

Trans-gressing Christianity: Process Theology, the Transgender God, and Trans Liberation¹



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Rose Sharon

¹ This piece is dedicated in loving memory to all those lost to the cruelties of this world, including my cousin, Brian Allen “Gray Cloud” Gray III (August 9th, 1997 - October 5th, 2021).

² [Image description: A background of the transgender pride flag (composed of a blue bar at the top and bottom, two pink bars in between, and a white bar in the center) with an image of Jesus of Nazareth wearing a crown of thorns overlaid on top. Images used are copyright free.]

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Epigraphs

Let's think of the nuclear arms, of the possibility to annihilate in a few instants a very high number of human beings. Let's think also of genetic manipulation, of the manipulation of life, or of the gender theory, that does not recognize the order of creation. With this attitude, man commits a new sin, that against God the Creator. The true custody of creation does not have anything to do with the ideologies that consider man like an accident, like a problem to eliminate. God has placed man and woman at the summit of creation and has entrusted them with the earth. The design of the Creator is written in nature."

— Pope Francis, in *This Economy Kills: Pope Francis on Capitalism and Social Justice*

In transsexualism, males put on “female” bodies (which are in fact pseudofemale). . . The surgeons and hormone therapists of the transsexual kingdom, in their effort to give birth, can be said to produce feminine persons. They cannot produce women.

— Mary Daly, *Gyn/Ecology*, p. 68

Contemporary trans-exclusionary feminism is similarly animated by the fear of being ‘overrun’. And this fear is almost always sexualised: reactionary feminists have much in common with conservatives who claim that increased immigration will result in increased rape. Dystopian fantasies of the female and lesbian ‘erasure’ that will result from trans women being recognised as women sit alongside the Islamophobic conspiracy theory of the ‘great replacement’ and the antisemitic spectre of ‘white genocide’. . . Traversing borders is a threat – and in the colonial mindset, the borders of class and nationality are at one with the borders of gender. Binary gender is a colonial and capitalist project, what feminist theorist Gloria Anzaldúa called the ‘absolute despot duality that says we are able to be only one or the other’.

— Alison Phipps, *Me, Not You: The Trouble with Mainstream Feminism*, p. 156

Deuteronomy 22 chapter 5 says
A man shall not wear women's clothes
I'm reading this with a dress on
I'm kind of like Jesus
I'm tough, Lord
I'm a blonde in the major
The god transgender
And if any man of the lord tries to use violence to challenge me
I swear to the gay gods that watch over me
That I will eat your face
I am not terrified by your diatribes and exorcisms
'Cause any attempts will allow me to stare at your god in his face
And tell him that he's not welcome here

— Backwash, “Heteronomy”, *Black Sailor Moon* (2018)

For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd;
'he will lead them to springs of living water.'

‘And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.’

— Revelation 7:17

I. Introduction

I - Part A: “Do Transgender Christians Have a Church?”

What would it mean to say to an oppressive God that ‘He’ is no longer “welcome here”, as rapper and producer Ashanti Mutinta, known professionally as Backxwash, so powerfully declares? And to do so as a trans woman — a Christian trans woman, at that? The first two quoted passages make it a difficult problem, with the most powerful living figure in Christianity, the pope, comparing us to nuclear bombs; and, arguably even more depressing, one of the founding figures of feminist theology declaring that I — that we — will never truly be women. That transphobia and trans persecution is a pressing problem for the Church is obvious to anyone of trans experience. We are so often told by our communities that we are committing a sin, that we are going against nature and against God, that we are confused and misguided, that we are dirty and corrupt, that we — as trans-exclusionary radical feminists (TERFs) have so often said — are either rapists of the female body (in the case of trans women) or misguided girls who need to be brought back to their womanhood (in the case of trans men). Many denominations have made it ecclesial policy to encourage repentance, conversion therapy, detransition, and the provision of lackluster alternatives to treating dysphoria.³ The terrible choice to have to choose between one’s own authentic identity and their religious faith is disheartening at best, deeply oppressive most commonly, and lethal at worst. As a 2015 study on adult transgender experience in the U.S. indicated, “98% of those surveyed had been discriminated against at least four times in the year and 51% of them had attempted to commit suicide.”⁴ According to a 2020 study conducted by the Trevor Project, “48% of LGBTQ youth reported engaging in self-harm in the past twelve months, including over 60% of transgender and nonbinary youth.”⁵ Not only do trans and gender non-conforming adults and youth face higher rates of suicide and self-harm than the average population, but they are also murdered at a terrifying rate. According to the Human Rights Campaign (HRC), 2020 saw “at least 44 transgender or gender non-conforming people fatally shot or killed by other violent means [in the U.S.], the majority of which were Black and Latinx transgender women. We say at least because too often these stories go unreported — or misreported. Since HRC began tracking this data in 2013, advocates have never seen

³ Aleksandra Sandstrom, “Religious Groups’ Policies on Transgender Members Vary Widely,” Pew Research Center (Pew Research Center, September 10, 2020),

<https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/12/02/religious-groups-policies-on-transgender-members-vary-widely/>.

⁴ Loyal | thisisloyal.com, “Suicide Thoughts and Attempts among Transgender Adults,” Williams Institute, April 9, 2020, <https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/publications/suicidality-transgender-adults/>.

⁵ “The Trevor Project National Survey 2020,” The Trevor Project, accessed December 15, 2021, <https://www.thetrevorproject.org/survey-2020/?section=Introduction>.

such a high number at this point in the year.”⁶ And things are only getting worse: As HRC has documented, 2021 is already set to surpass this rate of murders.⁷ That this is a serious national (and transnational) crisis should be obvious. And the Church — what is supposed to be a beacon of guidance, community, love, and justice — is in many ways culpable. That the Christian Church should be responsible for providing a sanctuary for those most persecuted by our society is something that many would agree with, but less are willing to uphold.

It would be foolish to pretend as if this paper would provide all of the answers for how we go about making this change. However, I do believe that there are some fundamental theological underpinnings to the transphobia that is so prevalent in Christianity (and Christian-influenced society) today. Primarily, I believe that much of it has to do with the hegemonic God-image that we have embodied: that of the all-powerful, patriarchal Father God who reigns from on high, dictating precisely what goes on in the world (predetermining reality down to the smallest detail), operating as an unmoved mover (in other words, un/dis- affected) — a vengeful and mostly unloving God who only loves in order to create militant, loyal, law-abiding creatures. While I may be being uncharitable, I do believe that this is the God-image that so often fuels the persecutory, fundamentalist wing of Christianity. This is the image of God which Backxwash, as a Black trans woman, declares is “not welcome here”. This image, however, is changing; and it is doing so both within and outside the Church. As this paper will explore, there are three interrelated events occurring within Christian

⁶ **Remembering them (2020):** Dustin Parker, 25; Neulisa Luciano Ruiz; Yampi Méndez Arocho, 19; Scott/Scottlynn Devore, 51; Monika Diamond, 34; Lexi, 33; Johanna Metzger; Serena Angelique Velázquez Ramos, 32; Layla Pelaez Sánchez, 21; Penélope Díaz Ramírez; Nina Pop; Helle Jae O'Regan, 20; Tony McDade; Dominique “Rem'mie” Fells; Riah Milton, 25; Jayne Thompson, 33; Selena Reyes-Hernandez, 37; Brian “Egypt” Powers, 43; Brayla Stone, 17; Merci Mack, 22; Shaki Peters, 32; Bree Black, 27; Marilyn Cazares; Dior H Ova; Queasha D Hardy, 22; Aja Raquell Rhone-Spears; Lea Rayshon Daye, 28; Kee Sam; Aerion Burnett; Mia Green; Michelle Michellyn Ramos Vargas; Felycyia Harris, 33; Brooklyn Deshuna, 20; Sara Blackwood; Angel Unique, 25; Skylar Heath, 20; Yunieski Carey Herrera (aka Yuni Carey), 39; Asia Jynae Foster, 22; Chae’Meshia Simms; Kimberly Fial, 55; Jaheim Pugh Jaheim Barbie; Courtney “Eshay” Key, 25; and Alexandria Winchester, 24. “Violence against the Transgender Community in 2020,” HRC, accessed December 15, 2021, <https://www.hrc.org/resources/violence-against-the-trans-and-gender-non-conforming-community-in-2020>.

⁷ **Remembering them (2021):** Tyianna Alexander (aka Davarea Alexander), 28; Samuel Edmund Damián Valentín; Bianca “Muffin” Bankz; Dominique Jackson; Fifty Bandz, 21; Alexus Braxton (aka Kimmy Icon Braxton), 45; Chyna Carrillo (aka Chyna Cardenas); siblings Jeffrey “JJ” Bright, 16, and Jasmine Cannady, 22; Jenna Franks, 34; Diamond Kyree Sanders, 23; Rayanna Pardo, 26; Jaida Peterson, 29; Dominique Lucious, 26; Remy Fennell, in her 20s; Tiara Banks, 24; Natalia Smut, 24; Iris Santos, 22; Tiffany Thomas, 38; Keri Washington, 49; Jahaira DeAlto, 42; Whispering Wind Bear Spirit, 41; Sophie Vásquez, 36; Danika “Danny” Henson (aka Prynce Daniel and Niia Da Don on Facebook), 31; Serenity Hollis, 24; Oliver “Ollie” Taylor, 17; Thomas Hardin, 35; Poe Black (aka Oliver Jackson and Legion), 21; EJ Boykin (aka Novaa Watson); Aidelen Evans, 24; and Taya Ashton, 20. “Fatal Violence against the Transgender and Gender Non-Conforming Community in 2021,” HRC, accessed December 15, 2021, <https://www.hrc.org/resources/fatal-violence-against-the-transgender-and-gender-non-conforming-community-in-2021>.

theology that could provide pathways to a more robust, enticing, enchanted, just, and liberating God-image: the first event being that of process theology, explored through the work of the founder of process philosophy, Alfred North Whitehead, with reference to the collapsing theological framework of substance metaphysics that preceded it; the second, via analytical psychologist Carl Jung's work on the shifting God-image throughout history, which I argue could reach a new threshold in the form of a transfeminist critique of the gender binary; and lastly, in the emergence of queer theology, such as that of contextual theologian Marcella Althaus-Reid, and its potential to deepen ecclesial life and open the door — of a closet, perhaps? — into a brighter, more loving, more redemptive Christian future.

I - Part B: “Trans-gressive Liminality”

Before we delve further, I think that it is important to define the key concept of this paper — trans-gression — and to explore its relationship to a liminal methodology. The idea of theological trans-gression is, fundamentally, about transgressing boundaries. And what (or who?) transgresses boundaries more spectacularly than God? It is foundational to this study that God cannot be captured by any simple dualism, but instead exists in a state that supersedes them and, in a mysterious, imperceptible (yet intuitionnally apparent) way, permeates the boundary between them. As Jung writes, describing the relationship between the Self (not to be confused with the individual ego), the center and circumference of consciousness/the universe, and God,

With increasing approximation to the centre [in other words, the Self, which is also the circumference] there is a corresponding depotentiation of the ego in favour of the influence of the “empty” centre, which is certainly not identical with the archetype but is the thing the archetype points to. As the Chinese would say, the archetype is only the name of the Tao, not Tao itself. Just as the Jesuits translated Tao as “God,” so we can describe the “emptiness” of the centre as “God.” Emptiness in this sense doesn’t mean “absence” or “vacancy,” but something unknowable which is endowed with the highest intensity.⁸

The vibrancy of the unknown, the silent Pleroma, the luminous dark: these are many ways of saying (and unsaying) this ‘emptiness’ of ‘the highest intensity’. We must recall Alison Phipps’ usage of a Gloria Anzaldúa quote, used as an epigraph: the ‘absolute despot duality that says we are able to be only one or the other’ is precisely the place that God finds, through its transgression of ‘despot duality’, both its radical immanence (the center) and its horizon of transcendence (the circumference).⁹

⁸ C. G. Jung and Murray Stein, *Jung on Christianity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 62.

⁹ In this context, I describe immanence as the center of consciousness, as this is where the “depotentiation of the ego in favour of the influence of the ‘empty’ centre” occurs. Likewise, transcendence is viewed as a horizon to mark

It is the place in which God is both empty *and* intense; vibrant *and* unknown; silent *and* full; luminous *and* dark. And yet God is also none of these things. God is everything and God is nothing; God is and God is not. God: the word that haunts and the word that seizes, appearing and disappearing, opening space for conversation and simultaneously enclosing a mystery that can never be spoken. Yet it calls.

In what is an important note of relation, Chilean fiction writer Roberto Bolaño — famously a founding member of the *Infrarealismo* poetic movement established in Mexico City in 1975 — was also one of the prime architects of the “Infrarealist Manifesto”. A piece of bountiful experimental poetry and prose, it begins with the following paragraph:

It's four light hours to the confines of the solar system; to the closest star, four light years. A disproportionate ocean of emptiness. But are we really sure there is only a void? We only know that there are no stars shining in that space. If they existed, would they be visible? And if there existed bodies that are neither luminous nor dark? Could it not be that on the celestial maps, the same as on those of Earth, the star-cities are indicated and the star-villages are omitted?¹⁰

This space where “there existed bodies that are neither luminous nor dark” and in which “star-villages are omitted” is the in-between space — the space that requires an attention-to-detail and a sense of the ambiguous and microcosmic — that is in essence the poetic landscape of the *Infrarealismos*. To enter infra-space, one must have “the eye of transition”. As the Manifesto states, “So it is possible that on the one hand one is born and on the other hand we're in the front row for the death throes. Forms of life and forms of death pass daily through the retina. The constant crash gives life to infrarealist forms: THE EYE OF TRANSITION.”

