

“The Closet” on campus

Hookup culture and sexual assault

The rise of hookup culture is believed to be associated with the rise in sexual assaults on college campuses. Megan McCabe writes, “[R]ape on campus is not a deviant form of violence perpetrated by bad men. Rather, campus rape is the violent manifestation of seemingly ‘normal’ heterosexuality.” This campus culture encourages hyper-masculine, aggressive and dominant, and hyper-feminine, acquiescent and passive, performances of gender. In this type of culture, “patterns of sexuality that are infused with violence, coercion, and abuse are seen as typical, normal expressions of heterosexual relationality and encounters.” In the dominant form of sexual encounters on college campuses known as hookups, male partners are socialized to assume the availability of women’s bodies and to filter sexual desire through objectification. Most studies of sexual assault on college campuses that track these cultural trends and gender expectations focus on straight, female victims. As a result, literature on the prevalence of sexual assault in the LGBTQ campus community and our understanding of how the hooking up model of sexual intimacy affects queer students is sparse. While knowledge on the topic on college campuses is limited, research on the general population indicates equal or greater risk for sexual violence amongst LGB people. In a large and unique study of twenty-one colleges and universities, straight women and gay/bisexual men reported similar rates of sexual assault at around 25% of the population. Bisexual women had the highest rates of any group, with 38% reporting an instance of sexual assault. Another study found that LGB students are three times more likely to experience sexual assault than straight men, and transgender students are more likely to experience sexual assault than cisgender students. Ultimately, “such high numbers for these sexual minority groups strongly suggest that there is a relationship between sexual orientation and sexual violence during individuals’ formative years in college.” This point about sexual orientation, sexual violence, and years of formation requires

emphasis. A 2013 study by the Pew Research Center shows that while most gay, lesbian, and bisexual people knew for sure that they were LGBTQ between the ages of 15-18, the first time they told someone else was between the ages of 18-21. This means that college-educated LGBTQ people who matriculate to their institution directly after high school on average are coming out to people at their university and are engaging in discernment about queer sex for the first time on their college campuses. LGBTQ identity is therefore being forged in an environment of dominant cultural understandings of masculinity and femininity, where social rewards and incentives lie in the hooking up model. The data that is available shows that LGBTQ people and gender minorities experience disproportionately high rates of sexual violence on college campuses, a statistic located within the rigid sex and gender norms dictated by hookup culture.

Recent literature on sexual assault on college campuses has emphasized social drivers of assault rather than focusing on individual predators or post-assault procedures. In *Sexual Citizens*, Jennifer Hirsch and Shamus Khan emphasize the role of sexual projects, citizenships, and geographies in their “ecological model” of campus cultural formation. Sexual projects refer to the reasons that students seek out sexual encounters. These reasons are shaped by families, friends, and religious institutions, amongst other cultural factors. Hirsch and Khan find that, for LGBTQ students and those exploring sexual and gender identity, sex was not “just about who to have sex with. It was a project of coming to understand the person they were, or wanted to be.” The findings show many young people to be unequipped by their social support systems to think critically about their own sexual project. Sexual geography illuminates the power that physical and social space has in organizing sexual relations. Hirsch and Khan employ these concepts to argue for their central claim about sexual citizenship: sexual agency and self-determination are human rights to be promoted and protected. The college campus itself is best thought of as its own community requiring justice and accountability measures. On college campuses, sexual citizenship is a

“community project that requires developing individual capacities, social relationships founded in respect for others’ dignity... and a culture of respect.” Sexual citizenship is constrained when students are not encouraged to develop their sexual projects in relation to their values and by geographies that enable abuses of power or control. Rigid gender norms, statistics of violence on college campuses, and narratives of sex and sexual expectations are compellingly understood as results of social structures and an ecosystem of drivers that makes sexual assault more likely to occur. Sexual integration is formed in this cultural context, and for some students, this context is filtered through a religious lens.

