

BOSTON UNIVERSITY
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Dissertation

WE ARE COMRADES!--*TONGZHI* (COMRADE) THEOLOGY (同志神学) AND ITS
CONTRIBUTION TO
CHRISTIAN THEOLOGIES OF GOD IN THE NEW MILLENNIUM

By

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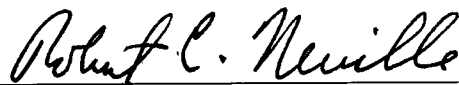
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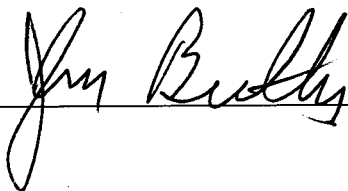
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ABSTRACT

Queer theology emerged in the 1960s and 70s, when the civil rights, feminist, black power, and the gay rights movements called world attention to power inequalities and injustice. The discourse of queer theology, however, has been dominated by the West, especially by white, Anglo-Saxon, middle-class gay men. This dissertation seeks to improve upon queer theology by introducing and developing *Tongzhi* Theology (同志神学), which is a Chinese queer theology that has its roots in both Confucian discourse and in Whitehead's process philosophy, and to articulate its critique of and contribution to Christian theologies of God.

Chapter one seeks to scrutinize the historical context of the development of queer theology. Chapter two argues that classical theism fails to embrace and explain the experiences of LGBTI people, and that heterosexism in Christianity is largely attributed to the conception of God in classical theism; until *Theos*, the subject of theology, is revolutionized, queer theology is never queer enough. Chapter three intends to transform the theology of God in classical theism

by introducing the concept of *Tian* and *Dao* in Confucianism and argues for Confucian reflections on transcendence. Chapter four explores the concept of God in Whitehead's metaphysical scheme and argues that the process-relational nature of God in Whiteheadian thought strikingly resembles the ideas of *Tian* and *Dao* in Confucianism. Chapter five ventures to construct *Tongzhi* Theology (同志神学), especially a *Tongzhi* theology of God, by integrating and appropriating Whitehead's concept of God and Confucianism. With the creative fusion of Whitehead's metaphysical scheme and the concepts of *Tian* and *Dao* in Confucianism, God and the world are organically related and all creatures are highly interdependent. Not only are we *tongzhi* (comrades) to each other, but God is the chief exemplification of the comrade. In conclusion, *Tongzhi* Theology (同志神学) combines and synthesizes a theological development of the idea of God and an ethical development of a form of Christian religion that embraces the experiences of, and is good for LGBTI people, as well as the marginalized in our society.

INTRODUCTION

WHY *TONGZHI* THEOLOGY (同志神学)?

This dissertation seeks to introduce and develop *Tongzhi* Theology (同志神学) and to articulate its critique of and contribution to Christian theologies of God. *Tongzhi* Theology (同志神学) is a Chinese queer theology that has its roots in both Confucian discourse and in Whitehead's process philosophy. *Tongzhi* Theology (同志神学) combines and synthesizes a theological development of the idea of God and an ethical development of a form of Christian religion that embraces the experiences of, and is good for, lesbians, gays, bisexual, transgender, and intersex people (LGBTI), as well as all Christians in Chinese Christian communities in Asia.

As Kathy Rudy has poignantly asserted, “the issue of homosexuality threatens to divide Christian churches today in much the way that slavery did 150 years ago,” such that homosexuality continues to be a heated topic in Christianity in the twenty-first century.¹ It is widely believed that the issue of homosexuality is perhaps even more complicated than slavery because homophobia has its roots in sexism, heterosexism, and the underlying assumptions of negative biases toward the human body and sexual pleasure that are very deeply embedded in Christian theological discourse history. Someone once asked theologian Will Campbell when the church would ever become comfortable with homosexuality, to which he replied, “The institutional church has never come to grips with heterosexuality.”² Consequently, it is even more difficult to talk about homosexuality in the Christian church, as homosexuality has split

¹Kathy Rudy, *Sex and The Church* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1997), xi.