It is here that we will find our guiding thread: “the eye of transition” that leads from one state to another, that exists in-between them, that re-members them together as part of a whole, a story, and a vision. We will follow the becoming of the process God; its transition into multigendered, archetypal complexity; and its transformation into a friend of queer and trans liberation. At the point where transcendence and immanence are no longer mutually-exclusive, we might catch sight of the God of

itself as the periphery of thinkable thought: the transcendent nature of God is only truly transcendent when it encompasses all that there is, and thus it is particularly necessary to pay attention to ‘the outside’, ‘the circumference’, ‘the periphery’, ‘the minoritarian’, ‘the subaltern’, ‘the microcosmic’, and ‘the unspeakable’. In this sense, immanence is the dissolution of the ego through an endlessly-complicating process of enfolding toward a virtual, centerless center; transcendence, on the other hand, is the continual unfolding of the ego back into univocal (but not undifferentiated) Being, or the actual. It is important to note that this is my understanding of Gilles Deleuze’s concept of ‘the fold’ as presented through his own work in *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque* (1993), as well as Joshua Ramey and Catherine Keller’s extended connections between ‘the fold’ and the thought of Nicholas of Cusa in their respective works *The Hermetic Deleuze: Philosophy and the Spiritual Ordeal* (2012) and *Cloud of the Impossible: Negative Theology and Planetary Entanglement* (2015).

¹⁰ Roberto Bolaño, “Manifesto of Infrarealism,” trans. Tim Pilcher, La Universidad Desconocida, June 23, 2012, <https://launiversidaddesconocida.wordpress.com/manifesto-of-infrarealism/>.

the mystics — a God that transgresses the boundaries of what orthodoxy accepts as God and challenges our capacity to understand who and what God is. In search of an indecent, heretical God, we trans-gressors — the queer, transgender, and gender non-conforming weaponizers of theology — may yet find a (re)new(ed) faith in the cracks of deadening duality. With that said, we hope that this theological cartography opens fresh paths of transgression in the hearts and minds of its readers; and, more fervently, that it puts tools in the hands of my fellow trans-gressors in our fight for material, social, and spiritual liberation. May our tears be wiped away through both struggle *and* grace.

II. Process Theology: An Affected, Relational, Luring God

II - Part A: “The God of Substance”

As we begin our trek through various God-images, we must start at the most fundamental image that has ruled Western religious cosmology for nearly the past 2,500 years: The God who establishes the world through a harmonious natural hierarchy, the God of substance. In the world of this God, there is a top and a bottom, an ontological Heaven and Hell, the spiritual realms and the world of matter. It is in the middle of these realms that the God of substance has placed humans, who have the ability, as was so powerfully-articulated by Renaissance humanist Pico della Mirandola in his *Oration on the Dignity of Man* (1496), to move from one station of creation to the other, “to degenerate into the lower forms of life, which are brutish” or “to be reborn into the higher orders, those that are divine.”¹¹ The ladder of creation owes its conception equally to the mythos of the Abrahamic faiths as it does to Platonist, Neoplatonist, and Ptolemaic cosmologies. As ecotheologian Thomas Berry writes, summarizing this relationship,

According to [the redemption story of Christian cosmology] the cosmos, and every being in the cosmos, reflects the divine exemplar considered by Plato as the Agathon, the Good; by Plotinus as the One; by the Christian as God. All things are beautiful by this beauty. The supremely beautiful is the integrity and harmony of the total cosmic order, as Saint Thomas insists upon repeatedly.

The human mind ascends to the contemplation of the divine through the various grades of being, from the physical forms of existence in the earth, with its mountains and seas, to the various forms of living things, and so to the human mode of consciousness, then to the soul, and from the inner life of the soul to God. . . . Initiation into the basic human and

¹¹ Pico della Mirandola Giovanni, Francesco Borghesi, and Massimo Riva, *Oration on the Dignity of Man: A New Translation and Commentary* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016), p. 117.

Christian values was initiation into this cosmology. Christian spirituality was built up in this manner. The mysteries of Christianity were integral with this cosmology.¹²

Related to this worldview is René Descartes' substance, or mind-body, dualism. In this theory, mind and body are two ontologically-distinct entities, related to each other in some capacity, but mostly independent — a distinction that he explicitly links to separation between the *soul* and body.¹³ As Descartes writes in *Principles of Philosophy* Part I, section 53, “. . .each substance has one principal attribute, thought, for example, being that of mind, and extension that of body.” In this same piece, Descartes argues that God, which we imagine as perfect, by necessity exists independently of all things, relying on no other thing; whereas each and every other thing’s existence is completely contingent on the activities of God as creator.¹⁴¹⁵ While this seems to be a rather commonplace, almost hegemonic, conception of God and creation within Christian theology, it is my argument that it is inherently harmful to the relationships between matter, consciousness, divinity, and embodiment. By cleaving these experiential capacities apart as separate substances — and by making God and thus spirit completely independent of the world — we reach a crucifixion of material, embodied reality at the hands of an all-powerful God. This is the basis of substance metaphysics, which, as glorifying as they are of the divine, seem to be equally committed to disembodying creaturely experience in a degrading hierarchy of relation.

Arguably as heinous as it might be inspiring, it is my conviction that this is the same hierarchical relationship between God and matter that has resulted in the flesh-hating, Earth-dominating, woman-subjugating theology of what I argue is a mutually-entwined colonial and fundamentalist Christianity. Even when so-called created things are valued intrinsically — as one would expect from a pope who donned the name of Saint Francis of Assisi — if it is done within a hierarchical theology, we get claims about ‘the order of creation’ and all those monstrous, ill-begotten, misguided souls transgressing it. That Adam came first and that Eve was tempted and further tempted Adam is a story that does not die easily; it is an essential fixture of patriarchal Christianity. This story, in my opinion, also requires a belief in the harmonious, God-ordained natural hierarchy of ‘the order of creation’, usually with a wholly-transcendent, supernatural God at the top, men not far behind, and the rest of us wondering when the God of love might start objecting to the genocide, femicide, and ecocide done in His name. So if we sound bitter at the bottom of the substance hierarchy, it might just

¹² Thomas Berry, *The Dream of the Earth* (Berkeley: Counterpoint, 2015), 128-129.

¹³ René Descartes and John Veitch, *Principles of Philosophy* (Lightning Source UK Ltd, 2019), Part I, Section 8.

¹⁴ Ibid. Part I, Section 14.

¹⁵ Ibid. Part I, Section 15.

be because we have the taste of a dead God in our mouth; and if we sound zealous, perhaps a living one is coursing through our flesh, rolling out as the embodied, intercarnational Word of abandoned peoples.

As Thomas Berry argued, we need “a new story”, one which guides us through the world-shattering breakthroughs of modern science, a technologically-advanced, hyper-globalized society, and what has been called the death of God. It is my attempt in this paper to chart such “a new story”, with particular attention to those coming from a transgender background interested in the field of theology — an invitation to *trans-gress* theological boundaries as well as an attempt to reclaim our spiritual identities in our collective quests for liberation. Throughout this section of the paper I will explore the death of God phenomenon as the death of the *substance* God in particular; the possibility of a God arriving *after* the death of God; and the God of process philosophy and theology as one remarkable candidate for such a resurrection.

II - Part B: “His Death”

When Friedrich Nietzsche wrote of a madman declaring the death of God — a call laughed at and derided by the villagers in the madman’s vicinity — he was speaking on a spiritual, metaphysical, and existential level.¹⁶ Nietzsche in other places spoke of “monotono-theism” — a clever play on words to describe the historical habit of Western philosophers and theologians decontextualizing concepts (including God) from the fleshy, embodied world of life and passion. He writes, “They think that they show their respect for a subject when they de-historicize it, *sub specie aeterni*—when they turn it into a mummy. All that philosophers have handled for thousands of years have been concept-mummies; nothing real escaped their grasp alive. When these honorable idolators of concepts worship something, they kill it and stuff it; they threaten the life of everything they worship.”¹⁷ Nietzsche remarks further how this depreciation of the living turns against the senses, writing in the voice of the monotono-theists:

“There must be mere appearance, there must be some deception which prevents us from perceiving that which has being: where is the deceiver?” “We have found him,” they cry ecstatically; “it is the senses! These senses, which are so immoral in other ways too, deceive us concerning the true world. Moral: let us free ourselves from the deception of the senses, from becoming, from history, from lies; history is nothing but faith in the senses, faith in lies. Moral: let us say No to all who have faith in the senses, to all the rest of mankind; they are all ‘mob.’

¹⁶ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Portable Nietzsche*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Viking Press, 1960), p. 95-96.

¹⁷ Ibid. p. 479.

Let us be philosophers! Let us be mummies! Let us represent monotono-theism by adopting the expression of a gravedigger! And above all, away with the body, this wretched *idee fixe* of the senses, disfigured by all the fallacies of logic, refuted, even impossible, although it is impudent enough to behave as if it were real!”¹⁸

That the hierarchically-ordered God of substance, driven by pure transcendence — funneling meaning outside of the world of the senses and into the aether — was a historical construct destined for death is obvious to anyone who has experienced a loss of metaphysical faith — a dark night of the soul, if you will. The monotony of this God is one founded on the rat race: fight your way to the top of the spiritual ladder, and if you don’t make it, blame it on Calvinistic predestination (which historically has vile classist, sexist, racist, and imperialistic overtones). It is not a God of life, but instead a God of privilege. To believe that the natural order of things — which is so often a reification of unjust social relations — has been ascribed by an unmoved mover set on being worshiped eternally while threatening us daily with fire and brimstone is to believe in an abyssal God, a black hole for freedom. Achieve and it was your destiny; fail and it was your nature. With a God like this, it is no wonder that so many have walked away from the world of the Christian religion.

But it is not so easy to just walk away. As Nietzsche describes in many of his writings, the death of God is not something that can be trivialized as a past event in our culture. Rather, the God of substantial monotony does not die alone; he carries with him the whole structure of Western metaphysics. A philosopher may believe that God is no longer worth believing in while simultaneously advocating for the metaphysical architecture that came along with him, including related social hierarchies, cultural impulses, and affective values. In Nietzsche’s story of the madman, he ends with the following words:

At last [the madman] threw his lantern on the ground, and it broke and went out. “I come too early,” he said then; “my time has not come yet. This tremendous event is still on its way, still wandering—it has not yet reached the ears of man. Lightning and thunder require time, the light of the stars requires time, deeds require time even after they are done, before they can be seen and heard. This deed is still more distant from them than the most distant stars—and yet they have done it themselves.”

It has been related further that on that same day the madman entered divers churches and there sang his *requiem aeternam deo*. Led out and called to account, he is said to have replied each time, “What are these churches now if they are not the tombs and sepulchers of God?”¹⁹

¹⁸ Ibid. p. 480.

¹⁹ Ibid. p. 96.

In this story, Nietzsche clearly means both the literal churches as places of worship but also the metaphorical churches of metaphysical speculation. The attendant hierarchies, impulses, and values of the God of substance have not reached their moment of finality yet — they linger as if they still had the power of a first cause. This is the true ramification of the death of God. When Nietzsche discusses the dangers of nihilism elsewhere, he speaks of the deep loss of purpose that comes with the collapsing of this historical system of meaning. We can see this acting out in the contemporary world through many reactionary tendencies, including the bolstered strains of white supremacy, patriarchy, and classism that have boiled to the surface at each and every small step of progress. Progress in regards to anti-racism, feminism, and class consciousness looks like a spiral into nothingness, the collapse of civilization, and the end of the world to these sects. It is no wonder, then, that apocalypticism in the colloquial sense has such a grip on our cultures, religious *and* secular.

But if we take the death of God in the full sense of Nietzsche's meaning, aware of the troubles of nihilism that it brings, what hope is there? Is believing in God not just another reactionary tendency? Isn't the idea of belief — whether in God or the world — foolish and barren? And if not, what kind of God *can* we believe in? And resultantly, what kind of world would that God make possible?

II - Part C: "God After God?"

In the past 140 years since Nietzsche spoke of the death of God through the voice of his so-called "madman", there have been many articulations of what can and should be done in response to a collapsing philosophical and theological architecture. For instance, we have the work of Paul Tillich, who advocated for the notion of God as the "ground of Being" and an existential approach to overcoming the experience of nihilism; in the 1960s there arose the work of Death of God theologians such as Thomas J.J. Altizer, who drew on the work of William Blake, Hegel, and Nietzsche in order to expound an immanent, apocalyptic, and materialist theology; and lastly, the work of deconstruction popularized by Jacques Derrida and elaborated on theologically by thinkers such as John D. Caputo. Important recent works on the topic include Caputo and Gianni Vattimo's *After the Death of God* (2009), Richard Kearney's *Anatheism: Returning to God After God* (2011), and, a personal inspiration of mine, *Nietzsche and Levinas: "After the Death of a Certain God"* (2008). Other significant developments include the rise of post-secular approaches, including the fields of constructive and comparative theology popularized since the 1980s by theologians such as Sallie McFague, Catherine Keller, Hyo-Dong Lee, and John Thatamanil. While all of these thinkers offer different approaches and

insights to our current God crisis, I believe that an especially important articulation of what God can be after the death of God — in other words, the collapsing of substance metaphysics architecture — is offered by process philosopher Alfred North Whitehead and the process philosophers and theologians that followed him.

In the following section, I will give a basic overview of how Whitehead's God differs from the God of substance, articulating how his vision of a process ontology may offer a key to creatively engaging with divinity in a post-secular, radically-embodied, anti-nihilistic way. As will be seen throughout the rest of this essay, a process God-image is a key hinge in trans-gressing the theological shackles of a kyriarchal Christian orthodoxy, as well as a captivating approach to thinking Christianity anew. As the funeral pyre of the dead God rises, may we let the process begin.