Catholic teaching on sex and gender

In December 2023, the Catholic Church’s Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith (DDF) published *Fiducia Supplicans*, on the pastoral meaning of blessings. This document emphasizes a pastoral and living understanding of blessing, such that the Church “must shy away from resting its pastoral praxis on the fixed nature of certain doctrinal or disciplinary schemes.” The Prefect, Víctor Manuel Card. Fernández, with Pope Francis’s approval, concludes that there appears the possibility for blessing same-sex couples. This document received significant national and international media attention, given the Catholic Church’s notorious position upholding gender complementarity in marriage. However, less than four months later in April 2024, the DDF released another document titled *Dignitas Infinita*, on human dignity. In this document, carrying equal authority and approval from Francis, Fernández harshly condemns gender theory and “sex change” as contrary to Catholic understandings of human dignity: Gender theory “intends to deny the greatest possible difference that exists between living beings: sexual difference. This foundational difference is not only the greatest imaginable difference but is also the most beautiful and most powerful of them. In the male-female couple, this difference achieves the most marvelous of reciprocities.” Taken together, *Fiducia Supplicans* and *Dignitas Infinita* helpfully represent a Catholic Church at a critical juncture, attempting

simultaneously to create pastoral spaces of welcome for queer people and to hold onto traditional views of sex and gender that undergird much of Catholic theology, institutional practices, and governance structures. This tension is not new, but rather is the result of shifts that have been occurring since the Second Vatican Council toward a modern, inculturated church that embraces the social sciences and emphasizes personal conscience as an ethical resource.

It is in these ways that *Fiducia Supplicans* and *Dignitas Infinita* represent competing strains within Catholic social teaching. While the average Catholic is not an expert on the document tradition of marriage and family, these approaches—a pastoral approach, a living tradition, and sexual relationships about love and fulfillment versus an authoritative approach, an unchanging tradition, and sexual relationships about procreation—permeate the varied ethics of sex in Catholic spaces such as families, parishes, and universities, where sex and gender is practiced and enacted.

Queer Theory

The modern gay liberation movement in the United States dates itself to the 1969 riots at Stonewall Inn. These riots abruptly brought the private sphere of queer and trans life into the public arena in a political way, demanding a right to exist without fear of policing or violence. Accompanying this irruption of marginal sexuality onto the public sphere was the rhetoric of “coming out.” Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s *Epistemology of the Closet* takes a critical look at the construction of language and the social function of terms like homo/heterosexuality. Sedgwick writes, “[E]ven the phrase ‘the closet’ as a publicly intelligible signifier for gay-related epistemological issues is made available... only by the difference made by the post-Stonewall gay politics oriented around coming *out* of the closet.”¹ Indeed, National Coming Out Day was founded in 1988 as a way to celebrate living freely as gay or lesbian, an example of the solidification of the

¹ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 14.

closet into national discourse. Sedgwick's argument is that the idea of the closet and of "homosexual" identity represented a new form of world-mapping into binary categories.

The idea of queer visibility that coming out of the closet harkens to has been a source of distinct joy for the queer community. Around the world, Pride marches announce the presence of a wide range of sexualities and gender identities, celebrating pride in one's identity over the shame that can accompany the experience of being closeted. There are distinct ways that the celebration of visibility, being "out," has served to protect queer people in the legal sphere and in the workplace. In contemporary politics, this gains a renewed sense of relevancy when considering the introduction of the "Don't Say Gay" bill signed in March 2022 in Florida and the history of "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" politics in the U.S. military. Indeed, Sedgwick does not deny the concrete social impacts that the possibility of being outside the closet has had for queer people. However, Sedgwick writes that "[t]here are risks in making salient the continuity and centrality of the closet, in a historical narrative that does not have as a fulcrum a saving vision—whether located in past or future—of its apocalyptic rupture. A meditation that lacks that particular utopian organization will risk glamorizing the closet itself, if only by default; will risk presenting as inevitable or somehow valuable its exactions, its deformations, its disempowerment and sheer pain."² Sedgwick is concerned about the ways that working within an epistemology of the closet limits our imaginations of what is possible for queer flourishing. There is a way that the closet imaginary depends on the idea of certain vulnerable queer bodies, disempowerment, sheer pain.

There is a way that the closet contains a certain degree of violence in its ordering of gender and sexuality into neatly packaged narratives that often operate in simplistic binarisms. For Sedgwick, this is due to an approach to knowledge as stable and sexual categories as, therefore, easily

² Ibid., 68.

identifiable. Queer affirmation, on the other hand, privileges unknowing. The hermeneutic that Sedgwick proposes in this foundational text for the field of queer theory is described by Gila Ashtor as “the will-not-to-know.”³ If the closet represents a clearly defined and knowable past and a neatly intelligible queer identity of the present and future, queer epistemology resists the idea that there is a completely “knowable” queer self. Queerness resists anticipating what is and is not queer. This insight from Sedgwick becomes a defining characteristic of the field of queer theory. The term *queer* exists as a noun, adjective, and a verb. It is distinctive for its embrace of dislodgement and resistance to any real categorical definition. In this way, the category, at least in theory, aims to be in a constant state of self-critique and becoming.⁴

