

**THE QUEER CHRIST:  
RECOGNIZING OURSELVES IN THE DIVINE**

**November 17, 2022**

Discussion hosted by  
Phoenix Community Church  
Kalamazoo, MI

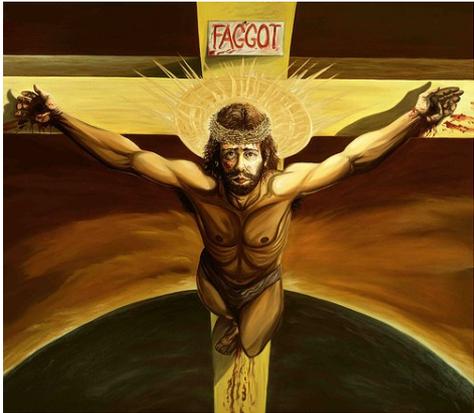
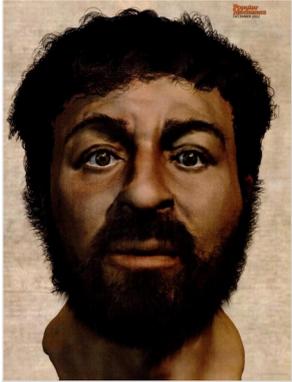
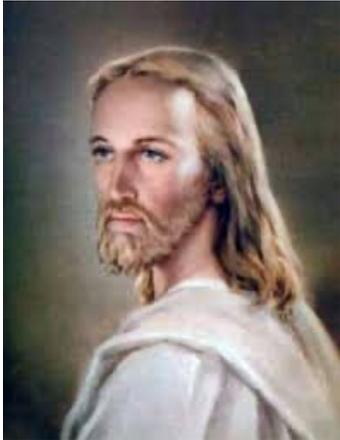
# The Queer Christ

- **Opening Prayer**
- **Welcome**
- **We are recording this session and will make it available on youtube. The slides will be available at <https://phoenixchurch.org>.**

# Images of Christ

- **Jesus the Christ is the foundational figure in Christianity**
- **Therefore, unconventional images of Christ can be controversial.**
- **However, different images of Christ have historically been used to make Christ more relatable and meaningful in different contexts (Asian Christ, black Christ, etc.).**
- **Which of the following images is most familiar? Which is probably most historically accurate? Do you find any of them disturbing?**

# Images of Christ



# The Queer Christ

- **Queer: all-inclusive term to encompass the marginalized who live on the boundaries of socially acceptable sexuality orientation and gender identity. More generally, anyone who does not fit into the culturally normative and church enforced category of white male heterosexuality.**
- **Jesus is usually presented as the model for us to strive for – a male heterosexual / asexual model. The Queer Christ is the Christ that transgresses the boundaries of that traditional model.**
- **Note, Christ is the Greek term for Messiah. Is the Christ who is alive to us today bound by the physicality of the human being who was Jesus? If the Christ were to manifest today, that Christ might very well be a woman, or Black, or Asian, or even queer. Perhaps the relevant question is who or what does Jesus the Christ represent to us?**

# The Queer Christ

- If a queer person is not acceptable in the eyes of the church, it is no surprise that the Queer Christ would be seen as blasphemous. However, these images are not acts of blasphemy.
- The Queer Christ declares that the Christ and the gospel are not just for white, male, heterosexual Westerners.
- The Christ is for all people, and especially the marginalized who were the focus of Jesus' message.
- The Queer Christ is a challenge to the classification of heterosexuality as the proper order of the universe, the resulting tabooing of queer people, and especially Christianity's complicity in this oppression.

# The Queer Christ

- **Christian marginalization of the feared, the disorderly, and the dirty is the very human seeking of purity, an orderly and comforting system of classifying our universe.**
- **Mary Douglas: “The quest for purity is pursued by rejection. It follows that when purity is not a symbol but something lived, it must be poor and barren.”**
- **The Queer Christ might also be one important way to prevent Christianity from becoming as “hard and dead as a stone” through its pursuit of a false purity. (is this why Christianity is in decline?)**

# The Queer Christ

- **Break-out discussion**
  - We'll break into small groups for about 12 minutes.
  - Questions for discussion:
    - How does the Queer Christ challenge traditional notions of purity?
    - Can the Queer Christ help Christianity from becoming hard and dead?
  - When we come back, we'll spend 2 or 3 minutes sharing highlights from our group reflections.