²Beth Ann Gaede, ed. *Congregations Talking about Homosexuality* (Hemdon: Alban Institute Publication, 1998), 12.

Christian churches asunder even further. Therefore, sexuality is a topic that Christians in the new millennium cannot afford to overlook.

All ideas are historical, Christian theologies being no exception. They are social constructions built from the cultural artifacts and materials of human life, and therefore they inevitably perpetuate some historical biases. In the late modern world, many people are highly suspicious of meta-narrative. Thus, there has been a shift from “theology” to “theologies,” because different theologians develop their theologies from different social locations and no theology can make absolute claims in a vacuum, expecting to receive acceptance readily; the human, temporal, spatial, and historical locations of theologies are critical, and need to be scrutinized.

Queer theology³ in the West emerged in the 1960s and 70s, when the civil rights, feminist, black power, and many other social movements called world attention to power inequalities and injustice. The discipline of theology as a social construction has also shifted since then. Many

³Many gay theologians in the West have started to “queer” their theologies by first describing their own personal development from being gay Christians, through being alienated from that religious heritage and pioneering a queer way forward. For instance, Robert Goss, one of the most important gay theologians in this country, has written two important books on queer theology, *Jesus Acted Up* and *Queering Christ*, in which he seeks to queer sexuality, the Christ, the Bible, and theology, which form the quadrants of his own spirituality that aim at the queer reconstruction of Christianity and reflect a life that aims to integrate the depths of spirituality and sexuality with a practice of justice. His *Queering Christ* is of paramount importance in understanding his theology and is arguably the most significant contribution to the scholarship of gay theology in the United States. Rather than arguing obsessively with traditionalists and religious fundamentalists about whether specific biblical passages are anti-gay, a debate that many Christian gay rights advocates engaged in intensely from the 1960s to the 1980s, Goss prefers to offer a general reading of Scripture from a queer perspective and goes a step further to assert that homosexuality is a blessed characteristic. Queer theology, as Goss proposes, should have the potential to “unite people over a range of barriers involving gender, sexual orientation, race, class, physical abilities, and ethnicity.” These statements indeed represent a bold new gay theology. See Robert E. Goss, *Queering Christ: Beyond Jesus Acted Up* (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2002).

theologians have begun to articulate new voices with new realities that point to new understandings of the Divine. In this dissertation, I seek to articulate *Tongzhi* Theology (Comrade Theology 同志神学), which is a Chinese queer theology with its roots in the Confucian tradition. Why *Tongzhi* Theology? *Tongzhi* Theology is significant at least in two ways. First, it challenges the discourse of the gay rights movement, which is dominated by the West, especially by white, Anglo-Saxon, middle-class gay men. As Chou Wah-shan, a Chinese queer scholar, has poignantly asserted, "...it is crucial to historicize and theorize same-sex eroticism, and to dismantle the presupposed universality of the Anglo-American experiences of lesbigay identity formation."⁴ Second, I attempt to explain how the theology of Confucianism, namely *Tianren Heyi* (天人合一), the "Unity of Heaven and Humanity," can and should pose a serious challenge to the patriarchalization and unilateral power of the traditional Christian God and offer a poignant critique of the Christian church in the West as a *Kyriarchy*⁵ and a

⁴ Chou Wah-shan, *Tongzhi: Politics of Same-Sex Eroticism in Chinese Societies* (New York: The Haworth Press, 2000), 5. Chou has been very critical about the gay discourses developed in the West. He even believes that "asking all people to come out and identify themselves as lesbian or gay because they love people of the same sex is to prioritize and absolutize sexuality at the expense of all other identities and difference. It can be an act of racism, classism, sexism, and cultural imperialism." While I share his concerns on racism, classism, sexism, and certainly cultural imperialism, I do not believe that coming out or to urge LGBTI to come out is a form of cultural imperialism. I will elaborate more on this in my dissertation.