Against the stable knowing of the closet, the embrace of unknowing by queer theorists has produced an imagistic theory on temporality, futurity, and an understanding of queer identity that always exists in a state of longing for the unattainable realm of queer liberation. Muñoz centers his book on queer survival around the image of a horizon: “Queerness is not yet here. Queerness is an ideality. Put another way, we are not yet queer. We may never touch queerness, but we can feel it as the warm illumination of a horizon imbued with potentiality.” Muñoz calls for queer people to strive “to think and feel a *then and there*.” This is not a dualistic or an other-worldly framework, but rather a call for attentiveness to queer practices and aesthetics that represent “a doing for and toward the future” that Muñoz elaborates throughout his book. Alison Kafer also theorizes about queer/feminist/crip temporality in her foundational text for the field of crip studies. Kafer understands temporality as “flex time not just expanded but exploded; it requires reimagining our notions of what can and should happen in time, or recognizing how expectations of ‘how long

³ Gila Ashtor, *Homo Psyche: On Queer Theory and Erotophobia* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2021), 40.

⁴ Barbara Anne Kozee, “Gila Ashtor’s ‘Homo Psyche’ a Bold Field Intervention Relevant for Liberation Theology,” *National Catholic Reporter*, June 11, 2022, <https://www.ncronline.org/news/opinion/gila-ashtors-homo-psyche-bold-field-intervention-relevant-liberation-theology>.

things take' are based on very particular minds and bodies." Like Muñoz, Kafer aims to "explode" our understanding of temporality and to make contested what often goes unthought due to our assumptions about normative bodies. She suggests that the expansive imaginary around sex, gender, and disability that she proposes "can never be fully or finally achieved, but serves as a kind of hopeful horizon."

Sedgwick's opening chapter quote for her epistemology of the closet is from Marcel Proust's *The Captive*, where he writes of social "lies" or narrative myths that one overcomes: "that lie is one of the few things in the world that can open windows for us on to what is new and unknown, that can awaken in us sleeping senses for the contemplation of universes that otherwise we should never have known." It is striking how theological queer theorists such as Muñoz, Kafer, and Sedgwick here in her opening reflection can sound when attempting to understand the vulnerability of queer bodies and the violence rendered by certain binaristic rhetorics or literary devices such as the closet. True to Sedgwick's argument, the Proust quote illuminates the beauty of unknowing and its possibility for awakening us, via contemplation, to a form of imagination or mystical knowing that would previously have gone unattained. Turning to Rahner's theology and anthropology, which I connect to his contemplative writings in explicit ways, can help to illuminate a theological and contemplative dimension to how queer theorists define flourishing. Contemplative practice and regular encounters with the paschal process of knowing, unknowing, and knowing afresh pushes against the closet logic of gender and sexuality and cultivates a view on the self as always in the process of becoming.

Catholic Theology

Rahner employs the notion of horizon in his philosophical beholdenness to Martin Heidegger, but the horizon he has in mind also has much in common with that of Muñoz and Kafer. Rahner's interpreter, William V. Dych, emphasizes the approach to knowledge in Rahner

moving “not from without, but from within existence” such that theology is able to be in dialogue with modern philosophical concerns. Rahner adds the theological stakes involved in queer flourishing. When viewed with the insights of the Christian contemplative tradition and his own contemplative writings, Rahner’s own ethics for experiencing a graced and mysterious life is apparent.

In *Grace in Freedom*, Rahner meditates on “the little word ‘God’” and provides some musings on the topic. For Rahner, the word *God* simultaneously evokes the concept of higher being at the same time as it is always fundamentally limited, a failure to describe the full image of that to which it refers. This is the dynamic which leads Rahner to describe God as mystery: “God is the silent mystery, absolute, unconditioned and incomprehensible. God is the infinitely distant horizon... This horizon continues to exist just as distantly even when all the understanding and action relating to it have come to a standstill. God is the unconditioned, but conditioning ground, the sacred mystery because of this everlasting incomprehensibility.” God, for Rahner, is both beyond our comprehension and the conditioning ground for how we experience ourselves, our interiority, and the world around us, our exteriority. There is a way that we can become attentive to the mystery of God:

“God is there, not here or elsewhere, but everywhere in secret: where the ground of all silently confronts us, where we encounter the inescapable situation of responsibility, where we faithfully do our duty without reward, where we realize the blissful meaning of love, where death is accepted in the midst of life, where joy no longer has a name. In all such modes of [existence we are] involved in something other than the strictly definable.”

