; your preferences will take priority. We will also discuss a pseudonym that you wish for me to use in the dissertation where I intend to make explicit reference to your story.

Once the project is completed, I will place the data in the University's data storage and archives, at which time it will be unable to be altered. This data will be backed up and protected from damage for a period of 10 years. During this time, it will be available for public use and new research.

Withdrawal from the Study

I will give you the opportunity to review a draft of my dissertation prior to the final editing stage. This will occur by September 16, 2019. At this time, I will ask you to review my depiction of the spiritual journeys shared with me. This will provide me with added learning about your impressions concerning my interpretations of your life stories.

If you decide not to have your story represented in the final dissertation, you may withdraw your permission to have it included anytime prior to September 30, 2019. There will be no disapproval or negative consequence to you for doing so. You will be asked to sign a form to confirm your decision to withdraw; following this, your personal information and data will be destroyed.

If you decide to withdraw your consent after September 30, 2019 1 will be responsible to honour my commitment to the other participants, the University, and the other persons who have already invested in this study. Therefore, you will be advised in writing that your informed consent will remain in force.

<u>It is important that you understand these limitations on withdrawing your consent to use your information</u>.

The University is committed to this project's being carried out in a legal and an ethical way. If you ever believe this is not occurring, please speak with me. If, after sharing your concern with me, you are not satisfied, you may speak to the Principal Investigator, Dr. Guest about this and you may do so even after the research has ended. Our contact information is listed at the top of this form.

Appendix 4

Participant Information and Consent Sheet

The Research Procedure
If you agree to be involved in this research, you will be expected to participate in specific ways. Please review the following description of this process, and do not hesitate to ask me if there is something you do not understand.

1. As the primary participant or subject of this research, you will be involved in 3 interviews with me. These will involve face-to-face conversations in which we will be talking about your spiritual journey as it has unfolded throughout the course of your life; it may focus on experiences that may not be understandable or easily expressed in words, but that are experienced by you as real.

2. An interview should last for approximately I hour. It will be held in a quiet and private location that we have agreed upon, where there will be no distractions.

3. I will make a digital audio recording of all of our interviews. Occasionally, I may also take some written notes.

The First Interview

4. When we meet, I will begin our time together by lighting a candle. The candle is a symbol of the presence of The Divine/God with us. As we talk together, the candle will serve as a reminder of our dependency on a divine grace which is outside of ourselves — one to which we look to accompany us as we discuss the meaning of your spiritual journey to you.

5. I will start with a word of invitation or prayer, to acknowledge God/The Divine as one who welcomes us into this time of listening to one another.

6. After this we will be accompanied by a few moments of silence. This will give us space to approach our conversation with relaxed attentiveness.

7. I will then pose an open-ended question to you to invite you to share about your spiritual story and you will be free to elaborate on it in whatever way you choose. You may plan to bring with you an item that illustrates it — e.g. a photo; a piece of artwork; a song; a poem or written prose.

8. Our conversation will continue with your sharing and my responding to something you have said. I will respond briefly and respectfully (e.g. a few words or a nonverbal acknowledgement of your experience; a gesture; a question to invite you to expand on something you have said).

   We will continue on in this way, with your sharing and my responding, until I indicate that our time will be coming to a close. I will check with you to see if you have said all that you wished to share or if there is anything you wish to add before we end our time together.

9. As we conclude, I will ask you to reflect on whether anything has come to your mind as a result of our time of accompaniment that you interpret as an invitation for further thought or action.

10. I will end with a word of blessing. And before we depart, I will extinguish the candle.

The Second Interview

11. In our second meeting, we will be joined by a friend/companion/family member who you have chosen to join in on our time of accompaniment and who will have already been provided with this Participant Information and Consent Sheet for review. When we meet, I will ask our guest to sign a consent sheet to indicate that they have read, understood and consented to participating.

12. I will begin this meeting in the same way as I did in our first one - with the lighting of a candle, a prayer, and a moment of attentive silence.

13. I will then pose an open-ended question to our guest, inviting them to comment on the effect of your spiritual journey on their life. As in our first meeting, they may choose to elaborate on it as they wish. They, too, may bring along an item with them that will illustrate this.

14. As before, my conversation with them will continue with their sharing, and my responding. I will ask you to remain quiet while attending to our conversation. If you react or interrupt, I will request that you kindly allow them to continue; I ask that you keep their disclosure confidential.

15. We will continue for about I hour. At that time, I will let them know that our time will soon be coming to a close and will check to see whether they have shared everything they wished to say or if there is something they wished to add prior to concluding. As before, I will ask whether anything that has arisen that they interpret as an invitation for their future thought or action.

16. As before, I will end with a word of blessing, and before we depart, I will extinguish the candle.

The Third Interview

17. The final interview will involve you and me, and I will begin our time together as before. Once again, I will invite you to start our conversation by posing a question. We will continue this in a manner similar to our previous discussion for about I hour; and that will conclude our interviews.

18. During or after we meet, I may wish to get a better understanding of a theme that has arisen in one of our interviews. I may contact you or your friend/companion/family member with a question; inquire about paying a visit to your church, spiritual community, or a community gathering; or engage in supplementary data collection about these communities and/or your involvement with them. Before I do this, I will ask you to recommend someone whom I may contact for this purpose. If, however, you do not wish to be named or identified to a person within these communities in the course of my collecting additional data, you may request this.

19. Within 4 weeks of our final interview, I will allow you and your guest to review my written transcription of our interviews for accuracy. If you believe that any information you have shared about yourself is likely to make you identifiable to someone, we will discuss changing your personal details to maintain your anonymity; in this case your preferences will take priority.

20. When the dissertation has been accepted and published by the University, I will provide you with a personal copy in appreciation for your contributions.

The Importance of a Safe Research Environment

In our meetings, you may share details about your life that give rise to emotions. Your story may bring to mind disappointments, hurts or past trauma. If you feel the need to pause to collect yourself, please let me know and we will do so. Similarly, if I feel that a break may be helpful for you, I will suggest this. We will resume our interview only when you are prepared to do so, rescheduling our meeting if necessary.

I have been providing mystagogic accompaniment for several years. I am also registered as a certified psychotherapist. If I sense your need for more support, I will enquire into whether you would appreciate a referral to a local counsellor. This service will be at your expense. If your reaction to an interview suggests that it may not be in your best interest to continue in the study, or if you disclose that you are in potential danger or risk of harm, abuse or

critical illness, we will discuss your withdrawal. I will contact the appropriate emergency services and will discuss your situation with the Principal Investigator. Where relevant, any relevant community support persons with whom you are involved will also be consulted. I will adopt similar action if you express an intention to harm a minor, yourself, or another person.

It is important that this research be carried out in a way that respects all participants and the researcher. Any of us has a right refuse to continue in the process if we are feeling continuously uncomfortable, intimidated or threatened, including being exposed to verbal or physical manipulation or aggression. I will be required to report such actions to the appropriate authorities and to the Principal investigator.

Thank you for giving of your time to promote research and learning about LGBTQ spirituality.

Appendix 4

Participant Information and Consent Sheet

Statement of Informed Consent for Primary Participant's Friend, Companion, Family Member

I understand that I am volunteering to participate in this research which concerns my friend/family member/ companion and that I may withdraw from it up to September 30, 2019 with no consequence to me.

I understand that there are persons associated with the University, funding bodies, and members of the public who may have access to data that is collected about me through audio recording; and I consent to this.

I confirm that I have read the Participant Information and Consent Sheet for this project and have had the chance to ask questions which have been answered completely.

I fully understand what I have read and agree to participate in this project as described to me.

_____	_____	_____	_____
Participant's name (print)	Date of birth	Signature	Dated
_____		_____	_____
Name of Principal Investigator		Signature	Dated
_____		_____	
Name of person taking consent (print)		Signature	Dated
(if different from principal investigator)			

Statement of Withdrawal of Consent

I choose to withdraw from this research. Date: _____ Signature: _____ Witness: _____

---

1 copy of this form is for the Participant, 1 copy of this form is for the Principal Investigator

Appendix 4

Participant Information and Consent Sheet

Statement of Informed Consent for Primary Participant

I understand that I am volunteering for this research and may withdraw from it up to September 30, 2019 with no consequence to me.

I understand that there are persons associated with the University, funding bodies, and members of the public who may have access to data that is collected about me through audio recording and supplementary written records; and I consent to this.

I consent ☐ I do not consent ☐ (please check one option) to be identified by the researcher during her conversations with community members when collecting supplementary information about me and/or the communities in which I participate.

I confirm that I have read the Participant Information and Consent Sheet and have had the chance to ask questions which have been answered completely.

I fully understand what I have read and agree to participate in this project as described to me.

_____	_____	_____	_____
Participant's name (print)	Date of birth	Signature	Dated
_____		_____	
Name of person taking consent (print) (if different from principal investigator)		Signature	Dated
_____		_____	_____
Name of Principal Investigator		Signature	Dated

Statement of Withdrawal of Consent

I choose to withdraw from this research. Date: _____Signature: _____ Witness: _____

---

1 copy of this form is for the Participant, 1 copy of this form is for the Principal Investigator

Appendix 5

Primary Participant's Personal Information

Name: _____

Date of birth: (year/month/day) _____ Age: _____

Permanent address:

_____

Length of time you have resided at this address: (years/months) _____

Phone (home): ( ) _____-_____ Phone (cell): ( ) _____-_____

Email: _____@ _____

Emergency contact: (Name/relation) _____Phone: ( ) _____ - _____

Marital status: (circle) Never married Divorced Widowed Married Common-law

Other (please explain) _____

Children: (list ages)

_____

Gender: (circle) Female Male Intersexual Two-Spirited Transgender

Other (please explain): _____

Sexual Orientation: (circle) Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transexual Asexual Queer Questioning

Other (please explain): _____

Race: (circle) Asian African Caucasian Aboriginal

Ethnicity: (circle) First Nations Eastern European Western European British Afro-American Afro-

Caribbean Latin/South-American Middle-Eastern East-Asian South-Asian Bi-Racial (please explain):

_____Other (please explain): _____

Education: (years completed) High school ___ Trade school ___ Other ___ College ___ University ____

Family Income: (circle) < 20,000 < 40,000 < 80,000 <100,000 <120,000 <150,000 Other

Permanent disability: (please explain)

_____

Job/occupation/student/volunteer position: (please explain)

_____

Past Christian religious affiliation and length of involvement:

_____

Current spiritual tradition/community (if applicable) and length of involvement:

_____

Primary participant's companion/relation: (please state) _____ Length of relationship: _____

First Name:_____ Phone: (__) - _____Email: _____@ _____.__

Appendix 6

Interview Schedule – Unstructured Interview Questions.