⁵ Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza offers an insightful analysis of the idea of *Kyriarchy* in her article, "A Discipleship of Equals: Ekklesial Democracy and Patriarchy in Biblical Perspective," in which she writes, "The Greek word *ekklesia* is translated as "church," although the English word "church" derives from the Greek word *kyriake*, i.e., belonging to the Lord/Master." And she asserts that "church" in this understanding of *kyriake* is an "actual sociopolitical patriarchal structures that produced the kyriocentric (master-centered) ideology of 'natural differences' between elite men and women..." See her article "A Discipleship of Equals: Ekklesial Democracy and Patriarchy in Biblical Narratives" in Eugene C. Bianchi and Rosemary Radford

household, as well as how the process-relational philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead challenges the traditional theological construction of the concept of God, revealing that it is highly problematic, and enriching Christian Theology in general and queer theologies in particular. This dissertation on *Tongzhi* Theology will also demonstrate how the merging of the wisdom and philosophies of the West and the East might contribute to Christian theology as a trajectory to reconstruct our relationship with the Divine and construct a church as *ekklesia*, so that a Christian church might become truly inclusive and universal.

As Chou Wah-shan rightly asserts, “*Tongzhi* is the most popular contemporary word for GLBT.”⁶ *Tongzhi* (同志) simply means “comrade.” “*Tong*” (同) literally means “same” or “homo.” In the Chinese language, homosexuality is translated as “*Tongxinglian*” (同性恋), which literally means, “same/homo- sexual love.” The term *Tongzhi* (同志) has been used widely as synonymous for “queer” or “gay” since 1989 by Hong Kong gay activists, who employed it at the first Lesbian and Gay Film Festival in Hong Kong.

The term *Tongzhi* (同志) is widely used and well accepted in Chinese-speaking communities for at least two reasons. First, it does not contain the word “sex,” which helps to counteract the pervasive vulgarization of homosexuality in mainstream society. Second, it is a word that has positive historical references and which has been widely used in China, both by the Communist and the Nationalist Parties, to refer to comrades struggling for a better future through revolution. “*Tongzhi*” (同志) is thus more inclusive than “homosexuals” or LGBTI people;

Ruether, eds., *A Democratic Catholic Church: The Reconstruction of Roman Catholicism* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1992).

⁶ See Chou Wah-shan, *Tongzhi: Politics of Same Sex Eroticism in Chinese Societies* (London: Routledge, 2000), 1.

everyone who shares the same vision and who embraces the mission to challenge mainstream homophobic and heterosexist culture, could be identified as a “*Tongzhi*” (同志) or a “comrade.”

Tongzhi Theology (同志神学) is a theology of Chinese queer Christians in the context of Chinese culture, which has its roots in Confucianism. Confucianism has had a pervasive influence on all aspects of Chinese life for more than two thousand years. Its complex philosophy, social ethics, spirituality, and worldview have influenced Chinese culture and tradition in the most fundamental and profound of ways.

The traditional social and “religious” teaching of Confucianism has influenced philosophical and social trends not only in China, but also in Japan, Korea, Vietnam, and South East Asia. Confucianism and Christianity are different in their worldviews and belief systems. It has been difficult for those of Chinese heritage to understand Christian doctrines and to have a dialogue with Christianity. Many Chinese are confused and flabbergasted by the teaching that Christians’ God is all powerful and that He controls and determines every detail of every human life, and that He is love but does not hesitate to send people to hell to be burned eternally if they refuse to believe in Jesus who claimed to be His son, and sent by Him to die a horrible death for human beings. These “bloody” and strange teachings scare the Chinese followers of Confucianism and Buddhism, who have grown accustomed to a religion of self-cultivation and inner serenity.