God infuses the created world in an active form of presence. It is not us that confronts the ground, but the ground of all that silently confronts us. Our situation of response to our creator is inescapable; it is the most natural thing that we could do. And when we do those hard or joyful activities of embracing death and life, we are fundamentally involved with something incomprehensible. In a sense, we are suddenly made aware of the divine-creaturely dynamic that

existed prethetically and is always in ongoing relationship. Moments of spiritual encounter reveal to us the infinite horizon of God and the long, eternal process of becoming.

I begin with this contemplative understanding of God to illuminate the concepts of freedom, mystery, and transcendence that define Rahner's theology of relationship between God and creation. For Rahner, transcendental experience is how we enter in freedom into God's mystery. It is defined as "the subjective, unthematic, necessary and unfailing consciousness of the knowing subject that is co-present in every spiritual act of knowledge, and the subject's openness to the unlimited expanse of all possible reality." It is not merely an experience of knowledge, but also of the will and of freedom. The consciousness of God is that which is beyond the strictly definable, the God that exists prior to the human limitations of language. Rahner's theology begins with the person, the hearer of God's message. Anne E. Carr writes, "The experience in which we become conscious of ourselves as selves is one of radical questioning... No single cause, whether biological or cultural, entirely explains us to ourselves." We experience God in the mystery of our daily lives and the questions that it brings, which become the foremost way in which we can understand God, for Rahner. It is "in opening ourselves to the unlimited horizons of such questioning [that] we have already transcended or gone beyond ourselves, and beyond the limits of any particular question or explanation."

This methodological choice to begin with the person and our questions makes freedom central to Rahner's anthropology, as we can choose to move in freedom closer in proximity or further from the horizon of God's mystery. If freedom is a transcendental concept in this sense, then there is always an element of freedom that cannot be made fully conscious or empirically defined. For Rahner, God is simultaneously the one who imparts our freedom and the one who self-communicates to us, to which we have the choice to respond in freedom. In these two movements, Rahner makes possible the asymmetry between God and creation and the nearness of God to

ourselves and society. Rahner writes, God is “the abiding and holy mystery, as the incomprehensible ground of man’s transcendent existence is not only the God of infinite distance, but also wants to be the God of absolute closeness in a true self-communication, and [God] is present in this way in the spiritual depths of our existence as well as in the concreteness of our corporeal history.” It is this notion of the transcendental freedom that we have to move toward a radically present yet eternally mysterious God, who we can know more fully through greater response to God’s self-communication in our own beings, that is most compellingly concretized by the contemplative tradition and Rahner’s own contemplative writings.

In Martin Laird’s book on the practice of contemplation, he writes often of the role of attentiveness and stillness, accompanied by silence, in becoming attuned to God. “Discovering” God in contemplative practice is often about becoming aware to that which is already present, the ways that we already commune with God. Laird speaks of the heart-mind, which asks the meditator to shift attention “from the screen of thinking mind on which both thoughts and feelings incessantly appear... to the ground of the heart, this immense valley of awareness itself in which the thoughts and feelings appear... The concentration of attention in the heart—this is the starting point of prayer.” And this type of concentration that asks us to be still, to be silent, requires cultivation and practice. It is not easy to enter our deepest selves in a world of pain, suffering, and brokenness. Contemplation may seem like an activity set apart from our daily lives, but this could not be farther from the truth; contemplation helps us to engage our lives more deeply. Laird shows this in a consideration of fear, pain, and woundedness at the end of his book. He writes, “The doorway into the silent land is a wound. Silence lays bare this wound. We do not journey far along the spiritual path before we get some sense of the wound of the human condition, and this is precisely why not a few abandon a contemplative practice like meditation as soon as it begins to expose this wound.” Contemplation requires that we look squarely at our feelings, including the most feared and negative

emotions, and sit below them, on a deeper and forever deepening ground. By engaging contemplative practice, Laird tells us that we learn “how *to be* in this wound. When we discover the silent core of this wound, we discover a place of noncondemnation, of silent, loving communion with God and of compassion for all.” We are forever sinful, fallible, wounded beings. In an incarnational interpretation, contemplation places us, as Laird says, “where the balm of divinity anoints broken humanity.”