II - Part D: “The Process God”

As James Williams writes in the *Posthuman Glossary*, process ontologies,

... deny the priority of being over becoming, the priority of unchanging substance over change. They claim that reality is process rather than static existence and they claim that substances should give way to events. Process ontologies also deny the real existence of isolated individuals and they replace them with multiplicities of processes. Static beings are therefore redefined as illusions imposed over dynamic events and transformations. For example, for process ontologies a substance defined as a stable identity over time is really an event defined as the coming together of many transformations.²⁰

From this description we can already conceptualize the vast sea of difference that stands between substance and process understandings of reality. Initially popularized by Whitehead, process philosophy can be traced back as far as Heraclitus and currently has a strong following in philosophical and theological circles, stemming most popularly from the work of Gilles Deleuze and John B. Cobb, Jr., respectively. Some of their most famous proponents in contemporary culture include Isabelle Stengers and Catherine Keller.

In Whitehead's groundbreaking work *Process and Reality*, he famously offers six oppositions between God and the world and their respective antithetical statements, resulting in a series of expressive contrasts that are not inherently mutually-exclusive:

It is as true to say that God is permanent and the World fluent, as that the World is permanent and God is fluent.

²⁰ Rosi Braidotti, Maria Hlavajova, and James Williams, “Process Ontologies,” in *Posthuman Glossary* (Bloomsbury Academic, an imprint of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2018), p. 371.

It is as true to say that God is one and the World many, as that the World is one and God many.

It is as true to say that, in comparison with the World, God is actual eminently, as that, in comparison with God, the World is actual eminently.

It is as true to say that the World is immanent in God, as that God is immanent in the World.

It is as true to say that God transcends the World, as that the World transcends God.

It is as true to say that God creates the World, as that the World creates God.²¹

What Whitehead is able to do here is offer a vision of God and the world that is balanced, mutually-affected, and intricately-transformative of orthodox assumptions. Our ‘eye of transition’ is helpful here, as each antithetical conveys another depth to the creativity at play between God and world—a relationship which, ultimately, cannot be confined to any one absolute metaphysical statement. Again expressing the non-dual, relational quality of these primordial realities, Whitehead writes,

God and the World stand over against each other, expressing the final metaphysical truth that appetitive vision and physical enjoyment have equal claim to priority in creation. But no two actualities can be torn apart: each is all in all. Thus each temporal occasion embodies God, and is embodied in God. In God's nature, permanence is primordial and flux is derivative from the World: in the World's nature, flux is primordial and permanence is derivative from God. Also the World's nature is a primordial datum for God; and God's nature is a primordial datum for the World. Creation achieves the reconciliation of permanence and flux when it has reached its final term which is everlastingness—the Apotheosis of the World.²²

From this vantage point, we can understand the process image of God as one which is actually dependent on the world rather than one which is hierarchically-reigning over it. Without God, the world cannot exist; and without the world, God cannot become. In other words, the process God changes in relation to the realities and actions of the world, while the world realizes its potential through the conceptions of God. In this vision, the future is open and our decisions are meaningful, meaning that we, in our lived experience, are actively affecting God and the potentiality of the world in its manifestation. Diving deeper, Whitehead offers the idea of the “principle of concretion”—the power by which the virtual is converted into the actual and the force which we might say is specifically called God. Concretion, in this sense, is both ideal and material. It fuses the infinitudes of each into a finite creation, “a creature” as Whitehead would put it—a fusion that overcomes simple mind-body dualism and allows the many to become the one. An example would be this essay. Within this work, as you will find, I have taken many disparate concepts (the conceptual) — from process philosophy to

²¹ Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality* (Riverside: Free Press, 1978), p. 348.

²² *Ibid.*

gender non-conformity and transgender liberation — and put them into language with real world examples (the actual) in order to craft a finite product, a synthesis. Concretion is the child of a profound, inherent, consistent, ontological creativity. In much the same way as I have produced this creaturely paper, the process God also produces the world and its events: taking the given, the actual, and fusing it together with the possible, the conceptual.

That process theology is antithetical to the God of substance goes without saying. Importantly, however, it is not *merely* antithetical and oppositional, but instead contrasting and integrative. Substance metaphysics is not inherently wrong, *per se*; rather, it is simply missing fundamental nuance and relationality—in other words, it lacks balance and thus robs both God and the world of their shared complexity and intimacy. It is my opinion that the process vision of God and world is not only deeply healing, but also profoundly-transgressive. It asks us, with all of our faith, hope, and love, to envision the transformative potential of a God who shares itself with us in a way that does not coerce, but instead compels and gently guides, learning from us as we learn from it. Whitehead speaks of this God, writing,

What is done in the world is transformed into a reality in heaven, and the reality in heaven passes back into the world. By reason of this reciprocal relation, the love in the world passes into the love in heaven, and floods back again into the world. In this sense, God is the great companion—the fellow-sufferer who understands.²³

Following this vision of God, we will explore a different approach in the next section: specifically the notion of the God-image as articulated by Carl Jung (and in relation, the image of thought as discussed by Gilles Deleuze), and its relationship to the work of pioneering feminist theologian Mary Daly. In my appreciation and criticism of Daly's work, I will attempt to convey the idea of a transgender God — a God who exists beneath and beyond the realms of cisgender patriarchy — as another vision of the process God. It is my hope that this will offer some helpful cartographical contributions to further developments in my trans-gressive theology, as well as those of feminist, queer, and trans theology more generally.

²³ Ibid. p. 351.

III. The Trans/Formations of the God-Image: From Patriarchy to Transfeminism

III - Part A: “Image of God, Image of Thought: Jung and Deleuze in Dialogue”

For both Swiss psychologist Carl Jung and French philosopher Gilles Deleuze, there are parallel fundamental images which structure the human psyche on a personal and collective scale: for Jung, one such image is the image of God (*imago dei*);²⁴ for Deleuze, it is the image of thought.²⁵ In Jung’s work, the image of God is an archetype of the unconscious, one which takes shape and form throughout history, transmitting and transmuting itself through the psyche in personal and collective fashions. It is how we see God within ourselves and how God appears to us as a culture. It is also, importantly, a pivotal model of the Self, taking on many characteristics of the individual psyche. The image of thought, on the other hand, is Deleuze’s model for what sets the bounds, possibilities, goals, and structures of thinking in a prepersonal way. In other words, the image of thought is filled with what we assume to be prerequisites for the search for time-honored values such as truth, beauty, justice, etc. Characteristically fierce, Deleuze once said, “An image of thought called philosophy has been formed historically and it effectively stops people from thinking.”²⁶

In each case, these images represent perhaps the limits of the conscious mind as well as the shackles of the unconscious. While it would be easy to say we must simply do away with both (which Deleuze almost suggests at one point in *Difference & Repetition*), both authors urge a passionate and enduring caution. The conscious mind is itself quite fragile, not to mention the strikingly abyssal qualities of the unconscious. To contest the image of God and the image of thought, let alone to attempt to transform them through sheer will or tacitless abandon, is in many ways a fool’s errand. Both heirs to Nietzsche, Jung and Deleuze each recognize the need for mediators when traveling through the maze of the unconscious, whether they be the former’s archetypes or the latter’s concepts. Before we delve into the possible transformation of these two images, however, we must first look into how they manifest in the work of their respective authors.

For Jung, the image of God is both an image of the Self — a *coniunctio oppositorum* of the conscious and unconscious — and a reflection of the primordial-historico-cultural, and thus archetypal, process of God known through the human experience. In *Answer to Job*, Jung explores the development of the God-image from the vengeful and wrathful disposition of the patriarchal Yahweh to the loving and forgiving Father of the Christ, who, as we have been told time and time again, “. . .

²⁴ C. G. Jung and Sonu Shamdasani, *Answer to Job* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011).

²⁵ Gilles Deleuze and Paul Patton, *Difference and Repetition* (London, UK: Bloomsbury, 2014).

²⁶ Gilles Deleuze et al., *Dialogues II* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 10.

so loved the world, as to give his only begotten Son; that whosoever believeth in him, may not perish, but may have life everlasting" (John 3:16).

For Deleuze, on the other hand, the image of thought amounts to what we could call thinking's presuppositions, whether they be, in Kantian terms, *a priori* or *a posteriori*. In other words, it encompasses all that is considered readily-known and unquestioned — what we might call "common sense" — whether it emerges from a rationalist or empiricist series of assumptions. Deleuze carries this problem through much of his work, reframing it in his third major book co-authored with French psychoanalyst Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, which translator Brian Massumi refers to as "State philosophy".²⁷ State philosophy, according to the two authors, consists of five qualities or powers: identity, resemblance, truth, justice, and negation.²⁸ Identity determines something's eternal essence; resemblance determines its value in relation to an essential identity; truth determines its usefulness in relation to its resemblance to a transcendent Idea; justice determines its telos; and negation, reposing back on itself, determines its identity. As we can see, this *ouroborus* tends to capture thinking and delimit it. In this sense, the image of thought, so often in the form of State philosophy, serves as a positive feedback loop in which the powers-that-be are continually reaffirmed and eternally validated.

So what does the image of God have to do with this? It is, in my opinion, the possibility that the image of God, and thus our vision of God, is itself an image of thought — and, too often, this image is one that aligns with the interests of the powerful and is thus a State philosophy cloaked in divine appearances. For instance, if we think of the three temptations Jesus is met with by the devil in the desert — the prides of hedonism, egoism, and materialism — then I think that these sins, despite the historical Jesus overcoming them as told in the Gospels, have latched their fangs into the *image* of Christ, the torch-bearer of the mutually-affirming Church-State enterprise. What I mean by this is no less than the fact that the most entrenched image of Jesus — the earth-destroying, self-deifying, world-conquering spirit of Western modernity/coloniality — is in many ways not our savior, but instead our *anti*-Christ. This may seem controversial, blasphemous, or even cruel; I know that many Christians cling to the image of Jesus quite tightly in their struggles through life, praying daily, hoping quietly, and maintaining steadfast faith. I only ask for that daily prayer, quiet hope, and steadfast faith to be present now as I ask a simple question: would the God of love really sanction the violences of patriarchy, white supremacy, colonialism, classism, and anthropocentrism that plague our world? And

²⁷ Gilles Deleuze and Guattari Félix, *A Thousand Plateaus*, trans. Brian Massumi (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), x.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, xi-xii.

even more so, under the spell of a white, Western European appearance and elitism? While I do believe that there is much value in depicting our spiritual figures in a wide-array of forms in order to speak to each and every community, I do not believe it holy to use the so-called Son of God to deify the harbingers of ever-continuing genocides. That the one we call Christ has become an anti-Christ is merely an unfortunate result of God's ever-balancing archetypal checkbook. Is it perhaps time for further accounting of (and accountability toward) our image of God?

What option do we have then? Deleuze suggests that we attempt to (un/re)cover an imageless image of thought. To find a new image of God — even an imageless one — however, would require that we, in true Jungian fashion, find a balance among the polarities of the psyche. Considering that both the predominant images of thought and of God have served in favor of a destructive patriarchal world-order, it would necessitate that we enter into communion with the *anima* and find the repressed feminine in the God-image. Perhaps this is why in *A Thousand Plateaus* that Deleuze and Guattari proclaim the powers of “becoming-woman”. It is also why I believe Jung so happily celebrated the papacy’s long-awaited acceptance of the Assumption of Mary.

The only way to truly think what is different — to begin thinking again — is to start with what has been cast aside, repressed, enshadowed, and persecuted — at last, with the feminine God. It is through the archetypes of the shadow, the *anima*, the Self, and the God-image — and a becoming-woman of each — that we may begin to approach an imageless image of thought, a thinking that is both primordial and revolutionary. In the following sections, I will explore the work of feminist theologian Mary Daly — particularly her work *Beyond God the Father* — and its significance in developing a feminist stance on religious patriarchy while also pointing the way to a post-patriarchal vision of what could be called “God”. I will also touch on the troubled legacy of Daly’s transphobia and transmisogyny, tracing a discursive line of flight from Daly to her dissertation advisee Janice Raymond, and from Raymond to transgender theorist Sandy Stone, and from Stone to what I believe is a fruitfully-emerging field of transgender theology. On this flight, we must observe with the eye of transition the many juxtaposing archetypal, spiritual, and political forces working themselves out; and with a lingering desire, call forth a God (even if it is just another image) who is at home with the transgender and gender-nonconforming community.

III - Part B: “God’s ‘Becoming-Woman’”

If it is true that human beings have projected “God” in their own image, it is also true that we can evolve beyond the projections of earlier stages of consciousness. It is the creative potential itself in human beings that is the image of God. As the essential victims of archaic

God-projections, women can bring this process of creativity into a new phase. This involves iconoclasm—the breaking of idols.²⁹

It is my belief that a return to the Divine Feminine is one of the few possible paths we have in regards to overcoming the genocidal paradigm which we are currently locked in. In Deleuze and Guattari's work, they speak of each becoming beginning with a “becoming-woman” — in other words, becoming particular, situated, perspectival.³⁰ This does not, however, mean becoming isolated or individualistic; rather, it means becoming individuated within the flow of contextual relationality that ties one to their particular stance and viewpoint. In many ways, a becoming-woman represents a return to the Divine Feminine in the form of immanence, becoming, flow, and participatory relationality — traits which are, more or less, absent from kyriarchal normativity. To overcome these latter forces and their lack of compassionate relationship to the world as a planetary ecosystem, we must engage in a proper paradigm shift: a becoming-woman of the species.