In each mystagogic interview, participants will be asked only the main, non-directive question. A reserve question will be used only where the interviewee has difficulty elaborating on the former. To gather data on concepts that are significant to the development of the theory that this research seeks, there may be occasions when questions may be revised based on participants' comments during interviews, observations, or archival data collected during the research process.

Interview 1 (2 hours):

Question 1a (main)*:* Please share how your spiritual journey unfolded and how it has been affected by the ebb and flow of various experiences in your life.

Question 1b (reserve): Please describe how and when your spiritual journey began and how it has progressed. Include what has happened during the up's and down's of your life.

Interview 2 (1 hour):

Question 2a (main)*:* Please share how you have been affected by the life of your partner/family member/friend, ___and how you think their spirituality has affected you.

Question 2b (reserve): Please describe the ways that your partner/family member/friend's life has influenced yours and how their spirituality has had an influence on you.

Interview 3 (1 hour):

Question 3a (main)*:* Please share about your sense of the person you are becoming and how your relationship with The Divine/ God and others is related to this.

Question 3b (reserve): Please talk about how you have changed over the years and how The Divine /God or others have influenced your process of change.

Appendix 7

Consent for Community Member Supplementary Interview or Community Archival Information

UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM
COLLEGE OF ARTS AND LAW
SCHOOL OF PHILOSOPHY, THEOLOGY AND RELIGION

Project Title:

'Queer Freedom': Poststructural Christian Spiritual Transformations in LGBTQ Persons

This project is being partially funded by The University of Birmingham's College of Arts and Law Distance Learning Graduate School Scholarship and has been approved by The College of Arts and Law Postgraduate Progression Panel and the Humanities & Social Sciences Ethical Review Committee.

Contact: Sheryl Metzgner, B.Sc., M.Ed., M.Div., C.C.C.
PhD Researcher, Department of Theology and Religion
Email [redacted]

If you have not received a response within 48 hrs of contacting me, please feel free to try again, as it is likely I did not receive your message.

Principal Investigator: Dr. Deryn Guest, Senior Lecturer in Biblical Hermeneutics
Email [redacted]

You are being asked to provide information which will serve to supplement data I am collecting for research that will further understanding about the spirituality of LGBTQ persons. I may ask you questions about research participants, your community organization or your spiritual/religious community, or I may ask you to give me access to archival information or promotional material. I will make written notes of what you share.

My intention is to use or refer to this information in my final report (i.e. 'dissertation') which will be available to the public through the University of Birmingham. I may also choose to use this information for books or related publications. Any knowledge gained from the information you share will be able to be shared or used to further research in the field of LGBTQ studies. There will be no financial gain to you for furnishing information toward this study.

The Responsibilities of the Supervisors, Researcher and Participants in this Study

This project will be supervised by two of the faculty of the University of Birmingham, Dr. Deryn Guest and Professor Ben Pink Dandelion. Both are aware and remain updated about the details of this research. As the Principal Investigator, Dr. Guest has the responsibility of ensuring that the study is carried out in an orderly way and that both you and the information you share are respected.

Although any relevant information that you share with me concerning your religious or community organization may be expressed in the final dissertation, your identity as a participant, the specific name of your organization, and the identity of any individuals to whom you may refer will remain confidential. In making reference to you, an individual, or your organization, pseudonyms and general organizational or religious and denominational descriptors will be used.

Appendix 7

Consent for Community Member Supplementary Interview or Community Archival Information

Throughout the research process, your data will be kept on a secured and password-protected laptop computer and an encrypted flash drive, which I will regularly back up. The information and the data I create from what you share remain be confidential, and will be securely maintained in my personal possession for a period of 10 years.

Once the project is completed, I will place the data in the University's data storage and archives, at which time it will be unable to be altered. This data will be backed up and protected from damage for a period of 10 years. During this time, it will be available for public use and new research.

Withdrawal from the Study
If you do not wish any of the information you share to be used towards the dissertation, you may withdraw your permission to have it included, anytime prior to September 30, 2019. There will be no disapproval or negative consequence to you for doing so; and you will be asked to sign confirming your decision to withdraw. Following this, the information you have shared, and its data will be destroyed.

If you decide to withdraw your consent after September 30, 2019, I will be responsible to honour my commitment to other research participants, the University, and the persons who have already invested in this study. Therefore, you will be advised in writing that your informed consent will remain in force.

It is important that you understand these limitations on withdrawing your consent to use your information.

The University is committed to this project's being carried out in a legal and an ethical way. If you ever believe this is not occurring, please speak with me. If, after sharing your concern with me, you are not satisfied, you may speak to the Principal Investigator, Dr. Guest about this and you may do so even after the research has ended. Our contact information is listed at the top of this form. This sheet provides you with an opportunity to give your written consent to participate in this way.

Thank you for giving of your time to promote research and learning about LGBTQ spirituality.

Statement of Informed Consent

I understand that I am providing verbal or published information for research purposes only and that there are persons associated with the University, funding bodies, and members of the public who may have access to the community or organization with which I am associated. I confirm that I have had the chance to ask questions which have been answered completely. I fully understand what I have read.

Participant's name (print)	Name of Organization	Signature	Dated

Name of person taking consent (print) (if different from principal investigator)	Signature	Dated

---

Statement of Withdrawal of Consent

I choose to withdraw from this research. Date: Signature: Witness:

---

1 copy of this form is for the Participant 1 copy of this form is for the Principal Investigator

Appendix 8

Mystagogic Accompaniment Prayers

Adaptations based on John O'Donohue (2008).
To Bless The Space Between Us: A Book of Blessings. New York: Doubleday.

Interview 1
Prayer *after* lighting candle:
God, I thank you for _____.
May we awaken to the mystery of being here together with you today,
May we enter the quiet immensity of your presence,
and be encouraged by the gifts you will offer to us.

Blessing *before* extinguishing candle:
_____, may you experience the grace to live a life that you love,
May you have the courage to follow its path,
And may you do what you have come here for.

Interview 2
Prayer *after* lighting candle:
God, I thank you for ___.
Today, may ___know a sense of belonging in friendship with _____,
and may you allow them to receive the challenges, truths, and light they need to avoid isolation, and know the embrace of the persons they are.

Blessing *before* extinguishing candle:
___, may your friendship with ____, bless you to become the persons you were meant to be,
and may those who cross your lives in days to come,
be gifted with fresh eyes with which to behold the world.

Interview 3
Prayer *after* lighting candle:
God, I thank you for ___.
And may your love which brought __into being,
into becoming who s/he was meant to be,
guide us into the truths concerning his/her becoming.

Blessing *before* extinguishing candle:
____, as you travel into the future,
May you find yourself attentive to the self you bring along.
May you find the light you need to illuminate your way,
and may you know God to go with you.

Appendix 9

Approval from Humanities and Social Sciences Ethical Review Committee

Application for Ethical Review ERN_16-1152

Samantha Waldron
Sent: July 17, 2017 4:18 AM
To: Deryn Guest
Cc: Sheryl Metzgner

Dear Dr. Guest

Re: "'Queer Freedom': Poststructural Christian Spiritual Transformations in LGBTQ Persons" Application for Ethical Review ERN_16-1152

Thank you for your application for ethical review for the above project, which was reviewed by the Humanities and Social Sciences Ethical Review Committee.

On behalf of the Committee, I confirm that this study now has full ethical approval.

I would like to remind you that any substantive changes to the nature of the study as described in the Application for Ethical Review, and/or any adverse events occurring during the study should be promptly bought to the Committee's attention by the Principal Investigator and may necessitate further ethical review.

Please also ensure that the relevant requirements within the University's Code of Practice for Research and the information and guidance provided on the University's ethics webpages (available at https://intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/finance/accounting/Research-Support-Group/Research-Ethics/Links-and-Resources.aspx) are adhered to and referred to in any future applications for ethical review. It is now a requirement on the revised application form (https://intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/finance/accounting/Research-Support-Group/Research-Ethics/Ethical-Review-Forms.aspx) to confirm that this guidance has been consulted and is understood, and that it has been taken into account when completing your application for ethical review.

Please be aware that whilst Health and Safety (H&S) issues may be considered during the ethical review process, you are still required to follow the University's guidance on H&S and to ensure that H&S risk assessments have been carried out as appropriate. For further information about this, please contact your School H&S representative or the University's H&S Unit at healthandsafety@contacts.bham.ac.uk.

Kind regards,

Miss Sam Waldron
Deputy Research Ethics Officer
Research Support Group
C Block Dome (room 132)
Aston Webb Building
University of Birmingham
Edgbaston B15 2TT
Tel: 0121 414 8101
Email: s.m.waldron@bham.ac.uk

Web: https://intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/finance/accounting/research-support-group/Research-Ethics

Please remember to submit a new Self-Assessment Form for each new project.

Click Ethical Review Process for further details regarding the University's Ethical Review process, or email ethics-queries@contacts.bham.ac.uk with any queries.