Bringing Laird’s insights to bear on Rahner’s anthropology, shows how cultivating a contemplative life can help one to live out Rahner’s understanding of our free choice to move transcendently along the infinitely distant horizon of knowing God. Contemplation allows us to encounter God as mystery in our daily lives and to feel ourselves in relation to a creator who knows in ways that are unattainable. We are able to embrace the unknown in prayer as, in fact, a unique form of knowing that is not to be feared. We become more ourselves. When the existential ability to integrate spirituality and sexuality is one of the biggest threats to queer existence, exemplified by the perpetually high rates of youth suicide and the negative impact of organized religion in the lives of queer people, this is no small component of queer flourishing.

Encounters with Silence

Rahner’s own contemplative writings in *Encounters with Silence* make explicit the contemplative practices that can accompany and thus allow us to “live out” his anthropology. Just as Laird suggests, Rahner’s engagement with contemplation is a manner of *being in the wound*.

Throughout the ten prayers of the book, positioned as communication between Rahner and the various ways that he chooses to name God in relation to himself, there is a sense of the dependence of Rahner on the creator. In “God of my Life,” Rahner prays, “But if You were not incomprehensible, You would be inferior to me, for my mind could grasp and assimilate You. You would belong to me, instead of I to You. And that would truly be hell, if I should belong only to

myself?” This image of God is certainly recognizable from Rahner’s theology of the immutable God who simply cannot be analogized to creation. Later in his incarnational prayer, Rahner considers this with the image of an ocean: “You have restrained the ocean of Your Infinity from flooding in over the poor little wall which protects my tiny life’s-acre from Your Vastness. Not the waters of Your great sea, but only the dew of Your Gentleness is to spread itself over my poor little plot of earth.” Rahner’s prayers more explicitly draw out an ultimate understanding of love that is at the core of his theological anthropology in his more academic texts. There is a way that this felt form of love is best experienced and articulated contemplatively in prayer and guides our relationships to God, ourselves, and others. For queer people, self-love can become a horizon of discovery that privileges the mysteries we are to ourselves and diminishes the relevance of the closet binary.

Love runs in the background throughout Rahner’s *Foundations*, but it is a central concept in *Encounters with Silence*. In “God of my Life,” Rahner emphasizes the incomprehensible mystery that is God in ways that harken to his academic insights. This reflection on God culminates in an understanding of God as love. “Only in love can I find You, my God. In love the gates of my soul spring open, allowing me to breathe a new air of freedom and forget my own petty self. In love my whole being streams forth out of the rigid confines of narrowness and anxious self-assertion.” By entering into love, Rahner experiences the freedom that he writes of, transcending the narrow elements of his cognition and unifying with that which is mystery. There is, indeed, a felt experience of joy in this prayerful unity: “In this state of joy my mind no longer tries to bring You forcibly down to its level, in order to wrest You from Your eternal secret, but rather love seizes me and carries me up to Your level, into You.” Rather than the seeking of the human mind, entering joy allows Rahner to be found and seized by the love of the divine.

Love is again present in Rahner’s prayer, “God of Knowledge.” Here, Rahner emphasizes the limits of traditional understandings of knowledge, saying “[I]t seems to me that knowing touches

only the surface of things, that it fails to penetrate to the heart, to the depths of my being where I am most truly 'I.'" While knowledge is limited, love is transcendent. Rahner asks, "How can we approach the heart of all things, the true heart of reality? Not by knowledge alone, but by the full flower of knowledge, love." In this prayer, Rahner is limited in his own knowledge of his experiences of the world and of suffering. He relies not on his own ability to understand, but rather on loving a God who enlightens on an incomprehensible horizon. While one day Rahner will experience the unity with the divine that will allow him full comprehension, he prays for the consolation of God and the stillness of his yearning heart, as "You Yourself are my knowledge, the knowledge that is light and life. You Yourself are my knowledge, experience, and love. You are the God of the one and only knowledge that is eternal, the knowledge that is bliss without end." In the prayers of Rahner, love seems to be a crucial component of the deepest ground of his being that constitutes the fundamental articulations of mystery and transcendence. Both love and response to love allow Rahner to contemplate the core theological categories of his academic anthropology. This love, for Rahner, is infused throughout all things and represents a horizon, a constant state of (be)coming.