# A Failing Christology

- We must be able to see our humanity represented by the Christ to say, “Yes, I can live a Christ-like life just as I am, loved by God just as I am.” We must be able to see our humanity represented by the Christ to be able to say, “Yes, God, through Christ, understands me.”
- Although traditional church doctrine declares Jesus the Christ both fully God and fully human, some aspects of Jesus' humanity are conveniently ignored. Jesus is presented as perfect, male, and asexual, or at least a heterosexual virgin. How many people can see their own humanity reflected in such a perfect being?
- The Christ is relevant only to people who fit the molds approved by the church, then Christ is not relevant to anyone. The Queer Christ begins to reimagine a truly inclusive Christ welcoming to all people seeking God.
- Proposed: the Queer Christ needs to be a fully human, imperfect, sexual Christ who is still fully divine and not necessarily male.

# A Failing Christology

- **Why must the Christ be “imperfect”?**
  - If the Christ is to know what it is to be human, then the Christ must know what it is to be imperfect.
  - The church's rhetoric of sin labels the queer person as inherently sinful. The Christ must not only know what it means to be unjustly labeled sinful, but the Christ must know what real sin is in an intimate firsthand way as all humans do.
- **Two senses of “perfection”**
  - “free from sin, dark thoughts, or any contamination from evil.”
  - “whole, complete, in order and harmony”
  - Christ can be considered perfect in the second sense. To be human, however, the Christ must necessarily be imperfect in the first sense
- **That the (Queer) Christ can be whole, complete and in harmony with God while also living an imperfect human life, struggling with sin and doubt, should be seen as a great hope for all of humanity.**

# The Queer Christ

- The Queer Christ is a way to both undermine the oppressive power of institutional Christianity as well as a way, by recognizing ourselves in the Christ and the Christ in ourselves, to find spiritual meaning.
- Meaning is not found by merely identifying with the Queer Christ but occurs when that identification allows the queer person to see the divine in themselves and thereby know themselves, like the Queer Christ, to be worthy and capable of transcendence (i.e. capable of finding meaning outside of their own selfishness.)
- The Queer Christ might provide a more meaningful symbol that celebrates God incarnated as humanity in all its diversity, a symbol that is more personally meaningful than a Christ figure with which many people cannot readily identify.

# The Queer Christ

- **Break-out discussion**
  - We'll break into small groups for about 12 minutes.
  - Questions for discussion:
    - Do you agree that the Christ should be fully human, imperfect, sexual and not necessarily male? Why or why not?
    - Is it important to you to see yourself in the Christ? Why or why not?
  - When we come back, we'll spend 2 or 3 minutes sharing highlights from our group reflections.

# The Queer Christ in theology

- In his book “Sanctity and Male Desire” Donald Boisvert proposes an alternative, erotic view of Jesus the Christ to provide a more meaningful way for gay men to find an intimate relationship with God through Jesus.

# The Queer Christ in theology

- In his book **“Out of the Ashes: Constructive Theology for Those Burned Out on Christianity”** Kenneth Arthur discusses **“the Queer Christ: Jesus as Multiplicity.”**
  - Jesus the Christ shows us that the Divine Presence is in all things by breaking through the human-divine boundary. As the ultimate model of what humanity is and can be, he reveals to us the many and diverse ways (a multiplicity of ways) the Divine manifests in humans.
  - The Queer Christ is the particular image of Christ as a marginalized queer person – the face of the infinite other.
  - In disrupting the image of the heterosexual / asexual gender-conforming Christ that reinforces the doctrine of the Everyone-must-be-like-me God, the Queer Christ opens access to the Divine Presence to not only queer people but all people who fail to conform in some way. In so doing, the Queer Christ enriches all of us by lifting up and celebrating the diversity and sacredness of all of the Divine Presence’s good creation.