Appendix 10

Participant 4 – Interview 1

Legend: Capitalization = Emphatic expression; Commas (,) or Dashes (-) at the end of a line indicate an unfinished sentence that continues in the next paragraph starting with a lower-case letter; The number following P (n) = paragraph number on page; P = Participant (Mystès); Period (.) = 1 second pause; R = Researcher (Mystagogue); A word in square brackets [ ] is a descriptor or is implied.

R: [lights candle and shares a prayer] God, I thank you for [P]. May we awaken to the mystery of being here together today. May we enter the quiet immensity of your presence and be encouraged by the gifts you have to offer us. We humbly offer these requests in your name.

R: Well, welcome [P].

P1: Thank you, [R].

R: The question I have for you today is: Would you please share how your spiritual journey has unfolded, and how it has been affected by the ebb and flow of various experiences in your life?

P2: [pauses]

R: I can repeat it if you'd like,

P3: sure,

R: okay. [Repeats question]

P4: okay. Uh …….. I guess I'll start sort of at the beginning .. I think .. um, when I was younger .. uh, I don't think I really thought too much about God and - I mean we went to the United Church for a little bit; it was near our house, hum, but we didn't really stay going there and so it was kind of – I guess I didn't really think too much about it. And … um … I think (on my dad's side) when my grandfather died, we did sort of a Buddhist ceremony for his death. So it was like [I thought]: 'Well, maybe we're Buddhist!' [smiling and chuckling; R chuckles with P] But still, I didn't really know anything about Buddhism at that point either. And then … yeah, I think I just kind of – I know at some point I just determined that there was no God, that I just felt that … I felt like I didn't fit anywhere. I think maybe growing up in [western Canadian city] and feeling out of place as both like, mixed race ('cause there weren't really - there were other [racial group] students at school, but not a lot, and they usually hung out with each other, spoke their own language). And then with many [racial group] students I just felt like I didn't fit, in that way,

R: um hm,

P5: and then, I mean, I knew at a young age too that I was attracted to the same sex, and I just felt that I didn't fit into sort of the norm of … society . in a way,

R: mm. Do you remember at what age that might have been at? Like primary school?

Appendix 10

Participant 4 – Interview 1

Legend: Capitalization = Emphatic expression; Commas (,) or Dashes (-) at the end of a line indicate an unfinished sentence that continues in the next paragraph starting with a lower-case letter; The number following P (n) = paragraph number on page; P = Participant (Mystès); Period (.) = 1 second pause; R = Researcher (Mystagogue); A word in square brackets [ ] is a descriptor or is implied.

P1: yeah, probably elementary, maybe like grade 5 [age 10-11] or 6 [age 11-12], somewhere in that realm.

R: so you were aware of identity at multiple levels. Your identity in terms of ethnicity, and sexual orientation,

P2: yeah,

R: [and] then maybe 'believing' or 'non-believing',

P3: yeah, I just didn't really – I think, I remember in grade 5 [age 10-11] that The Gideons came and gave us a little talk and gave us all little Bibles ..

R: I remember that too [smiling and P and R chuckle at common practice in Canadian elementary schools],

P4: and I remember reading the beginning of it. And I forget what it said, but there was something that caught me. I remember that I would read through the Bible at that age, but just not really connecting it to God, but like [saying to myself]: 'Oh this is a good thing to read!'

R: hm!

P5: but then as I got older, and like more in junior high and high school (like grade 7 [age 12-12] to 12 [age 17-18] sort of), I think because I was questioning my identity and my place, just felt that there was no God or Higher Power [pauses to sip tea]. But yeah, it was INTERESTING because in high school my sister started going to a group called Young Life. And she actually became a Christian through that organization – which I didn't really realize. I just noticed that there was a change in her, that she had a certain joy and hope that I hadn't seen in her before. And there was part of me that wanted that as well. And kind of around the same time, I had a couple of friends who – there was a Lutheran Church right beside our high school and I had some friends there, and we would (one of them) we sort of had the same schedule. We had a break before lunch. So we would just go and hang out at that church and play games and make tea [giggles],

R: nice! [smiling]

P6: it was nice! [smiling] There would sometimes be, they would sometimes do a lunch hour Bible study that I would stay around for, which I remember like, at that time [saying]: 'It might be good to understand different religions and faiths.' And then, sort of with my sister persisting and asking that, I would go to Young Life (I didn't want to, but then I eventually did). And yeah, so it was kind of a combination of, I think, going to that Bible study with friends, and being struck by their honesty and the truth about what they were talking about; as well as my sister and seeing the change in her; and then starting to go Young Life and meeting other Christians. So it was at the end of high school that I gave my life to Christ,

R: okay,

Appendix 10

Participant 4 – Interview 1

Legend: Capitalization = Emphatic expression; Commas (,) or Dashes (-) at the end of a line indicate an unfinished sentence that continues in the next paragraph starting with a lower-case letter; The number following P (n) = paragraph number on page; P = Participant (Mystès); Period (.) = 1 second pause; R = Researcher (Mystagogue); A word in square brackets [ ] is a descriptor or is implied.

P1: yeah. And then the first church that I went to was a Mennonite Church that was like a church plant. I got involved in the College and Career and playing music there,

R: okay,

P2: and yeah, so it was all really positive. And I also became a Young Life leader .. at some point as well . in that. Um, so it was all these things, but still … I think … still having that struggle of .. identity,

R: okay,

P3: Um, I put, sort of my sexuality, I think I just kind of IGNORED IT … essentially ... because my impression at the time was that I couldn't be a Christian and be gay,

R: okay. And where did you get that impression?

P4: I think it was just stuff that I'd heard and just the way people would talk about, uh, homosexuality in a negative .. light,

R: okay,

P5: uh, and Young Life itself – that was an interesting thing, 'cause I would pray that it would just go away - that my feelings would change. And I think I was able to just SUPPRESS it for chunks of time. But then a couple friends had come out who were involved in Young Life as well – and they kind of dropped out of contact with people in the community because of,

R: because of that?

P6: yeah, because of the negative experiences. And I remember talking to the person in charge of the area for Young Life, asking what we should do … and he and the response (the organization itself, which is a good organization, but at the same time they would be a non-affirming organization in terms of LGBT). And you couldn't be a leader if you were gay. So [it was] because I was a leader, and I knew that I had these feelings, that I chose to just hide that. And I think . I think that was something that I did for a VERY LONG TIME – I mean I know that was something I did for a very long time - but it would, and I think it would come up in different ways.

R: what do you mean?

Appendix 10

Participant 4 – Interview 1

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P1: I dunno, I think it caused a lot of depression and self-hate .. WITHIN me,

R: mm, mm hmm. Having to hide that part of you,

P2: yeah, and kind of NEVER FEELING that I COULD BE MYSELF around people, um,

R: that would be hard,

P3: YEAH. But also at the same time [I was] REALLY .. REALLY pressing into KNOWING GOD and understanding him and … yeah. And I think there was also [my asking myself]: 'Like, why am I not changing?' Or times when I thought I DID but all it was, was that I had just been able to suppress it enough to be disconnected from my (sort of) my emotional self in a way,

R: so when you said that you raised it with the leader of Young Life about 'what we should do' what did you mean?

P4: Uh, I remember a friend and I and went (in regards to another friend who used to be involved in Young Life). We were just asking what the policies of Young Life were, and um, like we didn't know. I think experiencing that for the first time, and experiencing it as a CHRISTIAN, it was kind of like [we were wondering]: 'Are we supposed to say something to them? What are we supposed to do? How do we respond?'

R: right. Yeah, trying to figure that out for yourself,

P5: yeah. Yeah, and kind of, I think .. I think the common response that (probably less so now, but more back then, which would've been I don't know (how old am I now?) like 20, almost 20 years ago where [it] was still I think a lot of people still believed that it was a CHOICE that people were making .. um, was kind of the impression that I got. Like that SPECIFIC LIFESTYLE choice, and that they could change it if they wanted to,

R: right,

P6: but … yeah, and then I think, so that is sort of the beginning. And then I moved to (B.C. city) to go to school for a couple years. And sort of like you mentioned [during pre-interview discussion] about going to new places and having new perspectives. So that was interesting for my faith as well. Um, it was interesting 'cause I didn't think I would meet so many other Christians within the music program in [city],

R: hmm!

Appendix 10

Participant 4 – Interview 1

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P1: so I was able to get connected to a church and a small group there. And I think at that point I didn't want to face my sexuality, but people KNEW and sort of ASKED. I just DENIED IT - at that point,

R: who would've asked? Friends in the Christian community?

P2: actually friends that I went to music school with,

R: okay!

P3: who were just [who said], 'Oh, I thought you were gay!'

R: okay! Wow! And were THEY [gay]?

P4: no. Well .. actually, I think a couple of them WERE bi-[sexual] or have now come out as bi-[sexual]. Um. And then I started - there was a guy there that I became friends with and he kind of pursued me, and I think that was kind of the first time I .. EVER actually QUESTIONED my sexuality. Um .. and so, yeah, I mean we had a bit of a relationship. But at the same time I think a lot of it was being surprised by somebody who was just so WANTING to be with me (the compliments and all of that which was really nice). I was only 23 at the time. So that - I think that made me question my sexuality. But then also I felt really strongly about wanting to be with another CHRISTIAN, and so and then it was hard to kind of convey that to him without ... a bit of – like FALLING OUT – so, yeah,

R: because he wasn't a Christian?