In "God of my Daily Routine," Rahner writes practically from a sense of cultivating awareness to divine mystery amongst the mundane activities of daily life. Rahner contemplates if it is best to spend life cloistered or in constant prayer, but concludes that even in these sacred settings, it is always possible to lose sight of the divine amongst daily practices. Leaving his ordinary life behind "would accomplish nothing at all." But Rahner concludes, "[I]f it's true that I can lose You in everything, it must also be true that I can find You in everything. If You have given me no single place to which I can flee and be sure of finding You, if anything I do can mean the loss of You, then I must be able to find You in every place, in each and every thing I do... Thus I must seek You in all things. If every day is 'everyday,' then every day is *Your* day, and every hour is the hour of Your

grace.” Rahner’s theology is one of attentiveness to the grace offered to us around us at each moment of being alive. Worldly contemplation can lead us to encounters with the divine, even in the most mundane moments of our daily routine. God is incomprehensible mystery infused through all of creation, an emphasis on the nearness of the creator to the created. Rahner’s understanding of the divine that is both radically exterior to creation and radically interior to our own lived experiences, in practice here in his contemplative prayers, serves to allow the created to feel the potential for divine mystery and grace to be experienced at any moment. Rahner concludes, “In Your Love all the diffusion of the day’s chores comes home again to the evening of Your unity, which is eternal life. This love, which can allow my daily routine to remain routine and still transform it into a homecoming to You, this love only You can give.” Once again, Rahner turns to the divine love to which we respond in freedom and love of our own. Even the mundane chores of the day are a part of our homecoming to eternal life. Cultivating contemplative awareness allows us to experience transcendence and mystery *in the world* in a very distinct way.

Rahner ends *Encounters with Silence* with an Advent prayer, a contemplation on the God who is to come. He muses on the annual liturgy each year of entering into a state of patience and waiting for the coming of a God who has, in a sense, already come. But is it so that God has really already come? “Are You the eternal Advent? Are You He who is always still to come, but never arrives in such a way as to fulfill our expectations?” In this way, what does it mean to a people in wait? Rahner evokes his image of the horizon: “Are You only the distant horizon surrounding the world of our deeds and sufferings, the horizon which, no matter where we roam, is always just as far away?” Rahner prays with the tension between the desire and longing for the coming of God’s nearness and yet the incomprehensibility that always puts God at a distance, on the horizon. Rahner’s anthropology in this prayer creates a situation of existential agony, perhaps. Rahner ends with an insight about God’s perpetual coming: “Slowly a light is beginning to dawn. I’m beginning to

understand something I have known for a long time: You are still in the process of Your coming. Your appearance in the form of a slave was only the beginning of Your coming... Actually You haven't come—You're still coming... Behold, You come. And Your coming is neither past nor future, but the present, which has only to reach its fulfillment. Now it is still the one single hour of Your Advent[.]” The agony becomes peace, as Rahner considers incarnation in perpetuity, a process that comes to bear on the present, the radical now, as much as the historical event that we celebrate in Advent liturgy. Christ, the ultimate microcosm for Christian anthropology, exists in a constant process of discovery and (be)coming. In this way, Christ becomes near.

Queer Becoming

The previous sections have illuminated the issues with the idea of coming out of the closet and the stability, finality of queer identity that this dynamic presumes. Rahner similarly contests the human ability to attain full knowledge, putting God always on the horizon of our beings. Rahner's contemplative application of his theology in the prayers in *Encounters* allows us to consider contemplative practice as flourishing in the lives of queer people. This is concretely important for a few reasons. Firstly, moving beyond the closet and toward the idea of a horizon of knowing God, self, and sexuality through spiritual practice eliminates the need for a queer person to “know” exactly what identity they are coming out as. Labels can be helpful until they are not. Understanding that identity can be fluid and changing over time relieves anxiety and allows oneself to be in a process of love and discovery. Secondly, this approach and practice removes the idea of “success” from full, queer visibility. The closet can create an unfair ethical demand on queer people to be out to family, friends, and loved ones, seemingly all at once. Life can be seen as a journey and the success to be found in relating oneself in love to God, self, and others in a multitude of changing ways. Thirdly, and most importantly, queer freedom and flourishing is redefined away from the closet in a way that imparts agency to the queer person. There is an integration between the spiritual life and the

knowledge or reflection on sexual identity and desires in a way in which theology becomes helpful rather than a source of trauma. For queer people who are part of a faith tradition, this is a powerful way where religion can be reframed and reclaimed.