



Introduction to Queer Theology

October 27, 2022

Presented by:
Phoenix Community Church UCC

Introduction

- Opening Prayer – Rev. Mike Tupper
- Welcome – Angie Willard
- We are recording this session and will make it available on youtube. The slides will be available at <https://phoenixchurch.org>.
- Limited time so we will try to keep things simple when they may really be quite complex.
- Please keep comments and questions respectful.
- We'll be using terms that you might define or use differently. We'd love to hear your understanding. We want to learn from each other.
- The book “Radical Love” by Patrick S. Cheng is a primary source for this presentation.
- Let's get started with some definitions... - Rev. Ken Arthur

What is Queer Theology?

- Definition: Queer
 - A person who identifies themselves as LGBTQIA+ (i.e. lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, questioning, queer, intersex, asexual, etc.) may identify themselves as queer.
 - Generally, a queer person is a person who does not fit the cisgender heterosexual societal expectation.
 - The term queer is sometimes used as an umbrella term instead of LGBTQIA+.
 - The term queer was originally an insult used against LGBTQIA+ people. It has been reclaimed as a term of pride. However, for many people it still can carry negative connotations.

What is Queer Theology?

- Definition: Queer
 - The term queer can also be used as a verb or adjective.
 - To queer something is to challenge and disrupt the status quo, especially regarding the boundaries and norms of sexuality and gender identity.
 - For example, queer theory is an academic field of study that challenges and disrupts traditional notions of sexuality and gender identity.

What is Queer Theology?

- Definition: Theology
 - Talk about God / The Divine / our Higher Power (will use “God” in these slides)
 - How we understand God
 - Not just an academic exercise. We live our understanding. For example, if we understand God to be peaceful, we will value non-violence. If we understand God to be male, we will invest ourselves in patriarchy.

What is Queer Theology?

- Definition: Queer Theology
 - Queer people talking about God
 - Our understanding of God as informed by our experience as queer people or allies.
 - Talk and understandings of God that challenge traditional religious boundaries and norms around sexuality and gender identity.
 - Delegitimizes ways religion pushes people and God into heterosexual cisgender boxes.

How do we do theology?

- Sources – our understandings of God come from four primary sources:
 - Scripture
 - Tradition
 - Reason
 - Experience

Sources of Queer Theology

- Scripture: considering scripture from a queer perspective
 - Example: Sodom and Gomorrah is about inhospitality toward strangers and not punishment of same-sex acts.
 - Example: Highlighting positive queer characters such as David and Jonathan, Ruth and Naomi, the Roman centurion, Ethiopian eunuch
 - Examples (books): Queer Bible Commentary; Jacob's Wound: Homoerotic Narrative in the Literature of Ancient Israel (Jennings); The Man Jesus Loved: Homoerotic Narratives from the New Testament (Jennings)

Sources of Queer Theology

- Tradition: considering church history and teachings over the last 2000 years from a queer perspective
 - Finding queer experience within the history and teachings of the church.
 - Examining hidden histories. For example, in his book, “Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality,” John Boswell argued the church only became homophobic in the 12th and 13th centuries. In his book, “Same-Sex Unions in Premodern Europe,” he argued that same-sex blessings existed in the church for centuries.
 - Examining hidden motives. For example, in his book, “Invention of Sodomy in Christian Theology,” Mark D. Jordan argues that the theological term “sodomy” was invented by medieval theologians out of the fear of sexual pleasure without reproduction. It created a category by which the church could condemn and control.

Sources of Queer Theology

- Reason: using reason and philosophy to inform our understanding of God
 - Using reason to challenge religious assumptions. For example, the assertion of the Roman Catholic church that homosexuality is against “natural law”
 - Incorporating conclusions of Queer Theory. For example, meanings of categories of gender and sexuality are socially constructed.

Sources of Queer Theology

- Experience: considering unique experiences of queer people and allies
 - Reflecting upon experiences of encountering God within the queer context
 - Personal example: In 2011, I took up a challenge to reflect upon how reading the Bible queerly had changed my life and how my sexuality and gender identity had brought me closer to God. In response I talked about how my queer experience taught me to question whether boundaries are God-given or human determined and how that questioning has brought me to a deeper relationship with God. See <https://pieceofthepuzzle.net/2011/08/10/queer-theology/> for my full reflection.

Introduction to Queer Theology

- Break-out discussion
 - We'll break into small groups for about 12 minutes.
 - Questions for discussion:
 - How does it make you feel to use the word queer in relation to theology? What questions or misgivings do you have? What do you like about it?
 - Which of the four sources (scripture, tradition, reason, experience) appeals to you the most? The least?
 - When we come back, we'll spend another 10 minutes sharing highlights from our group reflections.

Introduction to Queer Theology

- Sharing highlights of small group discussions...
 - The word queer and what it means in relation to theology
 - How do the four sources of theology resonate with you?