P5: no, he wasn't. Um, he was open to .. I think he was open to it. But at the same time I think I also knew I had a crush on one of my friends at that time too. And I was like [said to self]: "I know this isn't right, he likes ME a lot more than, uh, than I like HIM [chuckles nervously],

R: yeah. It wasn't comfortable,

P6: yeah. And I had a couple friends who just said - who were like, "If this isn't (like you've said that you want to be with a Christian), so if that isn't what you're wanting to stick with, then you need to make a choice,

R: um hm,

P7: um … yeah, so that was an interesting time too, with a lot of struggle, kind of trying to work that out,

R: yeah, having to make choices is not always easy,

Appendix 10

Participant 4 – Interview 1

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P1: no, [chuckles; R joins her in laughter]. It's not,

R: [long pause]. It really does sometimes invite us to question who we are when we have to choose,

P2: hm!

R: 'cause if we want to be who we are, then we're sort of forced to choose. Unless we just abandon the responsibility to choose,

P3: right. Yeah …. Yeah and then there's the times when you think: 'I think I would do THIS,' but you don't really KNOW until you're in that situation,

R: yeah,

P4: 'cause it's a lot easier to say than do,

R: yeah,

P5: um, yeah. So .. the nice thing I think .. is that .. I think GOD has REALLY been a ROCK as far as the different times in my life. 'Cause I do remember - I remember having a dream (when I was in [rural city] and really struggling with this) of driving a car and the car went off the cliff and I was falling. And then the image I had was like this HAND that reached down and grabbed my arm in sort of that WAY [gestures to demonstrate] and that BEING GOD just being like [saying], 'I got you! It's gonna be okay,'

R: um hm. Um hm,

P6: which still sticks into my mind to this day ….

R: a reassuring -

P7: um hm, amidst -

R: what was happening -

P8: yeah. Yeah, and I was actually involved in two different churches when I was in [rural city], which was really interesting. I went to a Presbyterian Church for the second year that I was there ……. yeah, and I think I remember talking to somebody at that point about – and it wasn't about me, either, it was just a conversation about, a conversation she had had with somebody else about homosexuality. And she brought up the organization Living Waters, which was kind of the first time I'd heard of that. And that had kind of stayed in my head …

R: hm. I haven't heard about Living Waters, that organization,

Appendix 10

Participant 4 – Interview 1

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P1: yeah, they've changed their name in Canada. They did a bit of a re-brand [laughs]. They – I don't know how long they've been around - but I know it was an international thing. And there was actually an article in the Toronto Star [Toronto newspaper] I think, quite a few years back, where a reporter went to a meeting which was (the meetings are all very private and so it was kind of) and he wrote about how it was an organization that was turning, like trying to turn gays from being gay to straight,

R: okay,

P2: so it was a very controversial article. But the organization itself was about sexual identity and healing. And mostly what I had heard at different points was in regards to homosexuality. But it was – [her church] was actually involved with it. And I think a lot of people went there for VERY DIFFERENT reasons [pauses to think] .. what now? Then I moved back to [city in another western province] and I was deciding to move out here to [city where she now lives]. Um ….

R: what was it that caused you to decide to come out this way?

P3: it was just GOD [laughs aloud], actually,

R: um hm!

P4: I remember - and I think going back to [city of origin] and just feeling like it was too easy to get back into old routines. (Although it was nice. At that time I went to a SMALLER church community, um, that I REALLY enjoyed). But, yeah, but there was just this PULL. Um,

R: um hm,

P5: and saying that to some people was just too much, I think [chuckles], so I often -

R: they couldn't understand it?

P6: they were like, 'What does that mean?' [mimicking a questioning tone] – so often I would say I was gonna live out here for music and see how it goes. A few people that I had gone to music school with had moved out here as well, so I had some connections, and ..

R: that pull (the draw away from the same routine) you saw that as God, then?

Appendix 10

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P1: yeah, it seemed (like I thought) like, I'd always wanted to live in [urban city where she lives]. I'd thought about it. But there was definitely (I saw it as God saying), 'Yeah, it's time to go, time to check this out,'

R: um hm,

P2: um ….. yeah, and it was GOOD. Uh, I had a lot of great support in [city of origin]. I had a lot of great friends. And I think there was just part of me that wanted to try something new and be in that way of, like: 'Maybe I need to be away from all these people WHO KNOW ME SO WELL, [giggles] so that I can know myself a little bit better as well' .. I think, yeah. Um, and originally I didn't think - I was like: 'Well, I'll give it a go for a few years and see what happens,' [chuckles]

R: and now it's been 14 –

P3: like 14 years! [laughs]

R: wow,

P4: yeah,

R: and how has it been then?

P5: it's been GOOD, overall. I mean there's been a lot of struggle BECAUSE . I did move out here. So the first roommate that I had, um, was going to [theological seminary in her city of residence]. She was from the States, and going there [theological seminary]. And her - the main thesis that she was working on was 'homosexuality and the Christian response',

R: hm!

P6: which was an interesting – I was like [I said]: 'THIS is weird!' [chuckles]

R: that IS weird! [chuckling in agreement]

P7: okay, so at that point – I mean she had so many books just lying around the house. Um, it's unfortunate because I never really took the time to like TALK to her. But I think I was STILL in a space of not wanting to talk to anybody about my sexuality. But I did read - I read one of her books, and then I think I also knew at that point. I think God was [saying] like, 'Okay you need to start to look at this and to face this,'

R: okay! Yeah,

Appendix 10

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P1: yeah, and I was like [I said]: 'Okay!' So I told a FEW people, um some people in letters and others in person - um … which was all VERY scary -

R: uh, that must have been!

P2: of course, not knowing what their reactions would be - yeah.

R: right. Who did you begin with?

P3: Um, I wrote a good friend in [city of origin] and the pastor of the church I had gone to before I had moved out here. And then my sister down in [U.S.A.]. And I talked to a friend here (who was the first non-Christian). The other three were, are, all Christian),

R: okay,

P4: um, so, and I think my sister was the scariest one to write the letter to.

R: was she the one who had invited you to Young Life?

P5: yeah. And so, in our family she - her and I are the only 2 Christians and we (and we're only, I mean, we're about a year and half apart in age so) we're quite close). Um, but yeah, it was nice, the responses were all, fairly [nice] …. I think because of the book that I had READ, which was [in contrast] one about the fact that 'everyone can change!' [chuckles]

R: okay, [joins P in chuckling]

P6: which was [it made me think] like, 'Oh, okay! Well, that sounds … okay,' [doubtful tone and P and R chuckle] So in my mind, I was just having to create a space where I needed - there was some sort of block or something and I needed - to be turned toward God and Jesus and then stuff would change,

R: right,

P7: so I started telling people. But I still was quite CLOSED OFF within the church community and the church that I was going to,

R: did you tell your other sister and your parents?

P8: I did EVENTUALLY, not initially,

R: um hm. Were you concerned about their response as well?

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P1: not as much, um .. I think – I mean, a little bit concerned about my parents. But my other sister, not really (she's pretty open minded). I mean, it was nice – I can't remember the year that I eventually told my mom. She was out here for Mother's Day and I remember just talking to her. And she had wondered, but she wasn't sure. And then that's when I found out that her brother (my uncle) is gay. Um, which I kind'a wondered when I was younger .. um, but he was married and they had a kid, and then divorced. And I always thought it was interesting how we still stayed connected to his ex-wife,

R: hm!

P2: but now it kind'a makes a bit more sense. Um … yeah … so … so, that was interesting to hear too. Yeah, and maybe (I can't remember sort of, the timeline but) I started, I was going to one church here and then I ended up actually under the recommendation of [friend] to check out a new church plant that was actually out of [location] and is now [name] Church, which at the time had started just in the [local theatre]. And I was living in [region], so it was close,

R: okay,

P3: yeah. And so that was interesting, 'cause I started going to that church. I still didn't wanna tell people about my sexual orientation, but yeah, I got involved with the music. And then the wife of the worship pastor, she came up to me after church one day and just - she was like [said] – 'You don't necessarily seem like the type to go to a women's group, but I feel like I should be asking you.' She was starting a women's Bible study and she's like [said], 'I got the sense that I should ask you to be involved.' So I said yes, and started going to that study. And it kind of distilled over time (over the summer) into a smaller group of 5 of us. Um, and it was, that was really LIFE CHANGING, and sort of in that spiritual way where we started telling our personal stories. So a different person would go each time. And everybody kind of had the same thing of - what we did was we'd write it out and email it to people and then when we met next, we could sort of talk about everyone's story. And everybody ended up emailing something that they didn't think they would share. It was VERY personal,

R: wow! Wow!

P4: [giggles] and so, so I ended up sharing about the fact that I'm gay. And it was really -, it was interesting 'cause it was sort of the first time that I had done that with other Christians that I didn't know AS WELL, um,

R: um hm. How long had you been meeting with them up until that time?

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P1: I think we – well … I think I probably had a good .. it was near the end, so I probably had about 7 months, 8 months in,

R: okay. And you felt comfortable enough to do that,

P2: yeah, I think because everybody had kind of shared something BIG and PERSONAL that they – and everyone was kind of the same [saying], 'I didn't think I was gonna put this in there!' And I was just [said to myself] like: 'I just wanna be honest with these women.' And then a couple people were like [said], 'Well, have you tried .. praying (and this and that)?' And I was like [said]: 'Oh, yeah!' And the woman who was the leader - I remember her emailing back and just saying that the older she gets the more she knows it's about love, a lot of it's about love. Um, and I think writing that out to them made me want to tell a few other people THAT, I think, as well, that time. But still it wasn't like something I shared with the broader community in that church,

R: I'm just thinking, you know, of that invitation that you heard from God, about, 'it's time to deal with this' (with regards to moving from [city of origin] to [city of residence]), no?

P3: yeah,

R: that's interesting,

P4: mm hm,

R: that this group allowed you to begin to do that,

P5: yeah. That IS interesting. Yeah, I think that's been part of the process of me being out here, like I still see it as God pulled me out here, and drew me out here, and maybe part of that purpose is being able to confront my sexuality in that way … um ….