It is my argument that Mary Daly argues for such a position, though clearly in her own words and without reference to the work of Deleuze and Guattari. It is worth noting, however, that Daly explicitly rejects the idea of a mere transitioning of the traditional patriarchal Godhead into feminine form — a process she rather unfortunately (though characteristically) refers to as “a transsexual operation on the patriarchal god.”³¹ As we will see further along, Daly has a deeply troubling legacy as a proponent of transphobic rhetoric, evident in her own work but also horrifically expounded on by her student and colleague, Janice Raymond.³² However, it is not my intent to drag Daly's work through the mud; rather, I would like to honor the truly revolutionary elements of her thought — and her abiding impact on my own work — while also giving an honest assessment of her lasting effect on the ideology of the trans-exclusionary vein of radical feminism.

While Daly began her literary career with the publication of *The Church and the Second Sex*—a transitionary piece between her period as a Catholic feminist and her latter work as a radical feminist (as expressed in works such as *Beyond God the Father: Towards a Philosophy of Women's Liberation* and *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism*)—she would spend the rest of her life dispelling patriarchal myths and reifications, bolstering feminist spirituality, battling various principalities and

²⁹ Mary F. Daly, *Beyond God the Father: Toward a Philosophy of Women's Liberation* (London: Women's Press, 1995), p. 29.

³⁰ Gilles Deleuze and Guattari Félix, *A Thousand Plateaus*, trans. Brian Massumi (London: Bloomsbury, 2013).

³¹ Mary F. Daly, *Beyond God the Father: Toward a Philosophy of Women's Liberation* (London: Women's Press, 1995), p. 68.

³² Janice G. Raymond, *The Transsexual Empire: The Making of the She-Male* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1994).

powers, and quite splendidly “striv[ing] to make the world Weirder” (p. xxvi). Taking notes from Nietzsche, Daly devoted herself to the Be-ing that could be (un/re)covered “After the Death of God the Father”, the title of the first chapter of *Beyond*. Echoing the critique of substance theology that began section II of this paper, Daly opens her chapter with a fiery, explicitly feminist declaration:

The biblical and popular image of God as a great patriarch in heaven, rewarding and punishing according to his mysterious and seemingly arbitrary will, has dominated the imagination of millions over thousands of years. The symbol of the Father God, spawned in the human imagination and sustained as plausible by patriarchy, has in turn rendered service to this type of society by making its mechanisms for the oppression of women appear right and fitting. If God in “his” heaven is a father ruling his people, then it is the “nature” of things and according to divine plan and the order of the universe that society be male-dominated.³³

In her seminal work cited above, Daly expresses her task as

de-reifying ‘God,’ that is, of changing the conception/perception of god from ‘the supreme being’ to Be-ing. The Naming of Be-ing as Verb—an intransitive Verb that does not require an ‘object’—expresses an Other way of understanding ultimate/intimate reality. The experiences of many feminists continue to confirm the original intuition that Naming Be-ing as Verb is an essential leap in the cognitive/affective journey beyond patriarchal fixations.³⁴

In this, Daly’s vision of God is not the static, hierarchically-world ordering Father on High — a vestige of “patriarchal fixations” — but something much closer to the God of process — an ever-present event at the heart of “ultimate/intimate reality”. Be-ing as Verb, a radical happening as opposed to *a* being (supreme though it may be) amongst other disparate beings or even ontological Being as the most fundamental noun-object amongst other noun-objects. The objectification of Be-ing into the static image of the omnipotent, omnipresent, omniscient God/Being/*a* being is an act of “Verbicide—[the] killing of the living, transformative energy of words” (p. xvii). For Daly, language is not a meaningless tool, but instead a vehicle for radical transformation:

Derived from the Greek *meta* (meaning after, behind, transformative of, beyond) and *pherein* (meaning to bear, carry), *metaphor* in the deepest sense suggests the power of words to carry us into a Time/Space that is after, behind, transformative of, and beyond static being—the stasis maintained by phalocracy.³⁵

³³ Mary F. Daly, *Beyond God the Father: Toward a Philosophy of Women's Liberation* (London: Women's Press, 1995), p. 13.

³⁴ *Ibid.* p. xvii.

³⁵ *Ibid.* p. xix.

This “phalocracy” is the patriarchal caste system that puts cisgender men — though Daly would argue, of course transphobically, that this also includes trans women — above and in control of women. What the power of metaphor allows, however, is a “metapatriarchal adventure of boundary living” which is a “journey of exorcism [of patriarchal indoctrination] and ecstasy [in regards to the feminist reclamation of Be-ing, Naming, and Living]” (p. xxi). Daly suggests that,

boundary living implies the awakening of Other senses—senses that have been muted in the state of depression/repression that is patriarchy. A woman who experiences/Lives this awakening may drastically change her occupation. Or again, a boundary-living woman may appear to be working the “same kind” of job that she held previously. However, the intensification and expansion of her Elemental powers of perception affect all of her activities. While looking and listening steadily with her “ordinary” eyes and ears, she sees and hears with her Third Eye and Third (Inner) Ear. The boundaries on which she lives and works, then, continue to be transmuted.³⁶

While this may sound like semi-mystical, impractical nonsense to some, I insist that Daly is advocating for a highly-sophisticated, truly mystical, deeply political shift in consciousness. Characteristic of much of the radical feminist movement(s) of the 1970s, consciousness-raising is a key aspect to revolutionary desire, hope, imagination, and transformation. As Daly writes of this period in the Preface,

The transition to a wider and deeper perspective within the author’s own consciousness has been dramatic. . . For women involved in liberation, these have been years of intense “living on the boundary”—a veritable full generation of change measured by the accelerated time flow of this age.³⁷

This “transition” period gave rise to the brilliance of *Beyond God the Father*, stretching itself beyond the death of the Father God to “Exorcising Evil from Eve” (in the form of challenging the lingering patriarchal legacy of the Abrahamic creation story); critiquing “Christolatry” and the misogynistic masculinity empowered by the all-powerful, eternally-male Christ; expounding our “Sisterhood” as both “Antichurch” and “Cosmic Covenant”; and the luring attraction of “the creative drawing power of the Good Who is self-communicating Be-ing, Who is the Verb from whom, in whom, and with whom all true movements move”— in other words, what post-Daly we can equally refer to as “Final Cause” or “God.”³⁸ After the static images of God decay, the imageless image Deleuze calls toward rests within itself as Daly’s Be-ing as Verb, the process, the ever-present event that we must Name and Live in order to think the world beyond patriarchal stasis. Beyond God the

³⁶ Ibid. p. xxi.

³⁷ Ibid. p. xxxiii.

³⁸ Ibid. p. 198.

Father: *Be-ing*. That my sense of self, purpose, divinity, and possibility has been endlessly affected by this transformative work goes without saying: I cherish it, in its breadth and radicality, in so much of my Living in, with, and as *Be-ing*.

It is also during this period, however, that Daly became entangled in some of the more repugnant and historically-objectionable aspects of radical feminism.³⁹ As mentioned previously, Daly was an early proponent of transphobic rhetoric — a common position for radical feminists of the time that gave rise to the term TERFism (trans-exclusionary radical feminism). For instance, in the introduction to *Beyond*, Daly references the work of her student Janice Raymond, writing that,

Since, as Jan Raymond has shown, a “a transsexed” male is still male (a “she-male” or a male-to-constructed female), it is clear that such an operation—whether men perform it on each other or their god—cannot be expected to bring about profound social change. A transsexed patriarchal god is still patriarchal and will function (at least in subliminal or subterranean ways) to serve the interests of the fathers, for such a symbol is external to the reality of women and nature.⁴⁰

This is Daly's early take on the issue of trans women in feminist terms, which, as you can see, is more focused on critiquing it as a metaphorical function in religious transformation. However, by the time she wrote her work *Gyn/Ecology* five years later, Daly had adopted the violently-transphobic rhetoric that has come to be identified with TERFism. For example, take the quote from that book which began this paper:

In transsexualism, males put on “female” bodies (which are in fact pseudofemale). . . The surgeons and hormone therapists of the transsexual kingdom, in their effort to give birth, can be said to produce feminine persons. They cannot produce women.⁴¹

Again, Daly writes,

Our hope lies in our power to know what these prostheses and cosmetics really are. The artificial faces, limbs, conditioned responses, are dead matter molded into “life-like” imitations

³⁹ While I will not delve into this historical circumstance in the body of the text, it is worth noting that beyond Daly's transphobia there is also the question of unreflective white supremacy. For instance, in multiple portions of *Beyond God the Father* she offers a reductionist, condescending attitude toward racism and Black theology specifically (pgs. 19, 25, etc.). Like other non-Black radical feminists of the time, such as Shulamith Firestone, she argues that racism is an off-shoot of patriarchy and should essentially take a back seat to the (implicitly white) feminist struggle. As Daly writes, “The Black God and Black Messiah apparently are merely the same patriarchs after a pigmentation operation—their behavior unaltered” (p. 25). This language, as will be shown, is reductionist in a similar manner to her stance on metaphorically transitioning God from male-to-female and, resultantly, the validity of trans women's literal gender identity and reality.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.* p. xviii.

⁴¹ Mary Daly, *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2006), p. 68.

of women, labelled “The Real Thing.” It is essential that we be aware of the shifting methods of the ghoulish gynecologists, these sons of Frankenstein, whose speciality is “the science of womankind.”⁴²

While these sentiments may be abhorrent to anyone who has a sense of the transgender experience, they were particularly commonplace for their tame. And while Daly’s thoughts on the matter are indeed transphobic, they are rather tame compared to the assault and harassment produced by her student and dissertation advisee Janice Raymond. Raymond is famously the author of what may be called the quintessential TERF text, *The Transsexual Empire: The Making of the She-Male*. In the “Introduction to the 1994 Edition”, Raymond suggests that “. . .some of my friends credited *The Transsexual Empire* as an important influence on the termination of the [program for transsexual surgery at John Hopkins]. . .the first U.S. medical institution to perform transsexual surgery. . .”⁴³ While Raymond gives several other questionable reasons for why the program was potentially shut down, she does proudly advocate that what we now know as gender-reassignment or gender-affirming care and surgery should be either abolished or made stringently difficult to access. Daly and Raymond’s thoughts on this matter are very similar, though Raymond takes it to another extreme: instead of simply arguing against the validity of the transgender experience or attempting to limit our right to care, she chooses to attack specific trans women. For instance, she writes of eventual pioneering transgender theorist Sandy Stone in the following manner:

Masculine behavior is notably obtrusive. It is significant that transsexually constructed lesbian-feminists have inserted themselves into the positions of importance and/or performance in the feminist community. The controversy in the summer of 1977 surrounding Sandy Stone, the transsexual sound engineer for Olivia Records, an “all-women” recording company, illustrates this well. Stone is not only crucial to the Olivia enterprise but plays a very dominant role there. . .This only serves to enhance his previously dominant role and to divide women, as men frequently do, when they make their presence necessary and vital to women. Having produced such divisiveness, one would think that if Stone’s commitment to and identification with women were genuinely woman-centered, he would have removed himself from Olivia and assumed some responsibility for the divisiveness.⁴⁴

Even further, Raymond, aggressively misgendering and attacking Stone, argues that trans women are in fact rapists of the female body, writing,

⁴² Ibid. p. 72.

⁴³ Janice G. Raymond, *The Transsexual Empire: The Making of the She-Male* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1994), p. xi.

⁴⁴ Ibid. p. 102.

As one woman wrote of Sandy Stone and the Olivia controversy: “I feel raped when Olivia passes off Sandy, a transsexual, as a real woman. After all his male privilege, is he going to cash in on lesbian feminist culture too?” Rape, of course, is a masculinist violation of bodily integrity. All transsexuals rape women’s bodies by reducing the real female form to an artifact, appropriating this body for themselves. However, the transsexually constructed lesbian-feminist violates women’s sexuality and spirit, as well. Rape, although it is usually done by force, can also be accomplished by deception. It is significant that in the case of the transsexually constructed lesbian-feminist, often he is able to gain entrance and a dominant position in women’s spaces because the women involved do not know he is a transsexual and he just does not happen to mention it.⁴⁵

Despite these unfortunate, painful, and saddening take on transgender identity, I still believe that Daly specifically is an eminent, formidable thinker of the highest order. Her fear of trans women does not condemn all of her theology; rather, it shows the wounded essence of her project. In deconstructing the heart of patriarchy, she falsely led her divine fury against a group she did not and perhaps at the time very much could not understand. Not all of us are lucky enough to love after the so-called transgender tipping point of 2015. The power of hindsight is a gift, and one we should use with some generosity toward our forebears and their now unretractable missteps, cruel as they may be. Daly, having passed before the the tipping point, perhaps could have developed her viewpoint in a more progressive, inclusive, and what I argue is a radically-transgressive manner through the recognition of the reality of transgender struggle. Janice Raymond, on the other hand, is still alive and has yet to develop her stance with any amount of empathy and deeper understanding toward the trans experience — beyond suggesting that the idea that trans women are rapists of the female body was too extreme of a metaphor.⁴⁶ *The Transsexual Empire* has become a blood-covered, violent testament to the hatred of trans women, forcing us to face transmisogynist violence on one hand and transphobic psychological terrorizing on the other. Without the work of Raymond, we may not have the current movement of “gender critical” feminism most famously espoused in the recent literary expulsions of *Harry Potter* author J.K. Rowling.⁴⁷ We also, however, would not have the most foundational text within contemporary trans studies: Sandy Stone’s “The Empire Strikes Back: A Posttranssexual Manifesto” (1987).

⁴⁵ Ibid. p. 103-104.

⁴⁶ Julian Vigo and Janice Raymond, “Dispelling Fictions and Disrupting Hashtags,” CounterPunch.org, August 25, 2014, <https://www.counterpunch.org/2014/08/25/Dispelling-fictions-and-disrupting-hashtags/>.

⁴⁷ “J.K. Rowling Writes about Her Reasons for Speaking out on Sex and Gender Issues,” J.K. Rowling, September 9, 2021, <https://www.jkrowling.com/opinions/j-k-rowling-writes-about-her-reasons-for-speaking-out-on-sex-and-gender-issues/>.