The religiousness of Confucian ethics is distinctive in Chinese culture. It is perhaps one of the most fundamental differences between Confucianism and Christianity. Even though Confucianism does believe in God, the understanding and the idea of God, as well as the concept

of religiousness in Confucianism are very different from Christianity. The ultimate concern of a Confucian sage is not worshipping God, but to seek to become a person who fulfills the ethical requirement as a “*Ren Ren*” (仁人, humane human being),⁷ that is, a self-cultivated humanist who lives according to Ritual (*Li*, 禮) on the “Way” (*Dao*, 道) to the goal of humanity. Thus, in Confucianism, there is no concept of a supernatural being as the savior of the human race without one's self. Human beings need no salvation other than the “self” that is within. To put it simply, in Confucianism, the concept of theistic “salvation” is beyond imagination. As a matter of fact, there is not even “self salvation” in Confucianism but rather the transformation of oneself by her/his own self-cultivation. In other words, one needs to be cultivated, instead of being “saved” by others from eternal punishment or perdition.

In the process of self-cultivation, one must establish a constant dialogical relationship with Heaven, which is the perfection of humanity, not the kingdom of God. This term “Heaven,” in accordance with Chinese culture, is always interpreted as the highest point of the world. According to Confucian interpretation, it denotes the highest quality of human ethics. Moreover, Heaven is the goal of self-cultivation and the will of the individual, not the personal God espoused by traditional Christian theology. In addition to that, in Confucianism, *Tian* (Heaven) is not a different geographical territory or a dwelling place for those who believe in God after they pass away, but a condition that is approachable and achievable in this lifetime, provided that a person lives in ceaseless self-cultivation. According to Confucianism, to cultivate one's authentic humanity is the ultimate concern and the mission of everyone so as to attain Heaven. In short,

⁷*Ren* in the Mencian version conveys religious significance; thus, it is completely unjustified to deny the religiousness of Confucianism. See Tu Wei-Ming, *Humanity and Self-Cultivation: Essays in Confucian Thought* (Berkeley: Asian Humanities Press, 1979), 8-9.

Heaven and the mission of Confucianism are human-oriented. This understanding of Heaven in Confucianism differs sharply from monotheistic religions such as Christianity, which believe that heaven is the place where the eternal God and transformed creation dwell. The idea of God in Christianity, or to be more accurate, in the traditional theology of God, is that of a personal God who holds the authority over life and death, and thus is inevitably a God who possesses unilateral power.

In light of this understanding, *Tongzhi* Theology seeks to impact Western queer theologies by providing a new way of understanding the relationship between the Divine and human beings, and thus reminding us of the old teachings of Jesus of valuing and embracing diversity and difference. Confucius's theology of "Heaven and the Human are One" offers a critique of the *kyriarchal* structure of the Church and Christian religion because it promotes inclusive oneness.

As Tu poignantly asserts, in the Judeo-Christian tradition, there is an ontological gap between God and human beings; "to say that man by self-effort, without a leap of faith, can become one with the Creator is novel, if not blasphemous."⁸ Thus, how could Heaven and humanity become one? This is the question, as well as a challenge to traditional Christian theology. In other words, put bluntly, is it possible that the "finite/temporal being" of creation may also be a "part" of the infinite/eternal being of God? If so, is there any ontological problem that the temporal should be a part of the eternal? Do both the temporality of creation and the eternity of God make them opponents?

⁸ Tu, *Centrality and Commonality*, 9.

According to the traditional Christian teaching, God and creation belong to opposite realms in which they ground their anthropocentric and androcentric structures of ecclesiastical hierarchy. The relationship of God and creation is portrayed in terms of a “superior – inferior” structure inside the *kyriarchical* church. The relations between humankind and God, and humankind and other creatures become estranged. As a result, the church is incapable of listening to the voices of the oppressed, the exploited, and the poor in the fight for environmental protection and the struggle against poverty. In this part of my dissertation, I will introduce insights from the theological analysis of Alfred North Whitehead to elucidate the relations between God and creation further.