R: mm hm. Were you aware of the effects on you of not sharing it before? Like, you mentioned that initially - that some depression, and self-hate,

P6: yeah. I mean, I - … yeah,

R: did you make that connection back then?

P7: I'm trying to think if I did. I think part of me did. And I, yeah, I just always knew I'd always had kind of a melancholy disposition. Um, but yeah, I know that there were some nights that were pretty hard, where life just didn't make sense to me. Um . and there was . yeah, I knew that that was connected on a certain level to the view of myself and my self-worth and just not feeling like – just a lot of doubt and just not liking myself and who I was because of THAT. And probably because it's been held in so tight,

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R: yeah. And I guess I hear an invitation from God to start liking yourself in that. Not even so much a statement of: 'Well lady, you gotta deal with this, you know!' but more like [God's saying]: 'I want you to like YOU,'

P1: yeah,

R: that's what I hear,

P2: yeah. Yeah, I think it took a long time for that to actually flesh itself out. But I believe you're right .. And then there was a bit of falling out I guess, at [church she was attending] with - the worship pastor got FIRED. And so essentially, that meant him and his wife were no longer part of the church,

R: okay. And that was the woman who invited you?

P3: yeah. And I mean that was a HUGE – and I think there's still a lot of brokenness to THIS DAY. And that was probably 9 years ago, 10 years ago - and I ended up leaving the church as well just after talking to the lead pastor and getting a sense of what the vision was, and realizing that it wasn't something that I was wanting to be a part of. (Which in the end, I mean, is good. They're very outspoken about where they stand as far as homosexuality; and they're also – they're a Mennonite Brethren Church – so women in leadership was also not a big thing for them either). So at that point I actually, I think I was tired. I didn't want to do the church shopping thing, like going around investing energy. The nice thing was that the women's group that I was a part of, we still would meet,

R: oh. Stayed together?

P4: yeah,

R: wow,

P5: which was really a blessing I think, for everyone,

R: uh huh,

P6: yeah so there was about a year and half – I think I was tired of that inward battle of my sexuality and my faith and feeling CONSTANTLY like I had to choose one or the other. So I kind of took a year and a half of a break [chuckling],

R: a sabbatical! [chuckling]

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P1: But then one, that September after I had moved into the house I'm in, I was like [said]: 'I'm gonna go for a bike ride!' And I ended up walking out of the house and just [got] this sense from God of: 'Why don't you go to that evening service?'[at church where interim pastor was] 'Cause it was that time [of day]. And I was like [said]: 'Oh ….. o-kay,' [mimicks her tone of reluctance, and chuckles; R joins in with a chuckle]. And it was interesting (I don't remember actually if it was ON that walk or IN the service, BUT there was a moment where God was just like [said]: 'I accept you FOR WHO YOU ARE,' and that was HUGE,

R: umm,

P2: That [I] was [said] like: 'WHAT!?'

R: wow!

P3: and there was part of me too [that] was like: 'Well what does that mean for relationships?' And [then] I was like [said], 'Actually, let's leave that! –

R: that was a little bit too much! [laughing with R]

P4: .. I'll take the acceptance!' [P and R laugh]

R: wow!

P4: so that was a big turning point,

R: were you overwhelmed with that feeling?

P5: I think I was. I remember - I'm pretty sure I left - I remember going to the service. The evening pastor at that time, the message really struck me. And I remember that I left before it was over because I was just SO EMOTIONAL,

R: mm mm,

P6: I was just like [said]: 'I don't wanna cry in this room full of strangers!' even though church should be a place where you should be FREE to cry. Yeah, and then it was interesting, 'cause then I was just drawn back to [that church]. I just wanted to keep going back. And every week it was kind of like, I don't know, in a way it was like walking back to GOD. I wasn't running,

R: mm,

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P1: I was just kind of shuffling through the leaves,

R: mm hm,

P2: but yeah, it was a nice sort of transition I think, into that,

R: hmm. What do you think made you want to pretend you didn't know God during that year and a half of staying away? What made you identify that struggle with GOD as a person (as opposed to [with] people)?

P3: I think because I had always connected (since I became a Christian) just that fact of like, 'Well now that I'm a Christian, I can't be gay,'

R: okay,

P4: and the fact that nothing had changed at that point,

R: you had received that message from God?

P5: no, I think that's what I received from people,

R: people, okay,

P6: and because I didn't really look into the context of the [biblical] passages either. So it was just like what people were saying. And them throwing out this passage and saying like, 'this is what it SAYS, so that's how you have to BE,'

R: so when God told you that God accepted you for who you were and that was sort of like an overwhelming affirmation, do you remember thinking then: 'What I've been hearing is not from God?' Like, 'What I've been hearing people say was not equal to what God is saying?'

P7: yeah, I don't know if I actually made that connection,

R: okay,

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P1: I think it was more … I think it was more also what I - I think I looked at it more like I was struggling with MYSELF. Like, I was fighting MYSELF, and it wasn't how I SAW MYSELF. And what I THOUGHT WHO I was SUPPOSED TO BE wasn't WHO GOD SAW. And that it was more me trying to live up to an expectation that I'd put on myself,

R: on myself. Right,

P2: as opposed to just letting go and letting God do his thing,

R: right. Right,

P3: yeah [pause],

R: um hm. So you let God back in,

P4: yeah,

R: yeah,

P5: which is always great! [chuckles and R joins in chuckling]

R: I'm sure God likes that! [P & R continue to laugh]

P6: [pause] and yeah, and then … so then started going to [the church she mentioned] and then wanted to get involved. So got involved with the worship - like playing music. Um …. and then … I guess, I think it's 3 years (in 2015, maybe) I went to …. no, actually - no there's some more stuff before that - so then going to [church] and then I started a business with someone as well, which was a big struggle,

R: hm, what kind of a business?

P7: uh, a coffee shop,

R: okay! Wow! That's big – in [city where she lives]! [P and R laugh]

P8: yeah, that was a BIG POINT. I always forget about – it was about 4 years that I did it,

R: mm hm,

P9: my business partner and I - and I mean, it ended . well - we're on good terms, but for MOST of the time that we were in it, there was just A LOT of struggle. We're TWO VERY different people. And that was a hard – I remember thinking before we started that business that I was thinking of going into counselling (but then we started the business and it was like, 'I don't have time'),

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R: mm. Mm hm,

P1: Um … and then, maybe a year or so into that I started dating someone that I had met who was going to [her church] and that relationship was – that wasn't a GREAT relationship. Um, it was with someone who she herself was struggling a lot with sexual identity. She grew up as a Christian … um, it was never really - she was always QUESTIONING. So it was always kind of an off-and-on relationship,

R: um hm,

P2: and kind of like - I think I was in a place where I was just um, too blind to see the truth of the situation. But I had also THEN started counselling. That was maybe a year or so into the business,

R: okay,

P3: um, which was really, it was great. It was - the person living across from me at that time had been taking, she was like a psychology major and she had started - counselling with someone. So she gave me the name of this woman. She found her to be really great - and so that was a GREAT experience of actually (I think that was the point of a lot of stuff coming out of understanding. Like that I had all this self-worth that I needed to build up because of all these things that had happened in the past in my childhood),

R: right,

P4: and [I] even did a couple of counselling sessions with my mom and,

R: mm!

P5: and that was great. Yeah. And I think it was a great time of feeling strong in who I was, and feeling strong in my faith. And then the relationship that I had with this woman at the time, it was just - I think it kind of turned all of that a 180 [degrees]. 'Cause the longer I was in relationship with her – and even my counsellor she just kept saying, 'You can't, you really shouldn't be with someone who can't be committal, and who, it sounds like is being very manipulative' – and yeah. And so there was a lot of stuff that I didn't see in the moment. And um … I mean we eventually broke up FOR GOOD, and after that happened … uh, the January after that happened (which would have been January 2014 or 2015. 2015 I guess) I went to the GCN conference (The Gay Christian Network),

R: hm, is that a Canadian?

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P1: no, they started in the States, they're about 12-ish years old,

R: okay, okay,

P2: It started as on online forum by a guy named Justin Lee,

R: okay,

P3: um, he - it was just meant to be a place where people could question and talk and discuss. And on the forum they had the two - two sides essentially of like, 'affirming' and 'non-affirming'. So they do a conference every year in January, um, and it was being (that year) [held] in [city in U.S.A.],

R: okay!

P4: so it was nice and close,

R: yeah!

P5: so I got a ticket and went down. And I went down TOTALLY on my own,

R: wow!

P6: I didn't know …

R: anybody?

P7: ANYBODY,

R: wow!

P8: I didn't know what to expect. I was kind of afraid. And it was interesting, 'cause I had all this hatred and anger for THAT RELATIONSHIP [that I had been in] and towards that person. Um, I remember asking people to pray about that. I really wanted to let that go. And on the train going down there was just this PEACE,

R: wow!

P9: and this WEIGHT that was lifted,

R: uh huh!

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P1: and being at the conference was actually LIFECHANGING. Like people talk about that, but to actually EXPERIENCE IT. It was the first time that I EVER FELT COMPLETELY COMFORTABLE just being BOTH a CHRISTIAN and GAY, and just ME,

R: wow!

P2: and the conference itself was just AMAZING. And yeah, there were people who - some people who would be on the side of being celibate and single, and then other people who were affirming. It was just a GREAT PLACE TO BE ABLE TO DISCUSS AND TO HEAL. A lot of parents, they did a whole thing where if you were a parent there you could wear a button that said: 'free hugs'. So if you were a kid there who had gotten kicked out from home and needed a hug from a parent, you could get one! [chuckling]

R: wow!

P3: which was really SWEET,

R: that WAS sweet,

P4: yeah, so in that whole conference was really - there were people from [city of residence] there. There was actually someone from [church], and …

R: did you know they were gonna be there?

P5: no. I had never met this person. And they actually went to the evening service as well,

R: okay, wow!