# The Queer Christ in theology

- In his book “From Sin to Amazing Grace: Discovering the Queer Christ” Patrick Cheng proposes moving from a crime-based model of sin and grace to a Christ-based model. He proposes seven new “deadly sins” and seven new “amazing graces” based on the Queer Christ.
  - Let’s take a look at this seven models of the Queer Christ...

# The Queer Christ: 7 models of sin and grace

<u>Model of the Queer Christ</u>	<u>Sin</u>	<u>Grace</u>
1. Erotic Christ	Exploitation	Mutuality
2. Out Christ	The Closet	Coming Out
3. Liberator Christ	Apathy	Activism
4. Transgressive Christ	Conformity	Deviance
5. Self-loving Christ	Shame	Pride
6. Interconnected Christ	Isolation	Interdependence
7. Hybrid Christ	Singularity	Hybridity (in-between binaries)

# The Queer Christ

- **Break-out discussion**

- We'll break into small groups for about 12 minutes.
- Questions for discussion:
  - Which of Cheng's models of the Queer Christ resonate with you? Why?
- When we come back, we'll spend 2 or 3 minutes sharing highlights from our group reflections.

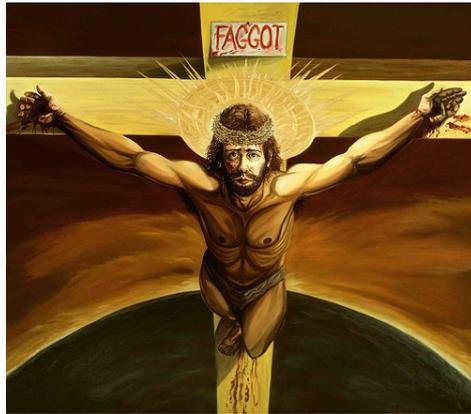
# Other examples of the Queer Christ

- **The Queer Christ in drama**
  - The 1998 play *Corpus Christi*, written by Terrence McNally, tells the story of a gay Jesus figure named Joshua who lives in Corpus Christi, Texas, and is having a love affair with his follower Judas.
- **The Queer Christ in art**
  - Many examples can be found in Kittredge Cherry's book "Art That Dares: Gay Jesus, Woman Christ, and More."
- **All of these depictions of the Queer Christ met with resistance and often demonstrations and violence.**

# The Queer Christ in Art



“Judas Kiss” by  
Becki Jane Harrelson



“The Crucifixion of  
Christ” by  
Becki Jane Harrelson



“Jesus of the  
People” by  
Janet McKenzie



“Christa” by  
Edwina Sandys

# Disrupting Christian Heterosexism

- The Queer Christ (and the celebration of queer people in general) threatens the patriarchal hierarchy.
- The Queer Christ is the face of the other which “breaks through the enjoyment of ego-centered existence” of the church “and shows it to be unjust and irresponsible.”
- The Queer Christ helps make queer people visible and issues the challenge to church oppression.
- The Queer Christ is a symbol of transcendence and meaning which speaks of the universal acceptance and love of God.
- To deny the Queer Christ is to deny the transformative and transcendent power of recognizing ourselves in the divine.

# Disrupting Christian Heterosexism

- **The importance of ritual**
  - Powerful tool of transformation
  - Helps us actualize meaning and truth found In Queer Christ
- **Ideas for ritual**
  - Annual production of McNally’s play “Corpus Christi”
  - Use queer liturgy, readings, art, etc. in worship
  - Ceremonies to honor queer people and their lives
  - What else?

# The Queer Christ

- **What resonated with you most about the Queer Christ?**
- **What did you find most challenging and disturbing?**

## Sources / Bibliography

- Arthur, Kenneth, “Out of the Ashes: Constructive Theology for Those Burned Out on Christianity,” Energion Publications, 2017.
- Arthur, Kenneth, “The Queer Christ: Recognizing Ourselves in the Divine,” a thesis for the Master of Arts degree, Chicago Theological Seminary, 2009.
- Cheng, Patrick, “From Sin to Amazing Grace: Discovering the Queer Christ,” Seabury Books, 2012.

**Thank you for joining us for  
today's discussion!  
Questions or comments:  
[office@phoenixchurch.org](mailto:office@phoenixchurch.org)**