Four Types of Theology

- In his book “Radical Love,” Patrick Cheng discusses four types of queer theology that show the trends in the development of this field.
- The terminology may also be used for more general discussions of theology as well (for example, apologetics and liberation theology).
- Note that these “types” are not mutually exclusive. A particular work of theology may incorporate multiple types of theology.

Four Types of Queer Theology

- Apologetic Theology
 - In general, apologetics explains why it is reasonable to believe something. For example, in the 3rd Century AD Origen wrote to defend the Christian faith against critics of beliefs about incarnation and resurrection.
- Queer theology is apologetic theology when its primary purpose is to show that one can be both queer and Christian.

Four Types of Queer Theology

- Liberation Theology
 - In general, liberation theology emphasizes the liberation of the oppressed, whether socially, economically, or politically. It understands God to be on the side of the marginalized.
- Queer theology is liberation theology when it goes beyond acceptance to argue that liberation from heterosexism and homophobia is at the heart of the gospel.

Four Types of Queer Theology

- Relational Theology focuses on “finding God in the midst of the erotic – that is, mutual relationship – with another person.”
 - Developed to give voice to women’s issues and feminist theological reflection.
 - Examples:
 - reflections on the (queer) erotic as sacred
 - Theology of (queer) friendship

Four Types of Queer Theology

- Queer Theology can also be understood as its own category.
 - In this sense, queer theology is theology that challenges binary categories of sexuality and gender identity.
 - Builds on academic work of Queer Theory which asserts our concepts (i.e. cultural meaning and significance) of sexuality and gender identity are socially constructed through language and discourse.

Talking about God (i.e. Doing Theology)

- Patrick Cheng: “God – like queer relationships – can be understood as *radical love itself*. In other words, God is the very manifestation of a love that is so extreme it dissolves existing boundaries... In the same way, LGBT relationships are grounded in a love so extreme that it also dissolves existing boundaries between the self and the other, as well as rigid societal boundaries as to gender roles.”
- The understanding of God here comes out of queer experience.
- Some other ideas developed by Cheng:
 - Creation as God’s outpouring of Radical Love
 - Sin as the rejection of Radical Love
 - Jesus as the embodiment of Radical Love

Talking about God (i.e. Doing Theology)

- Break-out discussion
 - We'll break into small groups for about 12 minutes.
 - Questions for discussion:
 - How has your personal experience as a queer person or ally contributed to your understanding of God? Does that relate to one of the four types of (queer) theology (i.e. apologetic, liberation, relational, queer)?
 - Can you think of a bible story that resonates with you as a queer person or ally? Has your understanding of that story changed over time?
 - When we come back, we'll spend another 10 minutes sharing highlights from our group reflections.

Talking about God (i.e. Doing Theology)

- Sharing highlights of small group discussions...
 - Effect of personal experiences on understanding of God
 - Interpretation of Bible stories from a queer perspective

(A partial) Reading List

- Cheng, Patrick S., “From Sin to Amazing Grace: Discovering the Queer Christ,” 2012.
- Cheng, Patrick S., “Radical Love: An Introduction to Queer Theology,” 2011.
- Cheng, Patrick S., “Rainbow Theology: Bridging Race, Sexuality, and Spirit,” 2013.
- Jennings, Theodore W., Jr., “Jacob’s Wound: Homoerotic Narrative in the Literature of Ancient Israel,” 2005.
- Jennings, Theodore W., Jr., “The Man Jesus Loved: Homoerotic Narratives from the New Testament,” 2003
- Mann, Rachel, “The Christian God is a queer God,” *The Christian Century*, 7 Oct 2022.
- “The Queer Bible Commentary,” editors Guest, Goss, and West, 2006.
- Stuart, Elizabeth, “Gay and Lesbian Theologies: Repetitions with Critical Difference,” 2003.
- Tonstad, Linn Marie, “Queer Theology: Beyond Apologetics,” 2018.

Previous Discussions / Workshops

- *Some Folks are Gay, What Does the Bible Say?
<https://youtu.be/d60tRxfv4O8>
- *Pride Sunday Discussion: <https://youtu.be/jXqwEI5litk>
- *Our Words Matter, Part 1: <https://youtu.be/dnd8avH0bmQ>
- *Our Words Matter, Part 2: <https://youtu.be/hDXfe6CD56o>
- Inclusive Language Discussion:
<https://youtu.be/CUvhVk30bmk>

* a pdf of slides or notes can be found in the Resources menu at <https://phoenixchurch.org>

Thank you!

- Proposal: November 17, 2022 from 6:30 pm to 8 pm
 - The Queer Christ: Recognizing Ourselves in the Divine
 - Alternatives? Delve into a particular book of queer theology...
 - Future sessions are possible if there is interest...



Thank you!

- We appreciate you joining us for today's discussion.
- For follow up questions or to offer feedback and other comments please email office@phoenixchurch.org.