P6: but they're more secretive. Like a lot of people that go to the conference is kind of a mix. Some people tell people and some people don't,

R: yeah, yeah, yeah,

P7: um, and then [there was] another person who I've stayed friends with too who lives out here. And it was funny 'cause each of them (I had played in the Christmas concert at [church]) and they were like [said], 'Oh! You were the [instrument] player!' [P and R chuckle]

R: wow,

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P1: isn't that funny? And that was a huge turning point, and I came back from that VERY - I think VERY EMPOWERED and very - that was the point when I was like [decided]: 'I DON'T CARE WHO KNOWS!'

R: mm!

P2: and just started really sharing with people about where I was at, and finding out that a lot of people at my church were either on the fence about that issue, or were very supportive and affirming. And just had a lot of messages of LOVE,

R: wow,

P3: it was GREAT,

R: wow. And I'm thinking back to the feeling in primary school, I think. That there wasn't a place where you belonged,

P4: um, yeah,

R: and I'm hearing THIS and thinking, 'Wow!' You know, from that time (all that time) until then. How many years was that? How old were you -

P5: well I think … I don't think -

R: when you went to that conference?

P6: that conference? I was like 35? 36?

R: mm hm, mm hm. That was many years… that's nice …

P7: yeah. It is nice,

R: how did your dad respond to your coming out? I was curious too, about your parents' response to the multiple identities that you have as a Christian, as a gay woman. (And I assume that the people at this conference received you as a mixed-race woman as well). Um, so how did your dad respond to your other two identities?

P8: yeah, well, I think him and my mom sort of struggled when both my sister and I told them we were Christians, 'cause I think my mom's idea of Christian was just – wasn't necessarily a way that you lived, but just - like, 'I believe in God' and that's that,

R: mm hm,

Appendix 10

Participant 4 – Interview 1

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P1: and my dad, I don't think, I think maybe he struggled with it, but he never really vocalized that. Um, and as far as me being gay, they just want their kids to be happy is their kind of thing. I've been really lucky in that sense,

R: yeah, that's nice,

P2: and my girlfriend came out to [city of origin] the past two years for Christmas, so that was really nice. So they've gotten to know her as well,

R: mm, that's great. So your whole nuclear family anyway, is accepting of who you are,

P3: yeah,

R: yeah. Yeah. So you don't have to divide yourself into different identities,

P4: yeah, it's very nice,

R: yeah, yeah. That's nice [pause]

P5: yeah, I don't know if I should [questions about the time remaining] –

R: is there anything else that you want to add to sort of round together, round things up before we –

P6: finish up?

R: yeah,

P7: yeah. Well, it's kind of, there's new – I've always known that [my church] is connected to the Alliance [Christian Missionary and Alliance] and therefore a non-affirming church. Um, which never really - I think because I was always on the worship team it never really - I didn't question it too much. Um, until more recently when I heard that some other people who were LGBT weren't allowed to serve in different areas. Then I started to look into it, and yeah, it's complicated. But right now, like the lead pastor has a few sort of more idealistic views of what he'd like the church to be, but because they're in the Alliance they can really only operate within that kind of parameter. And so now the leadership agreements that people have to sign all say that you have to believe that marriage is between a man and a woman. So I've stepped down from serving because I can't sign that piece of paper,

R: okay, okay,

Appendix 10

Participant 4 – Interview 1

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P1: so that's sort of, yeah, I've never really had to - I think that's because I've never really been OUT at any other church - I never had to deal with that,

R: um hm,

P2: so now I'm actually really sort of dealing with that question - how to be a part of the community without being able to serve,

R: um hm. Right .. And you also said though that you wanted to be honest – in the past you wanted to be honest. So now, you're being honest. You're able to be honest. And how does that feel?

P3: that feels good [giggles]. Yeah,

R: okay, okay.

P4: it's much more freeing,

R: okay,

P5: but yeah, and then just frustrating - just how there's all these parameters,

R: um mm. So being honest has raised some challenges,

P6: yeah,

R: some DIFFERENT challenges than being maybe a little bit more discreet had [raised],

P7: yeah,

R: so it's sort of forcing you to take other actions as well. To choose. To make other choices as well. It's interesting how … you know, having to protect yourself, to take care of yourself by being discreet in the past - I mean, it was where you were. You couldn't do anything else. And over time, you felt invited by God to come out and be more vocal about who you are. And it's interesting how the challenges keep arising. But they also invite you to stand. They invite you to be a certain type of person. It's interesting …..

P8: yeah, it is interesting ……. good to think about …….

R: sometimes we, we encounter these things and we think, "Oh, man! This is a pain. I wish it weren't like this. Or, why don't these people change?" But sometimes we don't see that by confronting these differences, we are also forced to change. Forced to let somethings go. Forced to walk in other directions. And sometimes we don't see that as very good,

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P1: yeah,

R: but maybe sometimes it is,

P2: yeah,

R: just a thought [chuckles],

P3: a good thought. Yeah.

R: well, we have more conversations ahead of us. So this sounds like a good place to wind down for today. Does that seem okay?

P4: yeah,

R: okay. Well let me end with a blessing. And then I'll extinguish our candle and we'll wind up.

P5: okay,

R: [P] may you experience the grace to live a life that you love. May you have the courage to follow its's path, and may you do what you are uniquely shaped to do [blows out candle].

Appendix 11

Participant 4 – Interview 3

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R: [lights candle] God, I thank you for [P]. And may your love which brought [P] into being, into becoming who she is meant to be, guide us into the truths concerning the person she is becoming. We humbly offer these requests in your name. Amen.

R: [P] Would you please share about your sense about the person you are becoming, and how your relationship with God and others is related to this?

P1: Um, hm. The first thing that came to mind is becoming a woman of FREEDOM. Which is actually the name of a book that we went through with that woman's group I had talked about. And, yeah, I think that's the continuation, the ongoing process of letting go of my own expectations about who I thought I was supposed to be as well as the perceptions of other people, and who they thought – or what was placed ON me in that sense,

R: who you thought you were supposed to be .. Who did you think you were supposed to be?

P2: I think there's a lot of different moments in time where I thought I'd go one direction or anther, or that - as far as my sexuality - that that would CHANGE, or that I would just be single and sort of have that as somewhat of as a cross to bear, I guess,

R: hm,

P3: and I think, yeah I think .. as time went on, a lot of it was to do with self-acceptance and realizing (and I think I said this before about) I think I had some idea of who I was SUPPOSED to be, and how I was SUPPOSED to act once I gave my life to Christ. And I think for a long time it was a lot of ME just acting, and not really GIVING UP or LETTING GO of who I ACTUALLY AM to God so that I can BE (that sort of cyclical thing of releasing to him so that he can work THROUGH me),

R: um hm. So you were sort of - you had an idea of who you were to be and you were trying to be that person on your own,

P4: yeah,

R: and you weren't open to who God wanted to make you into - to mould you into,

P5: yeah, and I think there were moments where I intellectually, I knew that that's part of the process (is letting go and letting God do his thing). But then actually living it out I think, took a lot longer for me to be able to recognize that there were still things that I was trying to do on my OWN without him. And I'm sure there's still more things that will come up in the future. Um,

R: did it ever occur to you that this image you had of yourself … um, was getting in the way of letting go?

Appendix 11

Participant 4 – Interview 3

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P1: I don't know if it did when I was IN it, in the moment. Or at least I don't recall it being something I was really aware of,

R: how did you come to the place where you realized that the ideas that you had weren't what God was creating you to be?

P2: I think there were sort of, I think there was an underlying knowledge that ('cause I know there were different times when people would sort of suggest like going to certain groups (or whatever) in relation to CHANGE (I think because it was such a common thing for people to think, well, that's a CHOICE that you've made. And if you pray about it or if you go to this group that you can change). And I think I NEVER EVER, I don't think I really ever had a strong sense that that's what God wanted,

R: okay!

P3: I think, and I think over time, that that GREW,

R: okay,

P4: and … and then . and so I think that was more I think, a lot of ME thinking that I had to change because of what other people were TELLING me. But yet not necessarily really encompassing that or thinking that that's TRULY the way it was going to be. And so I think there was, I think for such a long time I just figured that I would be single. And I think reading some different literature just about – 'cause there was stuff about people CHANGING; but then also about if you DON'T CHANGE (and) living single and celibate. And that grew. And I think that was something that I grasped onto MORE than actually the thought of change, [of] changing who I am,

R: okay, okay. And was that similar to your pastor's [in home city] idea that you wouldn't [then] have to address your sexuality and intimacy?

P5: yeah. Yeah, which was a good point,

R: it was easier to do THAT?

P6: yeah, I think it was .. in some ways. Easier (at least I thought it was easier) than having to actually deal with emotions and with the question of: "Okay if I'm gay and affirming what does that MEAN? How can that be reconciled with my FAITH and does that mean I have to make a CHOICE between my faith and God - oh, SORRY - my faith and sexuality?

R: right,

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Participant 4 – Interview 3

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P1: so … I forget what I was thinking .. so at the point where I was walking to [church] that evening and God said he'd accepted me, that was, I mean that was a lightbulb of: 'Oh! This has been ME! Like I've been fighting MYSELF this whole time!' So that was very LIBERATING .. And I think – I mean it's the ongoing daily process that every Christian kind of goes through - making the choices of WAKING UP, and pursuing that relationship with God at the same time that he's pursuing US. And um, you think - it was really helpful reading uh, some of the books by David Benner? Brenner?