III - Part C: "God's 'Becoming-Trans'"

In spite of the personal attacks that Raymond publicly waged against her, Sandy Stone managed to respond in a manner altogether marvelous, influential, and inspiring. With nuance and delicacy, Stone suggests that the battle of transgender people and cis women are not that inherently different — as each has been denied a voice in our cisheteropatriarchal culture — while also responding to the cruelty of Raymond's stance:

The people who have no voice in this theorizing are the transsexuals themselves. As with males theorizing about women from the beginning of time, theorists of gender have seen transsexuals as possessing something less than agency. As with genetic women, transsexuals are infantilized, considered too illogical or irresponsible to achieve true subjectivity, or clinically erased by diagnostic criteria; or else, as constructed by some radical feminist theorists, as robots of an insidious and menacing patriarchy, an alien army designed and constructed to infiltrate, pervert and destroy "true" women. In this construction as well, the transsexuals have been resolutely complicit by failing to develop an effective counterdiscourse.⁴⁸

Finding a productive use of Raymond's transphobic rhetoric (and offering the foundational conception of a transgender "counterdiscourse"), Stone develops an elaborate vision of the deconstruction of the gender binary, writing,

I suggest we start by taking Raymond's accusation that "transsexuals divide women" beyond itself, and turn it into a productive force to multiplicatively divide the old binary discourses of gender—as well as Raymond's own monistic discourse. To foreground the practices of inscription and reading which are part of this deliberate invocation of dissonance, I suggest constituting transsexuals not as a class or problematic "third gender", but rather as a genre—a set of embodied texts whose potential for productive disruption of structured sexualities and spectra of desire has yet to be explored.⁴⁹

Writing of the legacy of trans studies as founded by Stone — including and especially her work on using transgender experience as "a productive force to multiplicatively divide the old binary discourses of gender" — and its relationship to other fields, such as the study of religion, the editors of the *Trans*/Religion* issue of *Transgender Studies Quarterly* (TSQ) have this to say:

...it is undeniable that feminist, critical race, postcolonial, queer, and disability studies in religion inform the conditions of emergence of trans studies in religion. On the other hand, it is undeniable that trans studies challenges the enabling concepts of these approaches to the

⁴⁸ Stone Allucquère Rosanne, *The Empire Strikes Back: A Posttranssexual Manifesto* (not yr cister press, 2008), p. 12-13.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.* p. 14.

extent that it understands gender to operate differently, challenging—even displacing—the hegemony of a binary cisgender framework. Transgender does gender differently.⁵⁰

In relationship to the work of previous cisgender feminist scholars seeking the abolition of gender and who may have been critical of transgender existence, the editors write,

[Cisgender feminist studies] moral courage is to be found in addressing the unjust realities of patriarchal gender, and in contesting the manner in which various traditions have normalized this orientation by asserting its natural or God-given status. Trans studies of religion is well positioned to move outside or beyond the genderabolitionist framework of cisgender feminist studies of religion when it imagines not that gender is something that will someday be overcome, but that gender is a form of assemblage within which new potentials for generativity and becoming can creatively emerge.⁵¹

It is my argument in this section of the paper that this “assemblage within which new potentials for generativity and becoming can creatively emerge” can be productive for and toward a becoming-trans of God. The cisgender framework of binary gender can, in many ways, be viewed as what Deleuze called an image of thought. In this meta-cisheteropatriarchal situation, both ourselves as human beings and our image of God are left in a box which cannot match up to the infinite complexity of sexual and gendered identity. As Deleuze writes,

There are not two sexes, there are n [that is infinite or unknowably-numerable] sexes; there are as many sexes as there are assemblages. And since each of us enters into several assemblages, each of us has n sexes. When children discover that they are reduced to one sex, male or female, they discover their powerlessness: they lose the machinic sense and are left only with the signification of a tool. And then a child really does fall into depression. They have been damaged; their countless sexes have been stolen!⁵²

While I spoke earlier of a becoming-woman of the various elements of the psyche as outlined in Jung’s philosophy, this is merely one step in the process of creative escape toward the horizon of God’s becoming-trans. Rather than just one moment of becoming (such as the becoming-woman), Deleuze and Guattari speak of several, including a becoming-animal and a becoming-imperceptible. In *Beyond*, Mary Daly points out how even if you define God as spirit, the anthropocentric father image still

⁵⁰ Max Strassfeld and Robyn Henderson-Espinoza, eds., *Transgender Studies Quarterly: Trans*/Religion* 6, no. 3 (August 2019), 285.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Gilles Deleuze and David Lapoujade, “The Interpretation of Utterances,” in *Two Regimes of Madness: Texts and Interviews 1975-1995* (New York: Semiotext(e), 2007).

exists subconsciously. The image of God, then — especially if we are to take seriously Daly's critique of merely feminizing the static God-image — must be transformed via what Deleuze calls a movement-image, a becoming, or a line of flight: a series of psychological, existential, ontological, and metaphysical transition of sorts, including a becoming-woman (a feminist, minoritarian, situated God), a becoming-animal (a post-anthropocentric, ecological God), and eventually a becoming-imperceptible (God as spirit-dust⁵³, pangentheism⁵⁴). In its transformations through process theology and Daly's Be-ing as Verb, God is able to be experienced, rather than merely worshiped. In this, we move from the patriarchy of substance metaphysics and stasis to the transfeminist process. Examining the religious conceptions the world over, it is apparent that what we call God has always been multigendered, though this has been obscured by Western modern/colonial, cisheteropatriarchal theology. God is a name, the signifier for that which transcends and permeates boundaries. God is, in this sense, a significantly trans-gressive force. Letting go of the signifier — Jung's archetype that points to something which is beyond its name — allows for the development of an infrarealist empiricism (the eye of transition) of the infinite sexes of cosmic creation, the roar of becoming that speaks the infinite names of signification (the many names ascribed to and as "God") together in their multiplicity. Buried beneath the legacy of the monotononotheism Nietzsche critiques and the static cisheteropatriarchal God is the movement back into the depths of the past and into visions of the future; a non-linear, rhizomatic attempt to Name the unnameable force Daly called Be-ing. As the editors of the *Trans*/Religion* issue of *TSQ* write,

Transgender [and God's becoming-trans] in this sense is not a teleological development but a movement within an ever-unfolding arrangement of the material and immaterial realms, without a clear beginning or a knowable end, whose genesis and *eschaton* are just stories we can

⁵³ Taking my own spin on Luke B. Higgins' essay, "Toward a Deleuze-Guattarian Micropneumatology of Spirit-Dust", I argue that each being, each monad, and each society is a sex in the n-sexes of God, and each sex is filled with n-sexes themselves. This is how I understand the infinite multitude of "spirit-dust", the divinization of each and every being as a becoming within the flow of creation. As Higgins writes, "We are connected to and responsible for one another not because we are all children of a higher God or common descendants on a single genealogical tree, but because we are all composed of the same creative Spirit-dust. The traditional liturgical formulation 'from dust to dust' might take on a whole new meaning here, expressing our indebtedness not to inert matter, but animate, inspirited microparticles—what Deleuze-Guattari call the molecular. If Spirit is life, then what is truly living about us is not something we can identify with any particular molar structure—human or otherwise. Spirit-dust is the life-giving force underlying and giving rise to all of reality. Spirit does not come down to form our various molar identities—rather it bubbles up to reinspire our molecular becomings (p. 262)

⁵⁴ This is Matthew Segall's take on process panentheism, which includes the modifier "gen" to emphasize the generative, integrative, upward-moving relationship between matter and consciousness. Matthew David Segall, *Physics of the World-Soul: Whitehead's Adventure in Cosmology* (SacraSage Press, 2021).

tell. Transgender emerges from the middle of things to approach *tehom*—the face of the deep that calls us to have an imagination for what is becoming—from another point of address.⁵⁵

The transgender God, then, is no-less than the ever-happening event of Be-ing, bubbling up at the beginning of the world and arriving from the horizon of our futural imaginations. That God required a transition — though not the one Daly criticizes — is clear. Considering, however, that God is still worshiped as the divine patriarch in the majority of Abrahamic faiths, this may seem to be optimistic, wishful navel gazing — rather untimely considering the apocalyptic chaos spawned by kyriarchy that we find ourselves in. While I do wish to help spread the good news of the transgender God to my transgender kin and our allies, it may be “just [one of many] stories we can tell.” With the harm that theological orthodoxy has done, it could be quite difficult to evangelize this — what I argue is a posthuman — gospel. Given this, the following section, “IV. Queering Theology: Christianity’s Coming Out Party”, is both an advocacy for a transgender theology and a disavowal of traditional Christian positionality. By forcing theological assumptions to meet the real lived experience of trans people and the issues that concern them, I venture away from a purely theological lens. Rather, I focus on three main topics central to the transgender struggle at this time, coinciding with the period of coloniality, mass abjection, and the Anthropocene: spiritual authenticity, ethical recognition, and political liberation. Through these subjects I hope to offer some final elements of my trans-gressive theological approach and offer a series of considerations for my transgender kin and our allies. It is with hope that what I have to say is taken seriously, even if it remains too little too late in our cisheteropatriarchal, kyriarchal, and genocidal epoch.

IV. Queering Theology: Christianity’s Coming Out Party

IV - Part A: “Marcella Althaus-Reid’s ‘Indecent Theology’”

The point of departure [for indecent theology] is the understanding that every theology implies a conscious or unconscious sexual or political praxis, based on reflections and actions from certain accepted social codifications. These are codifications which configure our Christian visions of life and mystical projections relating human experience to the sacred. In theology, and in revolutionary theology, it is discontinuity and not continuation which is most valuable and transformative, so the location of excluded areas in theology is crucial. For instance, poverty and sensuality as a whole has been marginalised from theology.

— Marcella Althaus-Reid, *Indecent Theology*

⁵⁵ Max Strassfeld and Robyn Henderson-Espinoza, eds., *Transgender Studies Quarterly: Trans*/Religion* 6, no. 3 (August 2019), 285.

To love has always been queer, in both the archaic sense of being ‘odd’ and in the sexual sense of transgressing boundaries. To love both romantically and sexually the bodies, minds, and spirits of those who we are only supposed to love platonically is an act of radical courage; it is also, as we know, a radically-dangerous act depending on when, where, and how visibly you go about it. When we begin to speak about trans bodies, we work to queer the fascile dualities of the cisgender hetero/homo binary. While not all trans people define themselves as queer, it is apparent that a very significant proportion of cisgender people view us as inherently outside of the appropriate boundary boxes of the binaristic sexual regime of cisgenderopatriarchy. Additionally, as we see from the quotes and statistics that began this paper, we know that the lasting impact of this regime on queer and trans existence is one which is both soul-crushing and undeniably deadly. It is clear then, at least in my mind, that a queer and trans sexual and political praxis is necessary in our times.

That a sexual and political praxis is ever-present in any theology is a radical idea, and one that opens up various pathways for theorization. Althaus-Reid calls for ‘discontinuity’ with the conscious/unconscious Christian relationship to sex and politics that has been so conservative politically, so vilifying of the flesh erotically. In her own work, she traces the relationship between sex, economy, queer love, and queer faith, juxtaposing the reality of Latin American poverty and sexual practices with the colonial, cisgenderopatriarchal norms of Western Christian orthodoxy. In the spirit of this work, I have attempted to make my own contributions from the perspective of queer/trans life and faith as I know it. I have made it both implicit and explicit that I am theorizing from a particular positionality as a queer and trans person of faith, and my spiritual, ethical, and political framework calls for trans-gressive encounters with the subjects of theology. In this section I bring what have been mostly metaphysical arguments to their existential conclusions by analyzing the realms of spiritual authenticity, ethical recognition, and political liberation. By linking the praxis of ‘discontinuity’ with that of transgression, I hope to elucidate three linked concepts: a transgender Christianity operating in good, rather than bad faith; the relationship between faciality and trans-abjectivity; and the im/possibility of exiting the (proverbial) closet. Taken together with the two preceding sections of this essay, I hope to have successfully begun a cartography of what I have termed trans-gressive theology. It is without any hesitation that I say this venture would have never been possible without the ‘indecent’ theological spark of Marcella Althaus-Reid, and for that I’m ever-thankful.

IV - Part B: "Spiritual Authenticity: The Good Faith of Decolonization"

12 And Jesus went into the temple of God, and cast out all them that sold and bought in the temple, and overthrew the tables of the moneychangers, and the seats of them that sold doves,
 13 And said unto them, It is written, My house shall be called the house of prayer; but ye have made it a den of thieves.

Matthew 21:12-13

In his philosophy as expressed in *Being and Nothingness*, French philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre famously differentiated between good and bad faith (concepts that were already present in Christian theology) with an emphasis on phenomenological and existential authenticity versus self-duplicity, respectively. Central to this scheme are the forces of facticity (the material constraints of one's existence) versus freedom (the possibility of choice). While we may be constrained by facticity, choosing to limit one's freedom based on these constraints as if it was an existential necessity is an act of bad faith, objectifying oneself into a *being-in-itself*, rather than an authentic *being-for-itself*.