In chapter 1, I will seek to articulate what queer theology is and trace its historical development, along with that of the gay rights movement in the United States. I will discuss how queer theology is derived from queer theories. I will also offer a brief illustration of the gay/queer rights movement in the United States, because it is the social context within which the queer theology discussed in my dissertation emerged.

After the preliminary discussion on queer theory and queer theologies, in chapter 2, I will investigate the history of the Western concept of God in traditional theology. I will argue that the theology of God in traditional Christian theology fails to embrace the experiences and lives of queer people who find themselves living in oppression as a result of heterosexism and homophobia. The problem of evil and theodicy will be discussed to demonstrate that the theology of God in traditional theology is inadequate, at best, and, at the very least, problematic. In this chapter, I will begin to articulate my theological theory of why traditional theology is inadequate for LGBTI persons; I will also lay the critical foundations of the problem, that chapters 3 and 4 will solve.

Chapter 3 is dedicated to illustrating the religiousness and spirituality of Confucianism. I will explicate the concept of God and *Tian* in Confucianism to show the similarities and differences between Confucianism and Christianity. I will explain the major theme of *Tianren Heyi* (Unity of Heaven and Humanity) in Confucianism that seeks to establish a constant dialogical relationship with *Tian* or Heaven, which is the perfection of humanity. The purpose of this chapter is to explicate how the concept of God and *Tian* in Confucianism complements Western/ traditional theological thinking and fills part of the gap mentioned in chapter 2.

In Chapter 4, I will explore the concept of God in Process Theology, especially in Whitehead's Process Relational Theology. I will argue that Whitehead's theology of God can better explain the experiences of queer people, and especially the sexuality of transgender people, as the latter seek to correct the "mistakes" of their existence by changing and modifying their biological gender characteristics. This chapter seeks to demonstrate that Whitehead offers a Western attempt to resolve the inadequacy of traditional theology mentioned in chapter 2, and that his Process Relational Theology of God intersects with Confucianism to establish a dialogical theological structure that favors LGBTI persons or "*Tongzhi*" (同志, comrade).

Chapter 5 is the articulation of my *Tongzhi* Theology (同志神学). In this chapter, I will explicate what *Tongzhi* Theology (同志神学) is, and why I believe that *Tongzhi* Theology (同志神学), a theology based on Confucianism and the theology of God of Whitehead, is relevant to the twenty-first century and can contribute profoundly to Christian theologies in this new millennium. The term *Tongzhi* (同志) means "comrade." It is a term, which is more inclusive than "homosexual" or even "queer," because everyone who shares the same vision and is on the mission to challenge mainstream homophobic and heterosexist culture could be identified as a

Tongzhi (同志) or a comrade. I will articulate the concept of God in *Tongzhi* Theology (同志神学), which is the crucial issue that marks the essential difference between queer theologies constructed in the West and *Tongzhi* Theology (同志神学) in Chinese communities in Asia. Finally, I will show that creativity combined with a dialogical structure allows us to form the synthesis of *Tongzhi* Theology (同志神学), which is the best of West and East; and is porous enough to bring the LGBTI experience into the historical circumstances of the twenty-first century.

CHAPTER ONE
FROM HOMOPHOBIA¹ TO QUEER² THEOLOGY

Social groups create deviance by making the rules whose infraction constitutes deviance, and by applying those rules to particular people and labeling them as outsiders. From this point of view, deviance is not a quality of the act the person commits, but rather a consequence of the application by others of rules and sanctions to an “offender.” The deviant is one to whom that label has successfully been applied; deviant behavior is behavior that people so label.

----- Howard Becker

Homosexuality is one of the most volatile topics in the world today, particularly in the United States, a super-power in the twenty-first century. In spite of the fact that the American Psychiatric Association (APA) ruled to remove homosexuality from its *Diagnostic and*

¹Homophobia is a term that was coined in the 1960s. It is defined by George Weinberg as “the dread of being in close quarters with homosexuals”; See George Weinberg, *Society and the Healthy Homosexual* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1972), 4; Mark Freedman defined it as “an extreme rage and fear reaction to homosexuals”; see Mark Freedoman, “Homophobia: The Psychology of a Social Disease,” *Body Politic*, no. 24 (June 1975), 19.