R: Benner,

P2: *The Gift of Being Yourself* – and uh, that one being sort of, the MOST impactful - but I think (it was a series of three, *Surrender to Love* and then *Desiring God's Will*), and they're all very similar, but it was GREAT in reading those and sort of PURSUING a greater UNDERSTANDING and relationship WITH God as well as (um, he talks about, 'the more we know God, the more we know ourselves,' and the reverse). And I think that's sort of the ongoing process. And so, yeah, I think it's …. becoming a woman of freedom is being able to HAVE that process be a daily practice. With the knowledge that it's not always steady and it's gonna be up and down,

R: right,

P3: yeah, I think knowing that there's so much more to LEARN and that there's many different ways to GROW, but definitely, in this point in life [I'm] feeling a lot more free to release a lot of who I thought I would be and focus more on just that UNDERSTANDING. And hoping that as I focus on the understanding of WHO God is and WHO I am that life will sort of play itself out how it's supposed to .. uh, yeah. And just being – I mean it's much more FREEING being open about my sexuality, um, than NOT! [chuckles]

R: yeah, definitely,

P4: um … yeah,

R: do you feel .. like - or did you feel your SELF being grateful to YOU for accepting HER? Do you know what I mean?

P5: for accepting who I was myself,

R: yeah, because before, you had to deny her,

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P1: um hm,

R: [deny] a part of her in certain contexts and not let people know that she was gay. And when you decided: 'No, I'm gonna start acknowledging MORE of who she is to people – I'm going to BROADEN my description of who [P] is to people to INCLUDE sexuality', did you at all FEEL differently? Did you feel a sense of being connected with that person?

P2: I don't know if I've actually THOUGHT about it! [laughs] But um .. I mean, probably did, but maybe thought about it more as just connecting to who I – YEAH! (I guess I did) – connecting to who I am and WAS AUTHENTICALLY as a FULL person,

R: as a FULL person,

P3: yeah. And not as, not feeling like I had to HIDE parts of myself which - the interesting thing being that I don't know until I went to that Gay Christian Network Conference, I don't think, I NEVER KNEW what that feeling WAS to just BE and not have to worry about that struggle of kind of hiding myself. Because I think I had done it for so long, it just was, that was NATURAL. And I didn't think about it. And then going to that conference and experiencing what LIFE and COMMUNITY is like BEING OPEN and it not being an issue as well. And not having to be sort of ON GUARD for what potentially could be asked or brought up,

R: um hm. right, right. Yeah ……

P4: yeah [pause -14 seconds]. Probably being able to let go of the shame, and realizing that I WAS OKAY was also .. really FREEING,

R: um hm, um hm,

P5: [pause for 14 seconds]

R: yeah holding onto shame is a heavy burden. 'Cause it has to do with who were ARE as people and it comes from the idea that we are NOT okay. And that would be a very heavy burden, like, how to get rid of that [burden] then? So having that go away would be a great relief,

P6: yeah. And I think it was helpful that … (I mean before and after) that when talking to people and being MORE OPEN about it, that a lot of the people I talked to were just so encouraging. And even a couple people I know who are hesitant about where they stood on LGBTQ and Christianity - one of the women from that women's group, uh, she told me - like we met for coffee and she told me (this is when I was dating somebody else and I just wanted to be OPEN about that). And um, so before we met she told me that she just really (because of how she was brought up in her understanding about Christianity), she wanted to pray about like [the fact that] she wasn't sure if it was right, like how to … I think she had felt like being in a

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same sex relationship was always WRONG. And she started to pray about what she would say to me as far as her thoughts on that. And she said that all she got in response in terms of what she should say to me is, 'love'. That God told her to just LOVE ME – which was . REALLY cool to hear [smiles and chuckles; R joins in on the chuckling]

R: was that a surprise to hear?

P1: yeah. I wasn't entirely sure when she was starting to tell me where it was gonna go,

R: yeah, yeah.

P2: so it was a relief. And coming from HER SPECIFICALLY (cause there are other instances in our group where we would talk about, and I forget what), and [knowing that] she has always been someone when we have talked about stories who's been very connected herself (with the Spirit) and with sort of hearing and listening to God in different times and areas of her life. And so, knowing a bit of that background, and knowing that she's had that experience BEFORE - of just really a strong sense of him [God] speaking to her, or responding to her - THAT held a certain amount of weight to it too,

R: are you putting less weight on what people think and more on what you think or what you are impressed about?

P3: mm. Yeah, probably. I think in general, I mean, I think it's always great to have feedback in what other people are SEEING in your life. And obviously if there are NEGATIVE patterns and people are saying the same thing, you want to pay attention to that. But I think as well, a general thing as I get older is that I DO care less about (not so much how other people feel, and like react), I guess it's like understanding that that's their position, that's their stance on something. And it's not - I mean, they have their reason for believing what they believe. I think I worry less about what people think of me and it's more trying to hold on to the sense of SELF that comes from God and not from other people. And ….. yeah, so then bringing up - being able to question like, signing the leadership document at my church as far as serving. And being able to openly talk about that with our community pastor and the worship pastor in the evening service. And feeling very open with other people who serve. And then when they are asking WHY I'm not playing, saying, 'Well it's because of this and this,' [laughs] and being okay MYSELF with that. Not knowing, I mean, I don't know what every single person's stance is. And over the years I've been SURPRISED in thinking that some people who I thought would be more conservative are actually more liberal in certain views and vice versa. Um, so just REALLY entering into those conversations with no expectation of what - which way it's gonna go and just hoping that the relationship we have is WORTH something. And if there's a disagreement in what they believe versus what I believe, just hoping that there'd be an openness to dialogue that .. yeah,

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Participant 4 – Interview 3

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R: huh. Sounds like a real, um a position of open hands - like not clinging to anything where it comes to acceptance of people, but really allowing yourself in a risky way to go with where people are; and to dare to see where they are; and to engage with them as they allow themselves to engage with you. So it sounds quite freeing as well as scary and a way of commitment, a way of commitment to see ` how things will go without guarantees. And that sounds like a posture of letting go of attachments. Excessive attachments, is not just a Buddhist concept, but it's also an Ignatian concept in terms of allowing ourselves to be free from holding on to any one thing to determine our well-being …

P1: huh!

R: yeah, very interesting. It's not easy,

P2: no! [laughs]

R: no, it's not easy, but it does SPEAK OF a GROUNDEDNESS in something DEEPER because you are able to allow yourself to go with what happens and deal with the reality; to deal with the present; to choose; and to respond as you want to be,

P3: yeah,

R: to me that sounds like the spiritual life,

P4: hm!

R: it sounds like the crux of what we are to be doing,

P4: yeah. I mean, It's definitely not – always how it's played out! [laughs]

R: [joins in the laughter] no it's not easy! No, but there is a tension, right? There is a tension there. BUT it also sounds very much alive,

P5: um,

R: it doesn't sound like you're 'going with the flow', or you're choosing just to give up and relinquish responsibility. But it sounds very real,

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P1: yeah,

R: how do you think God sees this woman of freedom?

P2: [laughs] I dunno some times!

R: [chuckling with P] you don't know some times!

P3: I think the hope is that he sees, he sees this woman as a truth-seeker and as someone who ..…is hopefully living out the life that we're supposed to be living out as Christians, as followers of Christ in that daily walk,

R: hm,

P4: um, and I think within that truth then there's the authenticity of who we are as humans and our failures in that pursuit of holiness. Um that - I mean it's all connected, and it's all, yeah - I mean, I hope he sees his CHILD .. um looking up at him and walking alongside him,

R: Mm hm. Mm hm … Hm … Do you think God looks very much at your failures? I just ask that because you mentioned failures in being human,

P5: uh! Yeah [giggles]. I don't think he thinks TOO much about it,

R: okay,

P6: um, I mean I think that's 'but for the grace of God' – I think there's so many things that we (and I know in the past and certainly at different points in life where you think that something is so. I dunno, we put so much stress on ourselves (or I put stress on myself) over, over an action or a thought that in the larger scheme of things is a BLIP! [laughs] And there's a woman that (she's sort of like my pseudo-grandmother and I try to see her a couple times a month and do her laundry and vacuuming. She's 97),

R: wow,

P7: and I mean there have been various times when she'll just talk about how at her age there are so many things that she thought were important when she was younger that AREN'T [chuckles]. And sort of she'll talk about the different times where people didn't talk about mental illness or being sick in any way (like everything was so, kind of 'hush hush'). She's like [says], but now everything [chuckles] (people talk about whatever); it doesn't matter. And I think that's just a normal process as we, as we get older - is recognizing I guess, 'Oh! That didn't really matter as much as I thought,' or like, yeah. So it's kind of – I don't think God necessarily is focusing on those - I think it's more a self-awareness of seeing the weaknesses we have in ourselves as humans - not being perfect. But then, at the same time being able to not only receive grace,

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but to be gracious TO OURSELVES in those moments where we FEEL like we haven't towed the line, or have made a choice that didn't seem like it was necessarily the right choice,

R: is that happening more? That you are being gracious towards yourself?

P1: I think so, yeah. I would say yes. Um … I don't think I beat myself up as much as I used to … and I, yeah. I mean it's helpful. I'm thankful to God for the people that he's brought into my life, like [97 year-old pseudo-grandmother] who's able to have that wisdom of somebody who's lived for nearly 100 years,

R: wow,

P2: as well as just – and I think about this often - like just the people that I HAVE in my life who have been so IMPORTANT to me. I just feel BLESSED to have friends who CARE and who have supported me, just in life, over time. I mean some of the relationships that I've had for a LONGER period of time of course, have gone through different phases. But then it's nice as the other person grows and as I grow, just [to have] that continual SUPPORT for each other in different ways is really HELPFUL along the way,

R: now that sounds like *becoming.* Sounds like a journey of moving towards who you were meant to be as a human. And I think the idea that it's not a big deal to God (our frailties as humans) is a gracious thought. Not being consumed by the little things. Can you imagine what your life would be [like] if you were consumed by all the things you didn't do? [P and R laugh together] Sound familiar? [R adds, jokingly]. So God looks at you then, graciously. Seeing who you want to be. Seeing your effort. Seeing your heart, your heart towards God,

P3: yeah, [Pauses for 20 seconds]. And then the other part [of the interview question] was, how friends - ?