By denying our possibilities based on facticity, we succumb to the normative, linear, kyriarchical, objectified time of disenchantment. In my view, this is most exemplified in the colonial-techno-capitalist systems, which are rooted in the worldviews of manifest destiny, objectivist scientific rationalism, and Calvinist predestination. That these three structures organize our general, collective perception, senses of self, and notions of purpose in the contemporary West is not something I will debate much in this paper, as I feel that it is evident if we acknowledge the historical trajectory of the last 500 years in Turtle Island (otherwise known as North America).⁵⁶ Each is interdependent with the other: manifest destiny requires a belief in historical and geopolitical predestination; objectivist scientific rationalism requires the disinvested, disembodied, dissocial *Zeitgeist* of both predestination and manifest destiny. Objectivity is, due to its colonial roots, inherently against the intersubjectivity of many indigenous worldviews.⁵⁷ It is in this way that there is a link between scientific and Christian fundamentalism: each normalizes the colonial relations of modernity by both obscuring it and as a result affirming it through a reliance on literalistic readings of their respective traditions. Objectivist approaches to Western science ignore the esoteric beliefs of figures like Newton

⁵⁶ While this settler-colonial history has been explored in many capacities by numerous authors, it is still under-acknowledged in the general public and is in a constant state of erasure by the colonial ideology, protecting its ability to continue occupying land and committing genocide. A good resource for the history of both pre-and-post-Columbian life in what would become the United States is the work of Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, particularly *An Indigenous Peoples' History of the United States and Not "A Nation of Immigrants": Settler Colonialism, White Supremacy, and a History of Erasure and Exclusion*.

⁵⁷ Peter Pels, "After Objectivity," *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 4, no. 1 (2014): pp. 211-236, <https://doi.org/10.14318/hau4.1.009>.

and the deeply passionate, embodied philosophies of the ancient Greek philosophers; Christian fundamentalism takes a living, malleable, ever-changing set of religious texts and reads them as the literal word of God Almighty (without historical nuance, exegetical grace, or what I believe is a necessary speculative depth in terms of interplaying symbolism). Each is inherently antisocial.

But what does all this have to do with trans-gressing Christianity? Precisely this: that Christians approaching ‘the transgender question’ can either live in the bad faith of antisocial, damnable, colonial fundamentalism or approach transgenderism as an opportunity to affirm our freedom — our freedom in living out our true selves without fear, our freedom to interpret our faith with creativity, and our freedom to transform reality for the sake of life for its one sake (being-for-itself). While Sartre argues this means setting our own personal existential goals, I do think that coming together as religious communities means that there is a necessary intersubjective element to our goal-setting. What will Christianity be in the 21st century? Will it settle for the image of the anti-Christ or will it find a Christ worth imitating — a Christ (in the form of Jesus of Nazareth) which I would argue, having started a theopolitical revolution of love against a colonial empire, is radically-decolonial? That this image of Jesus is buried beneath 2,000 years of history, theology, and politics is no excuse: as Christians, we may choose the bad faith of socially-conventional, colonial facticity or the good faith of uncovering a (re)new(ed) Jesus who calls for the end of colonial normativity.

There is another element to the radicality of a transgender Christian authenticity: By rejecting the bad faith of conforming to a religious worldview which does not accept our existence, we open up ourselves to the possibility of finding the good faith of embracing the mystery of human relationality (a common house of prayer). To truly exist within a Christian framework requires a (re)new(ed) sense of Christianity, one that is equally as im/possible as trans-gressing cisgenderopatriarchal gender boxes. As we should remember, Western gender is a colonial construct and thus, to be trans people trans-gressing in good faith, we must make our liberation and our faith compatible with decoloniality. This would mean contesting the coloniality of gender; contributing materially, organically, and spiritually to dismantling colonial systems of occupation, erasure, and genocide; and fostering a religious worldview compatible with and informed by indigenous wisdom traditions and cosmologies. I believe the process-relational worldview is particularly equipped for this endeavor. With this in mind, let us foster a (re)new(ed) faith in service of the common house of prayer, working together to drive out the moneychangers of bad faith colonial fundamentalism.

In conclusion, let us examine two key verses in the gospels: The apocalypticism of Matt. 12:28⁵⁸ and the immanence of Luke 17:20-21⁵⁹. These two notions are two sides of the same coin: immanence is inherently apocalyptic, world-transforming in its immediatization of perceptual unveiling of the real conditions and possibilities of the deeply interrelated world in which we find ourselves embedded. That the kingdom of God is upon us requires faith in the mystical perceptions of Jesus; that the kingdom of God is in our midst means that these mystical perceptions are accessible. To approach these two notions in good faith means to find the kingdom of God in both our center (between the conscious and unconscious, the mind and the body) and on the horizon (our farthest perception of history, the target of our goal, the *telos* of our collective intersubjectivity). We must both uncover who and what God is for us, as well as work to awaken the kingdom within the world. To know this kingdom means to know God; to know God means having an image of God that speaks to us, that helps us heal the world, that guides our goals. If our goal is decolonization through a trans-gressive reevaluation of Christianity, we need to uncover an image of God that is critical, decolonial, trans, and potentially non-dual. While the first three may seem obvious, that the fourth term, non-duality, be included is equally important to the project of trans-gression. As I have suggested at the beginning of the paper, trans-gression is inherently about crossing boundaries, disrupting binaries, and finding an epistemological vantage point from the liminality of the eye of transition. As I will explore in the following section, “Ethical Recognition”, part of the condition of being transgender in Western modernity is being relegated to an abject, less-than-human state; and the experience of abjection is, importantly, duality-transgressing. Perhaps then transgender people can take their state of abjection and process it into an ethos of trans-gressive non-dual union with their God in service to decoloniality. After all, the dualities of Western modernity, whether they be mind/body, male/female, self/other, or subject/object, are deeply tied to the legacy of the colonial project. As I will explore in the next section, the West has a long history of crafting the image of Christ after itself; this is in no way the non-duality I’m attempting to argue for. Rather, as I will elaborate, I am seeking union with the God of the abject, the God of the oppressed, the affected, loving God who lures and calls us toward ‘a country of [our] own’ beyond the kyriarchal, colonial relations of Western modernity. This is where we must direct ourselves if there is any hope left for not only a just image of God or Christianity, but also for a livable, justifiable life on Earth for all people.

⁵⁸ But if it is by the Spirit of God that I drive out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you

⁵⁹ Once, on being asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, Jesus replied, “The coming of the kingdom of God is not something that can be observed, nor will people say, ‘Here it is,’ or ‘There it is,’ because the kingdom of God is in your midst.”

IV - Part C: "Ethical Recognition: The Face, Faciality, and Abjection"

13 All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance, admitting that they were foreigners and strangers on earth. 14 People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own. 15 If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return. 16 Instead, they were longing for a better country—a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them.

Hebrews 11:13-15

To truly be seen is to be understood; but to be understood as an object — whether of fetishization, hatred, or violence — is to be made abject. While Emmanuel Levinas retheorized first philosophy as ethics, with the face of the Other being the quintessential ethical encounter, Deleuze and Guattari theorized the face in a much different way: it is more significantly the site in which bodies are disciplined and categorized in relationship to the penultimate face of Western history: the face of the (white, male, cisgender, imperial, colonizing) Christ.⁶⁰⁶¹ In Deleuze and Guattari's expression, one is forced to have a face, to be recognized in hierarchical relationship to this transcendent face of the Western God-Man. The closer one is in appearance to this face, the closer one is to perfection; the farther away, to abjection, banishment, and death. Recognition — to be made a face, a stable thing, an identifiable object — is the tool by which the State apparatus categorizes, organizes, and distributes groups across the strata of the social hierarchy.

It is worth stating that in critiquing the systems of the face and of recognition, it would be very easy to abandon the work of Levinas' first philosophy entirely. In fact, as has been noted in previous literature, Deleuze and Guattari's discussion of the face is in direct response to Levinas. What is more difficult, on the other hand, would be to hold these two philosophical systems together in mutual expression — both the ethical imperative of the Other to be truly seen and welcomed and the critique of the white supremacist, cisgenderopatriarchal, imperial, colonial system which relegates the Other to a necropolitical periphery through a stratified, codified facial recognition network. According to Levinas, the face of the Other's alterity precedes judgments about them. What Deleuze and Guattari point out, however, is that the face is already preinscribed with judgments. People are prejudged and

⁶⁰ Emmanuel Levinas and Philippe Nemo, *Ethics and Infinity: Conversations with Philippe Nemo* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2011).

⁶¹ Gilles Deleuze and Guattari Félix, *A Thousand Plateaus*, trans. Brian Massumi (London: Bloomsbury, 2013).

profiled, often unconsciously, by the color of their skin, their level of attractiveness, their visible disabilities, and their gender, for instance; transphobia and the gender binary are no exception. Most trans people are misgendered constantly, both intentionally and unintentionally. We are frequently trapped inside cisheteropatriarchal gender boxes. To be recognized in one's alterity then is often a painful process of being boxed in, sometimes to great discomfort, other times to lethal results. So what is the point of being recognized in one's alterity when it leaves them in an abjective state? Perhaps, unfortunately, to be used as diversity quotas for neoliberal institutions?

In asking this, I am not suggesting that marginalized individuals and groups should not receive equitable expansions of rights and opportunities (they should). Significantly, however, I do not believe that Levinas is calling for mere cultural-institutional representation in his ethical project (a strategy and aim that has been endlessly critiqued by various anarchist, Marxist, post-structuralist, anti-racist, and decolonial thinkers), but instead a reformulation of the metaphysical relationship between Self and Other. While Hegel theorized the Self and Other as in a mutual struggle for recognition and mastery, Levinas instead sees the encounter with the face of the Other as that which ruptures conventional metaphysical, social, and personal desires with the command "Do not kill me". In this way, the Other bears the mark of a transcendent ethical command. However, it is obvious from the history of human tragedy — from persecution to war to slavery to genocide — that this command bears the possibility of being ignored entirely. As Deleuze and Guattari suggest, the system of the face is capable of radically-alienating some of our fellow humans from their humanity while inscribing a sense of glorification in others. Some are made abject; others are made lords and gods; and most live somewhere in between.

When it comes to the relationship of the face of the Other — both in terms of the ethical command to sanctify and the structural process of abjectification — we may catch sight of the two poles which queer and trans people are most often relegated. On the one hand, we⁶² are acclaimed by the liberal media and allowed our pride month to openly celebrate in progressive cities; on the other, we are chastised, abandoned, persecuted, and murdered in both those places and others. If the former is what Levinas means, then I fear that this ethical obligation is merely a fantasy being played out by slightly-left-of-center institutions and corporations to absolve themselves from what happens 'over there', on the other side of the political spectrum. That Gay Pride began as a riot organized and led by

⁶² This we (the "we-are-in-this-together-but-we-are-not-one-and-the-same" of Rosi Braidotti's posthumanist praxis) is an internally-complex, ever-differentiating multiplicity that should always pay close attention to intersectional matrices of oppression and privilege.

queer and trans people of color — for instance, Marsha P. Johnson and Sylvia Rivera, both members of the Gay Liberation Front and founders of the Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries (S.T.A.R.) — is a less marketable, safe, and sanitized expression of what it would mean to be truly seen. Being queer and trans ultimately means being viewed as less-than-human, as an abject form of humanity, particularly in the eyes of fascists and their religious equivalent, fundamentalist theocrats. To be made abject is to be made killable; to be a representation quota to help sell a product, a brand, and establish the ‘ethicality’ of corporations is to be fetishized and exploited, to be hyper-visible and yet erased at the same time. Thus to be seen in this double-bind might be less about parades and more about throwing bricks. In other words, when representation is a tactic of pinkwashing the abjective conditions of the queer and trans community, “do not kill me” may mean at the same time “do not represent me”.

In terms of literature on the subject of abjection, it has been explored quite valiantly by Julia Kristeva in her work *The Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, while the link between abjection and trans life/studies has been expressed quite significantly in the first issue of *Transgender Studies Quarterly* in a short essay by Robert Phillips.⁶³ Judith Butler also delves into the subject of abjection in their book *Bodies That Matter*, describing (akin to Deleuze and Guattari) the way in which the repudiation (i.e. abjection) of certain bodies serves to uphold the power (i.e. subjectivity, faciality) of others. They write,

This exclusionary matrix by which subjects are formed thus requires the simultaneous production of a domain of abject beings, those who are not yet “subjects,” but who form the constitutive outside to the domain of the subject. The abject designates here precisely those “unlivable” and “uninhabitable” zones of social life which are nevertheless densely populated by those who do not enjoy the status of the subject, but whose living under the sign of the “unlivable” is required to circumscribe the domain of the subject. . . In this sense, then, the subject is constituted through the force of exclusion and abjection, one which produces a constitutive outside to the subjected, an abjected outside, which is, after all, “inside” the subject as its own founding repudiation.⁶⁴

Might we recall the God of substance’s hierarchical ontology? For God (and men with Him) to have power, lasting historical presence, and a bolstered subjectivity, the Earth, flesh, women, and non-Christians had to be cast aside. In a different way, and rather ironically, we saw that in their attempts to carve out subjective space for themselves during the 1970s and ‘80s, some radical feminists

⁶³ Robert Phillips, “Abjection,” ed. Paisley Currah and Susan Stryker, *Transgender Studies Quarterly: Postposttranssexual: Key Concepts for a Twenty-First Century Transgender Studies* 1, no. 1-2 (May 2014): pp. 19-21.

⁶⁴ Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (Hoboken: Taylor and Francis, 2011), 236-237.

chose a transphobic path. And most importantly, we must recognize how the West has built its identity during the last 500 years (and even longer if we look at the Crusades and the past 2,000 years of anti-Semitism in Europe⁶⁵) on racist conquest and genocide. In all of these examples, we see power formed through abjection, disgust, rejection, and desecration.

To finally conclude this section, I would like to examine the pivotal connections between colonialism, gender and sexuality, abjection, and Christianity made by Manuel Villalobos Mendoza in his book *Abject Bodies in the Gospel of Mark*. It is with great pleasure that I discovered Mendoza's meditation on the Gospel of Mark: Having already started this section of the paper and nearing completion, I discovered that much of the connections I had made were already prefigured in this book, published in 2012. For instance, Mendoza writes, ". . . my hermeneutics of *el otro lado* [the other side] relies heavily on the insight of Judith Butler. . . [such as their] understanding of the vulnerability and precarious nature of the body, of how some bodies become human and others do not. . . [though] instead of reading philosophers through the lens of Butler, I have decided to go *ad fontes*, for example to Julia Kristeva's concept of the abject, Emanuel Levinas's understanding of the face, and Michel Foucault's understanding of power" (p. 6). Considering that Mendoza independently linked Butler, Kristeva, and Levinas — and quite specifically in the same manner as I have — is a blessing and also incredibly humbling. To have my thoughts validated in such a way is wonderful; to see that they have already been expertly deployed in near perfect fashion makes this section potentially redundant. However, I do believe that I have offered some originality to the conversation; and if not, then it is still with pleasure that I say that Mendoza has provided a beautiful example of trans-gressive theology, one which I now cherish dearly.

To conclude, I ask a fundamental question to my community: What would happen if, in affirming ourselves, we were able to also affirm our abjectivity? If instead of trying to wear the faces given to us by an anti-Christian empire founded on white supremacy, cisheteropatriarchy, classism, colonialism, and anthropocentrism, we rather admitted that we are 'foreigners and strangers on earth' and allowed our abjection to be our passports for 'a country of [our] own'? To have the strength to affirm both our alienation and our capacities for dreaming of a world beyond it? To dream of a life where instead of yearning for representation from our oppressors we (re)begin to represent ourselves to each other along the margins? If the structures of cisheteropatriarchy cannot define us in relation to its penultimate face, we reach a state of imperceptibility and become a blackhole for the powers of

⁶⁵ This subject is explored quite extensively in Geraldine Heng's recent book, *The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages* (2018)

faciality, pulling the representative capacities of the center apart through an affirmation of trans-abjectivity. The face of the colonizing European Christ haunts the world, haunts the soul, and haunts the flesh. What would it mean then to dissociate from this image of Christ and instead gather together and resurrect the body of God as a multiplicity of difference-in-itself, enfleshed and in communion? Difference not in relation to some hierarchical standard of holiness, but a difference that is truly singular in its uniqueness, and yet deeply intertwined within a sea of univocal, differential Being⁶⁶; a post-Christian, yet also postsecular multitude that allows the face to be encountered anew, as a radically-transgressive anti-face; a non-hierarchical, rhizomatically-aligned anti-fa(s)cism? Moving beyond a concept of humanity that does not include us, we yearn towards a state of posthuman spiritual and political possibility. Deep underground, we might begin to connect the wires necessary to make our Otherness not a territory that the Self can master and overcome, but instead a plane upon which new modes of escape become possible. Reaching out into the void, we call forth a new creativity, a new people, and a new earth: that which exists beyond cisheteropatriarchal, capitalist, and colonial normativity. As Ralph Ellison's invisible man declares at the end of his eponymous novel, driven below the world of exploitation and into the heart of the sewers, "Who knows but that, on the lower frequencies, I speak for you?" Perhaps in our abjectivity, we may speak to and welcome those yet-to-come; and let us imagine in doing so that the lurking God is calling us to 'a country of [our] own', spoken through 'on the lower frequencies' — a place to call home.

IV - Part D: "Political Liberation: The Anthropocene, the Closet, and Im/Possibility"

"Afterward Moses and Aaron went and said to Pharaoh, "Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, 'Let my people go, that they may hold a feast to me in the wilderness.' "

Exodus 5:1

In the age of the Anthropocene, the prospect of our future as a planetary ecosystem, let alone as a species, is daunting. In a world in which everything is tied together, bound to one another, we find that our fates are intimately woven into the fabric of a cosmic, planetary, and existential tapestry. We do not know if we — the we-are-in-this-together-but-we-are-not-one-and-the-same⁶⁷ — will survive the terrors of the present. I have borrowed the term of the "im/possible" from Jacques Derrida, following its explication by Catherine Keller. Keller writes, "Not accidentally, this epoch comes philosophically framed as 'the impossible possibility of the im/possible'

⁶⁶ Gilles Deleuze and Paul Patton, *Difference and Repetition* (London, UK: Bloomsbury, 2014).

⁶⁷ As mentioned in footnote 62.

(Jacques Derrida). That slash means to break through the paralysis of merely unrealizable possibilities and merely hopeless impossibilities. Might it crack the impossible open and point the way to “The Great Transition?”⁶⁸⁶⁹ In the same way that our possible extinction is interwoven, so is the im/possibility of our liberation(s). But as we have seen with the figure of God in our first two sections, just at the point when all seems to be finished, that death seems certain, a (re)new(ed) hope remains. Something burning, something vital, something revolutionary quakes through the mysterious webs of relationality. To affirm the im/possibility of our age of crisis is to take shape of a cosmic creativity: at the point in which the Earth, its abject peoples, and even God find themselves wrapped together, there is a fighting chance — one founded on creative engagement with the uncertainty, unknowing, indeterminateness, and contingency of not only our time, but all time. To be born again in this sense is to embrace the radical im/possibility of our very existence. That a rock floating through a vast, dark cosmos — albeit a numinously-dark one — should teem with life is a miracle in itself; that it was a necessity is doubtful, but that the im/possible *did* occur is certain. That life sprang back over and over again in spiraling (r)evolution is a mark of the im/possible nature of our very existence; that the (r)evolutionary path may continue — that the im/possible could be actualized — is a hope that must not be foolishly expected, but instead impassionately incarnated.

It is here that, with careful attention to the liminal via the eye of transition, we must come to observe the process of exiting the proverbial closet: while it is easy to look at queer or trans people who have successfully ‘come out’ as having always been destined for that exit, this fails to account for the struggle of one’s emergence as a queer and trans person. With the combined aspects of cisheteropatriarchy, compulsory heterosexuality, religious persecution, and internalized homo and transphobia, it is a miracle that anyone ever makes it out. It is, in many aspects, a process of disidentification with the dominant sexual and gender paradigms and simultaneously an experimentation with an outside, with a space beyond where one has been, to a horizon out of reach

⁶⁸Catherine Keller, “The Im/Possibility of Global Solidarity - Counterpoint: Navigating Knowledge,” Counterpoint, September 8, 2021, <https://www.counterpointknowledge.org/the-im-possibility-of-global-solidarity/>.

⁶⁹“Our common destiny remains indeterminate and contested. From the branch point of the present, contrasting paths into the future are possible, distinguished by the ways social-ecological crises and our collective response to them play out. These global scenarios fall broadly into three types: evolution [conventional or incremental approaches], degeneration [decay into barbarism and global conflict], and transformation. . . Transformative scenarios, or *Great Transitions*, envision the advent of a new development paradigm redirecting the global trajectory toward a socially equitable, culturally enriched, and ecologically resilient planetary civilization. This possibility rests on the ascent of a constellation of values—human solidarity, quality of life, and ecological sensibility—to moderate the conventional triad of individualism, consumerism, and domination of nature.

“What Is the Great Transition?,” Great Transition Initiative, April 18, 2018, <https://greattransition.org/about/what-is-the-great-transition>.

and unknown. To cultivate oneself as a queer and trans person means actualizing the im/possible; and in doing so, one is making a (r)evolutionary alliance with all that is contingent. It is only after one succeeds in such a struggle that it becomes obvious to outsiders that it was always going to happen. To many of us, however, the only thing obvious is that we have, if we are lucky, survived one passage in a lifetime of many to come.

For years, I felt trapped, isolated, dirty, sinful, doomed, perverted, misguided, and maladjusted to the “right” way of living. I was stuck in fear. I couldn’t picture myself acting out my desires without also imagining my eternal damnation. The cisheteropatriarchal God that the status quo had shoved down my throat was always clawing its way through my body, giving foreboding warnings that I would lose my way and end up in Hell if I ever pursued what I really wanted. It was only by letting go of consensus Christianity that I was able to find a line of flight beyond this hateful, wrathful God. In His place, I found a multitude of divine love, a Mother to all, the harvester of joy, and the consecrator of pleasure. To come out of the closet first required tending to the dark night of the soul within the closet — a path of extreme pain that gave birth to a (re)new(ed) divinity within myself. I found that to know God truly was to truly be oneself, to be one with God was to be the parts of God that even God is afraid of revealing to the world. A queer, trans God; a God that is actually universal because They are the parts of the world that the world most rejects.

This is why I find the figure of Jesus of Nazareth so important. For Christianity to be truly revolutionary, it must, as Jesus suggested, find and embrace “the stone the builders rejected”. As Matthew 21:42 says, “Jesus said to them, “Have you never read in the Scriptures: ‘The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; the Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes?’” From my abject religiosity, I have come to believe that it is the disenfranchised, the oppressed, the poor, the suffering, and the abandoned which make up this rejected stone. While most scriptural interpretation views this rejected stone as a metaphor for Jesus, I think this misses the true spiritual and political significance of who Jesus was: a mystic who spiritually and politically aligned himself with the oppressed people of the world. In this way, each and every suffering person, as a branch in Jesus’ vine, is one with him in the spirit of God; and thus, each is the foundation stone. To see that Jesus as the Christ is not just an individual person, but is the entire community of struggling humanity, is to discover the Christliness of each and every person. To return to the place of the closet, we must understand that this is a space of deep ministry, mystical union, spiritual trial, and, ultimately, development of the Godhead in its most politically and spiritually realized form.

That we should view the closet as a threshold for political liberation means keeping in touch with the eye of transition. That I can foresee my future becoming something I do not yet know, but that I yearn for, is to meet the im/possible in all its unknowable, uncontrollable mystery. It is the excess of desire, the passionate plea for something both carnal and out-of-this-world: as Catherine Keller once wrote, “Eros in theology may signify the lure of the not-yet.”⁷⁰ The eye of transition is a reminder that all living things die; and yet, in its liminal majesty, that all things participate in the process of Life and may come to live again in desirous intercarnality — in touch with unknown, yet anticipated futures. Exiting the closet of our political persecution, domination, and vilification is just that — a chance to live again, uncertainly, in a call towards the radically-contingent incarnation of the im/possible.

Likewise, the fight for liberation is not one which we can guarantee success. To live with this expectation is to live lifeless, to be trapped by the same eschatological framework that has for so long allowed the status quo to continue on as it wishes, to interpret “rendering unto Caesar what is Caesar’s” in defeatist, apathetic, and submissive bad faith. Everything happens for a reason: Not all of them are good and not all of them are justifiable. We must move past treating the universe and adversity like Job’s friends would. Finding hope in suffering is one thing, but belittling that suffering by saying that it is all a part of God’s plan causes the genuine material reality of that suffering to be hidden behind an unnuanced and careless theology. We cannot simply await the end of white supremacy, capitalism, cisheteropatriarchy, or coloniality; we must strive against them with an ethics of active affirmation, an unrelenting drive toward the im/possible horizon of our freedom. Just as hiding away or denying the alternative paths of gender and sexuality from human beings under the paradigm of cisheteropatriarchy leaves them locked in a (often unnameable) closet, denying or covering up the realities of other horrific paradigms within kyriarchy leaves individuals and communities locked in closets of social, bodily, and psychological oppression. What we need, then, is a series of apocalypses. As Catherine Keller has noted in many of her works, the term *apokalypsis* does not mean the end of the world. Rather, it denotes an “unveiling” or an “uncovering”. To come out of the closet is to reveal the truth of life’s complexity, to unveil the horrors of injustice and at the same time open space for their overcoming. To welcome *apokalypsis* means holding space for the im/possible: a future where the closet no longer hides the abject away in shame, but instead welcomes them for all their beautiful, relational, and divinely-embodied bodily-divinity.

⁷⁰Virginia Burrus, Catherine Keller, and Catherine Keller, “Afterword: A Theology of Eros, After Transfiguring Passion,” in *Toward a Theology of Eros Transfiguring Passion at the Limits of Discipline* (New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 2006), p. 366.

In conclusion, we can say that in trans-gressive theology to live with spiritual authenticity in relation to our world-historical crises means taking on a (re)new(ed) vision of our role in incarnating the future; to achieve ethical recognition means escaping the very systems attempting to recognize us, while simultaneously building community underground; and to fight for political liberation means to struggle our way out of a very old and unfortunately inconspicuous array of closets in a return to fecund Life. To make our way outside, we must follow maps half-drawn; and on the way out, we must add our own creative cartographic contributions. In a struggle to survive the im/possibility of our circumstances, we trans-gress; and in each victory, each subtle escape toward innumerable numinously-dark horizons, we might see the splendor of a mysterious and co-creating world-to-come. Out there, ‘in the wilderness’ where the feasts of the im/possible may be held, we seek the liberation of not only ourselves, but of our enemies, our comrades, our communities, our ecosystems, and the very soul of the world. And so as we struggle, may we have a resilient faith in possibility, a yearning hope for transformation, and a passionate love for all beings.

V. Conclusion; or, Trans-gressive Theology: Pathways to Trans Liberation

V - Part A: “Summary of Previous Sections as Examples of Trans-gressive Theology”

It is with the powers of trans-gressive faith, hope, and love that transgender people will find their place in relation to Christianity in the general sense. The title of the first subsection of the introduction of this paper asked us, “Do transgender Christians have a church?” It is an open-ended question, but one that I feel has two primary potential orientations: 1. Are transgender people able to fit into the current culture and structure of the average Christian church?, and 2. Are transgender people capable of having a church of their own? I am concerned with both questions. It is my intention in this section to argue that transgender people as individuals and as a whole must answer these questions in good faith as they/we face not only our contemporary crises, but also our im/possible quests for liberation. Are the churches we desire to accept us even capable of accepting us truly in their current state? Even if, are these institutions capable of also directing themselves wholly to the project of decolonization, to their own dissolution? And what is more important: the potentially reactionary image of Christ they might cling to or the real, lived experience of the Earth’s abject peoples? Likewise, we must decide if we are going to do our theology from the location of abject struggle or from the comfort of absent-minded, yet active, colonization. The latter is inherently

anti-Christian; the former is transgressive of contemporary anti-Christian normativity, idolatry, violence, and genocide.