R: how friends and other people contribute to that,

P4: yeah. Yeah, I think it's just when friends and other people are contributing to it, it's the encouragement we can give each other at various points. And just being able to have AUTHENTIC relationships with people, uh, like, THEIR honesty about THEIR lives, um, being able to connect with THAT. And me being honest back - just that nice reciprocal acknowledgement of life. Um, yeah, and, I think people have been very - like I said, having good friends (like people that I've know for a LONG period of time, and people that I've known for a shorter period of time) and just learning new things as well along the way …. and being surprised. Like, and I'm an introvert so I DO like my alone time and spending time with ME [chuckles]. Um, and I think I'm always surprised when (cause I feel like every now and then - I have this point where I feel like I have too many friends [chuckles], like I know too many people! And then like, [I ask myself]: "How [is it possible that I] will I ever meet MORE people?" Just the thought of NEW friends and NEW relationships just seems inconceivable. And then I'll join this small group and there are new relationships out of that; or a different job. I mean so many times I go into a job and I think, you know, [I'll

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have] fun with this people, but [I'm] not gonna have long term friends. And then you end up having long term friends [laughs]!

R: [joins P in laughter] and that surprises you!

P1: and I mean I think it's just sort of, I don't – it's a funny thing, because my girlfriend is much more like active in trying to keep up with relationships. Whereas, like I could go – there are people in this city that I could go a year, and we don't hang out. And then we DO and that's just how it IS. And it's fine! 'Cause it's so much to do with just space and time and kind of who's there in that MOMENT, um … but, yeah it's an interesting. I think there's also, when there's people that I've known for a long time, uh, and you, like I remember them and I think about them often. And then to actually be in their PRESENCE and realize that they bring out something in me (something that other people DON'T), I think that's also helpful in recognizing that. I mean, that's what people do in a way (is), we all kind of it's like everyone having that role to play, and you getting (like, myself getting) to experience different AREAS of who I am sort of through OTHER people. And then like being able to remember like, 'Oh yeah! This is how it feels to be around you and I LOVE it, and it's great!' And then with other people (especially when people come into your life at different stages) and just, it's interesting what different aspects or different perspectives they'll bring into WHO YOU ARE as a person - and potentially challenge who you THOUGHT you were as well! [chuckles]

R: right, yeah. I was thinking that as well; that people bring out the shadow sides of us too that might be areas to explore if not now, at other times whenever it arises; that all of those are helpful in opening our eyes to different parts of ourselves,

P2: yeah,

R: I remember in Benner's book when he describes Thomas in *The Gift of Being Yourself*; do you remember that part where he – no I'm sorry, not Thomas, Peter – where he said that when Peter said to Christ, 'No, I'll never deny you!' that Peter hadn't yet met that part of himself. And that incident, that encounter with Christ, actually caused him to see that shadow side that he was unaware of (needed to see in order to *become*, to develop),

Appendix 11

Participant 4 – Interview 3

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P1: yeah, it's interesting how it happens. How we can be so sure, like Peter like, 'Oh gosh, no! I'd NEVER deny you!' And then when it's in your face, how will you react can be completely different,

R: yeah, and I think what we're saying (like Peter, and we all do it) is [actually], 'I don't know that part of me that will deny you yet. I haven't yet acknowledged or accepted that part of me yet' …… What you say reminds me of what [G] said about the things that you bring out for her, the gifts that you have in terms of raising issues, and being active and responsive to social issues. And how sometimes she THINKS about them but she may not ACT on them. And how THAT part of YOU brings up parts of herself that she may want to pay attention to,

P2: mm hm,

R: when I was listening to her talk about you, I thought: 'What I nice picture of the body of God's children, the Body of Christ,' (as we believe), how we can see all these different gifts that people have that we don't have, and how we can benefit from them. She struggled to call you a RESOURCE [P giggles], but you know, it sounds like she was describing your area of strength or gift, something that comes naturally to you. And it was a nice image for me of how complementary community can be if we can recognize what other people have to offer us,

P3: yeah,

R: it was very nice …. how was it for you listening to that?

P4: it was HUMBLING and encouraging, and inspiring – I was like inspired (by how she saw me) to be MORE THAT PERSON, [giggles], I guess!

R: okay! Yeah!

P5: yeah, I mean, [I was] slightly uncomfortable. 'Cause it's like - just her talking about me and just feeling .. I dunno … just kind of awkward [giggles] just sitting there. But, yeah, I mean it was SO encouraging, just to hear how so many things I didn't even THINK ABOUT as affecting her so DEEPLY, to know that they DID, and how appreciative SHE IS of these different qualities that she sees in me. It was … yeah, it was really lovely [giggles],

R: are you concerned at all about your church, the situation you're in right now? I just wondered,

P6: yeah. I - concerned .. I don't know. I think I - it's a different place for me 'cause I've never, I've never had to actually FACE THAT in a church. I've always been able to - because I wasn't open [about my sexual orientation] - I've always been serving in SOME way, and usually through music. So it's … yeah, it's kind of, it's something new that I'm exploring as far as a part of me feeling like I've spent a lot of time DEFENDING the church to other people who (especially non-Christians who) will hear that I go to a non-

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affirming church and just not understand - I mean, I don't even understand - how it can all work, and why I could GO THERE if I can't SERVE everywhere? Like if I can't even WORK there, or be MARRIED there,

R: right. What do you say to that?

P1: I mean, usually in the past I would say that I'm there because that's where God drew me in, and the community and the theology are part of WHY I'm there. And that the church itself in GENERAL is in this space (and has been for a while), but keeps ramping up as far as knowing they have to make decisions on where they're gonna stand on this particular issue. Um, so I think - I mean it's, it's HARD in that there's certainly a sadness … when I think about [P's voice trembles and eyes become moist] not being able to serve, not being able to play, um, which is something that just – I mean I LOVE music and I love music in the WORSHIP and praise context and being able to be a part of that was just SO WONDERFUL. And then now just feeling a little on the OUTSIDE. I mean there's that part of me that's FRUSTRATED that the church is in the space that it's in. And I'm not asking the church itself, for everyone to have the same OPINION on this issue ('cause I understand that there's the two sides). But WHY does there have to be? – and I also understand PROCESS. There's part of me that understands LOGICALLY everything that's happening. And then there's sort of that emotional part that's a bit more RAW, that's frustrated that there's so many stories TOO, of pastors and other LGBTQ Christians who come out and then are - like if they're working for certain organizations are FIRED and have no support. And kind of that LACK OF what it is to be a community and what it is to actually be following Christ's example. It's like, is there not a BETTER WAY even if you disagree on a point?

R: let me, um, let me just ask you something here. Because I can FEEL the emotion as you said that. And I can hear the tremor [i.e. voice] there. In that moment as you were saying that - that sadness, that pain - how do you think Jesus feels when he sees you in that moment?

P2: [voice trembles] I feel that he is sad as well [pause for 15 seconds]

R: what would he be doing with his sadness about your sadness?

P3: sitting with me,

R: um hm? …. in what position, in what way?

Appendix 11

Participant 4 – Interview 3

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P1: I always imagine - when I talk with Jesus – about being in a cabin, on a lake, just a very peaceful setting. Or just sitting on the stairs or on the dock …. him just BEING with me,

R: hm. [repeats P's words] He would be sad too. Would HE [like you] be crying?

P2: yeah …….. I think he'd be holding me,

R: holding,

P3: and just understanding the pain in this,

R: hm. [pause for 23 seconds]. Do you sometimes think about how Jesus feels in your experiences at different times?

P4: I sometimes do. Not all the time,

R: what effect does that have when you do that?

P5: I think right there it just – helps, to calm – calm me ……..

R: and when you gaze upon this, what would Jesus say, what would he invite you to do next?

P6: [pause for 15 second] I think he'd say, 'It's gonna be okay ……' I think as far as what [I am] to do next, be in a space of actively waiting,

R: Hm! ACTIVELY waiting!

P7: actively,

R: Wow! …. What does actively waiting feel like?

P8: It's HARD [chuckles]

R: it's hard?

P9: …… yeah, it feels like knowing .. knowing that there are UNKNOWNS. That, um, but just because those unknowns are there, doesn't mean you just sit in the room and do nothing. I continue to PRESS IN and …. just seek direction in that way, and just continue LIVING life,

R: mm hm. Mm hm. That sounds like quite a commitment to say that. To continue living life in the midst of the unknowns. I would think if I were Jesus, and you told me that you were willing to continue in this

Appendix 11

Participant 4 – Interview 3

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life and to follow me even though there are unknowns, even though there is pain, I would think I would feel honoured to have you use my name to affiliate yourself with me,

P1: [15 second pause] that's a nice invitation,

R: well, as our time draws to a close, is there anything else that you'd like to add or to say?

P2: I don't think so. I mean it's been an interesting process [giggles]. But I've enjoyed it,

R: interesting in the sense?

P3: um, in different ways, in sort of recalling my story, and where I WAS compared to where I AM. Uh, and just …. thinking about how God has been with me THROUGH that. And through your questions of "how does God see me?" and "where do I sort of see myself?" it's been good to think about it. Yeah,

R: hm. I'm glad,

P4: yeah,

R: okay. Well, I thank you for your openness and your honesty - your honesty in confronting your feelings and feeling free to share them. I appreciate that,

P5: yeah, I was happy TO SHARE! [chuckles]

R: well, let me end our time with a blessing. And then I will extinguish our candle.

R: [P], as you travel into the future, may you find yourself attentive to the self you bring along. May you find the light you need to illuminate your way. And may you know God to go with you.

P6: thank you.

Appendix 12

Photo of a Piece of Art for Participant 4 – Interview 2