It is with these framing questions that I would like to outline the ways in which trans-gressive theology (as described in this paper) serves to found a (re)new(ed), apocalyptic, and immanent sense of Christianity — a Christianity lived through trans experience, lived in good faith in that experience, lived with abjection but seeking liberation. To do so, I would like to examine the three main portions of the paper — “II. Process Theology”; “III. The Trans/Formation of the God-Image”; and “IV. Queering Theology” — and express with some concluding remarks about how they fit together as examples of trans-gressive theology.

In section II, “Process Theology: An Affected, Relational, Luring God”, I examined the dualistic, life-degrading, violent legacy of the God of substance, his figurative death due to the revelations of modern science and secular culture, the possibility of a God after God, and the claim that Whitehead’s process God is one extremely valuable candidate for such a position. Moving beyond the kyriarchal nature of substance metaphysics, we can see process philosophy and theology as a gateway to a more holistic, more relational worldview. To know the God Whitehead and other process thinkers speak of means to know them as “the fellow-sufferer who understands”, as a friend, as an ally, and as a comrade in the fight for a more just, healing, and creative world. It is without question that my trans-gressive view of Christianity is committed to a God in this form — a God of the oppressed.

Likewise, in section III, “The Trans/Formation of the God-Image: From Patriarchy to Transfeminism”, I traced Jung’s description of the shifting monotheistic God-image of the ancient Israelites through 20th century Christianity, linking it to the notion of a becoming-woman (through Deleuze) and a becoming-trans of God. Throughout this section, I also connected the history of feminist theologian Mary Daly’s trans-exclusionary radical feminism to the origin of trans studies via the work of Sandy Stone (through the intermediary of Daly’s dissertation advisee and Stone’s transphobic interlocutor, Janice Raymond). Each of these interconnected cartographies contribute important elements to trans-gressive theology: For instance, Jung’s insistence that, while there might be a genuine God, there is also always an *image* of God in the minds of a culture of believers that serves to help that culture relate to the world around them is essential. By psychologizing the God-image, Jung works to make the concept and experience of God a deeply liminal, potentially non-dual affair. That the image of God (and as Deleuze advocates, our image of thought) could change over time also leaves room open for further ‘trans/formations’ of the God-image — ones that could trans-gress the cisgenderopatriarchal image that has plagued women, trans and gender

non-conforming people, and queer people for the past 2,000 years. To transgressively approach the idol of the God-image of cisheteropatriarchy as a trans person is, quite essentially, the spirit of trans-gressive theology as I have come to know it in faith, study, and life.

Additionally, by tracing the budding spirit of trans theology in general back to Mary Daly, I work to trans-gress both the spirit of her trans-exclusionary radical feminism and also to provide evidence that trans people need not fear the spiritual side of their experience. Just as Sandy Stone fought back against Daly and Raymond's transphobic personal attacks and legacy, I hope to offer a further retaliation: that of trans-gressive theology, a theology by and for trans people. Ironically, we carry the torch that Daly did herself, only this time we do it for the trans men, women, and gender-conforming people that Daly could not find in her heart to love and accept. To love and accept ourselves, we trans-gress; and in trans-gression, we learn to live the lives of spirit that have been denied to us.

Finally, we look at section IV, "Queering Theology: Christianity's Coming Out Party". In this section, through the inspiration of Marcella Althaus-Reid's indecent theology, I approached three topics: spiritual authenticity, ethical recognition, and political liberation. In the "Spiritual Authenticity" subsection, I examined how, following Sartre, one could live in good faith to their lives and historical circumstances. Like Sartre, I specifically outlined how this relates to living in colonial times and spaces, but with the added conditions of being transgender and Christian. It was my argument that in order to live in good faith in Turtle Island specifically, American Christians need to commit to the project of decolonization. Additionally, for transgender people to live in good faith, we must recognize that it is quite possible that Christianity as an institution will never accept us, and therefore we need to find our religion in the common 'house of prayer', the world of process and relationality. That this means also breaking down the colonial structures — which include cisheteropatriarchy and fundamentalist scientism and religion — is a given. We cannot have a world of relationality and process (and live it in good faith) if we still excuse the systems of colonial oppression and genocide which have come to dominate and destroy essential lives, cultures, and ecosystems. Significantly, I argue that for cisgender and transgender Christians to commit themselves to such a task, they need both an apocalyptic and an immanent approach to their spiritual life. Apocalyptic because we need to feel that the dawning of the kingdom of God is always-arriving and in active need of co-creation; and immanent because we must find the seeds of this kingdom — and its concurrent God-image — within our own lived experience, imagination, and intuition. In an apocalyptic and immanent sense, living in good faith as a transgender Christian means trans-gressing colonial spatial and temporal normativity.

In the second subsection, “Ethical Recognition”, I compare the differing discourses on faciality of both Levinas and Deleuze/Guattari. I use this as an important venture into the subject of abjection and the possibility that the coming faith of transgender people may be most powerfully found through the rejection of representative institutions. In other words, perhaps transgender people do not need to be welcomed by the contemporary church; we may just have to form our own churches underground, committed less to comfort and more to the project of revolutionizing our modes of escape from the dominating apparatuses of the present. Rejecting the ‘face’ of being a subject in this kyriarchal present is a process of trans-gression; we choose the relations and intimacy of abjective solidarity over the demands of institutional representation. We find ‘the face of the Other’ — the stranger transfigured into the beloved — not on the surface of normativity, but deep below, feeling our comrades’ wounds as the wounds of (re)new(ed) Christs.

In the last subsection, “Political Liberation”, I explore the im/possibility of escaping the closet and how this process relates to the im/possibility of our quests for liberation. With the foreground set with the potential collapses of the Anthropocene, I express that we cannot operate with pre-established certainty about what will happen (think the bad faith apocalypticism of certain strands of Marxism and fundamentalist Christianity), but instead work to incarnate the possibilities that we desire with deep attention to uncertainty, unknowing, indeterminateness, and contingency. To trans-gress in this sense means to continually frame the impossible as the slashed ‘im/possible’, emphasizing the potentiality of our unknown, open, co-constructable futures. We combat bad faith with a deep connection to creativity. Just as the image of God is capable of changing, so is our relationship to the worlds of tomorrow. Whether they actually come to fruition will depend heavily on if we follow the luring call of transformative promise. In the meantime, we can take a lesson from the queer God, whose heresies of love light the way to a simple, devotional prayer.

V - Part B: “Trans Futures: The Indecent Love of The Transgender Christ”

If we were to follow that dictum from the Reformation, that we know nothing about God except for what we know of Jesus, then we need to confront a Jesus/God whose theological identity has become a unique mess of being the One who fucked Mary and is yet her son at the same time (interesting if not very edifying material). That Jesus who had a preference for men disciples, beloved disciples and a Lazarus who was so close to him that the Gospel presents Jesus in his infantile denial of his death. So Jesus may be a faggot, or a transvestite, so little we know of him except what other people saw in him; sexual appearances are so deceiving. Or Jesus as a man who desired both men and women and met those men and women’s desires whoever they were.

— Marcella Althaus-Reid, *Indecent Theology*

Today, being transgender is a heresy; and with trans-gressive theology, we not only seek to survive our banishing from the halls of organized religion and society at large, but to also affirm and harness the power of the heretical as a spiritual guide in our struggle toward liberation. As outcasts, we might use the numinous dark of our spiritual, ethical, and political status as a prophetic mirror against a Christian-sponsored kyriarchy; we might draw the world of cisheteronormativity into our abyss of trans-abjectivity; we might inject uncertainty into theo-fascist certitude; and we might open faith into realms of unknowing, indeterminateness, and contingency. In this way, the heresy of trans-gression is a model for spiritual, ethical, and political foundations of faiths inspired by becoming, transition, and transformation.

A trans-gressive Christianity is, perhaps, what Deleuze calls a larval subject — a pre-subjective singularity giving birth to a system;⁷¹ and it is my conviction that this system being birthed is the process, archetypal, and queer religiosity of an ancient and futural planetary consciousness. A Christianity that does not come to terms with its trans-gressive roots — for who was Jesus of Nazareth if not a spiritually, ethically, and politically transgressive leader? — may miss the potential lying at the heart of the so-called ‘transgender question’. A Jesus who may have been queer or trans, who takes on the personage of the ‘hungry’, ‘thirsty’, ‘strange’, ‘unclothed’, ‘sick’, and ‘imprisoned’ (Matt. 25:35-36), may very well be both the ancient Jesus of the Gospels and the future Jesus of an always-already coming age. To trans-gress, then, is to invite the Lord into the present.

That a future for transgender people may involve a (re)new(ed) sense of Christianity may seem quite *queer*. However, I hope that in the previous sections of this essay that it has been made apparent that theology and transgender people are not only deeply connected, but are mutually-implicated in the well-being of our local communities, our global societies, and our planetary consciousness. If we do not move past the omnipotent, omniscient, omnibenevolent God of Western Christian substance metaphysics, we lose the opportunity to feel justly-empowered, creatively-understanding, and passionately-empathetic in what are devastating, disempowering, dislocating, and dissociative times. Likewise, if we do not embrace the Divine Feminine and, even further, the inexhaustible plurality of spiritual archetypes of planetary wisdom traditions, then we serve only capitalistic disenchantment, the death of the numinous, and organized and mythologized cisheteropatriarchy. And lastly, if we do not come out of the closet of compulsory-cishetero Christianity, we banish the genuine teachings of justice-based transgression that, according to the Gospels, was taught by Jesus himself. That

⁷¹ Gilles Deleuze and Paul Patton, *Difference and Repetition* (London, UK: Bloomsbury, 2014).

transgressive attitude — which is at the heart of my theory of theological trans-gression — is, ultimately, a philosophy of love.

It is famously reiterated that Jesus said to love your enemies, but I think that it is equally important to acknowledge what Martin Luther King, Jr. often said about that moral injunction: “And I’m so happy [Jesus] didn’t say, “Like your enemies,” because it’s kind of difficult to like some people.”⁷² While this may be interpreted as a call for self-distanced tolerance of those who we may find unappealing, I think that this is an inherently-conservative interpretation and one that many conservative Christians do not have time for when it comes to transgender people. We are sinners and they are God’s chosen. We are on the side of the devil and they are on the side of the Lord God. We are, as Pope Francis said, “commit[ing] a new sin, that against God the Creator”. What I find most interesting in Dr. King’s elucidation, on the other hand, is what loving those we do not like means for those facing severe oppression. If transgender people are to love those who oppress us, it is a radical act of trans-gression — not because we are practicing God’s transcendent moral commandment, but rather because our oppressors are themselves, whether they realize it or not, oppressed by the same systems that they use against us. For instance, the shackles of cisheteropatriarchy, whether we view it in the realms of systemic institutional or personal structures, serve to limit what human beings are capable of feeling, experiencing, and practicing. In a very real sense, their love is cut short; it is made to be controlled, limited, and even feared. The God of cisheteropatriarchy is more vengeful than loving, with His talk of eternal damnation and apocalyptic destruction; and, in the era of Western modernity/coloniality, is a deeply-isolating and genocidal force. The call to love our enemies then, as transgender people, is a call to trans-gress these violent boundaries and call our siblings back into the world of relationality, relationship, and communion. To trans-gress is to love — perhaps indecently, perhaps heretically — and to love is to live in radical interconnectivity with all that is. Let us consider this: that the polyamorous love of Althaus-Reid’s Jesus — one who we may truly call Christ and Messiah, if simply for the fact that their love was unbounded, multifaceted, and intimately-engaged with the needs and circumstances of their beloveds in a way nearly (if not actually) unrivaled — is the true heart and most-abundant seed of Christianity. To embody a Christianity based on this principle is what I believe Catherine Keller means by the term “intercarnation”, and it is in intercarnational

⁷² “Loving Your Enemies, Sermon Delivered at the Detroit Council of Churches’ Noon Lenten Services,” The Martin Luther King, Jr., Research and Education Institute, May 24, 2021, <https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/king-papers/documents/loving-your-enemies-sermon-delivered-detroit-council-churches-noon-lenten>.

solidarity that queer, transgender, and gender-nonconforming people will aid in the struggle to bring about a (re)new(ed) faith in flesh, in the world, and in spirit.

In conclusion, I would like to offer a simple prayer that I wrote in the summer of 2021. It is a song for not only the Earth and the divine feminine, but, quite achingly, to ourselves. With the poetic urgency of deep love, I call them out of the closets installed by cisgender patriarchy and into a world of holy relationality, intimacy, and community. I hope that these words offer a hopeful message of possibility and a sense of trans-gressive, transfeminist creativity. May they enter your heart with affection and inspire your mind with connection.

Oh Lord Mother,
 I send thee a prayer tonight,
 A bitter offering,
 A sorrowful song,
 For I am weak and tired,
 Having stared long into the night,
 And saw nothing but shame and envy.
 Alas, I am calling you the only way I know how,
 For 'Lord' itself was too oppressive,
 And 'Mother' alone felt too homesick,
 So I lie here, hoping this reaches you—
 You who are the Sun and the Moon,
 You who write the songs of the forests and the oceans,
 You who make babies and mountains speak,
 A rumbling of spirit,
 A menagerie of consciousness,
 For you I kneel.
 Let me say just this:
 If you wake me in the Morning,
 Let it be to be a star in your show,
 Or, if you'll let me, just as an odd passerby,
 Even being just a simple stone would do,
 Sitting next to a river,
 Stepped on and unbothered,
 Flicked across the currents,
 Dancing on your belly to the sound of glee and laughter.

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