² According to Oxford dictionaries online, the word “queer” means “strange” and “odd.” It was “first used to mean 'homosexual' in the early twentieth century” and is suspected to derive from German *quer*, which means “oblique” and “perverse.” See http://oxforddictionaries.com/us/definition/american_english/queer?q=queer (accessed April 1 2013). It was a gay epithet, a term of derision. In the late 1990s, however, this term was reclaimed by gay people, and became very popular among gay activists. As Jane Pilcher and Imelda Whelehan point out, “it was a deliberate appropriation of a term always used pejoratively and homophobicly in the past in order to facilitate more radical declarations of gay and lesbian visibility.” See Jane Pilcher and Imelda Whelehan, *50 Key Concepts in Gender Studies* (London: SAGE Publications, 2004), 129. Today, “queer” is widely used by gay people to self-identify and to name their organizations; “Queer Nation,” is perhaps one of the examples. In other words, “Queer” is no longer deemed as a term of derision. As a matter of fact, there was even a national television show called *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* in the United States. “Queer” is beyond gay. It has become an umbrella term for LGBTI people; it can even mean non-heterosexist straight people. David Halperin has illustrated this point vividly by saying that queer “demarcates not a positivity but a positionality vis-a-vis the normative – a positionality that is not restricted to lesbians and gay men but is in fact available to anyone who is or who feels marginalized because of her or his sexual practices.” See David Halperin, *Saint Foucault: Toward a Gay Hagiography* (New York: Oxford, 1995), 62.

Statistical Manual in 1973, and that the World Health Organization (WHO) removed homosexuality from its list of mental disorders in 1990, many people in the United States, not to mention in other countries where homosexuality is still a taboo subject, still have very negative attitudes toward gay people.

Even though public opinion has continued to shift in favor of same-sex marriage in the United States, and some have argued that President Obama's support for the idea in May 2012 may have changed a few minds³, gay marriage remains a heated topic of debate in this country. In 1996, Congress adopted the federal Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) which officially defined marriage as the union of a man and a woman, outlawing gay marriage because of, as they claim, "a decades-long assault on marriage" by gay people and gay activists in United States.⁴ Many people still consider homosexuality as deviant, degenerate, and pathological, and many religious people believe it to be sinful and an abomination. Mare Stein has succinctly summarized the situation, as he writes, "antihomosexual discrimination remains legal in most U.S. jurisdictions and in policies affecting education, employment, health, housing, immigration, marriage, military service, parenthood, prisons, taxation, and welfare. In many contexts, homosexuality is tolerated but not treated as equal to heterosexuality."⁵

³ Scott Clement and Sandhya Somashekhar, "After President Obama's announcement, opposition to same-sex marriage hits record low", *Washington Post*, [May 2012], http://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/after-president-obamas-announcement-opposition-to-gay-marriage-hits-record-low/2012/05/22/gIQAlAYRjU_story.html (accessed May 23, 2012).

⁴ See www.domawatch.org.

⁵ Mare Stein, *Rethinking the Gay and Lesbian Movement* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 1-2.

This chapter seeks to articulate what queer theology is and to trace its historical development, along with the development of the lesbian⁶ and gay⁷ movement⁸ in the United States, because it is the social context within which the queer theology discussed in my dissertation emerged.

The History

Gay people have existed throughout human history. The history of gay people in the United States is as long as the history of North America. When explorers and missionaries came to North America, they met native people and they also met *berdache*⁹, who were the transgender

⁶ The term refers to women who are sexually attracted to women, originally referring to the Isle of Lesbos, the home of Sappho, a poet of the seventh century BCE. She wrote poetry, which were love lyrics to many young, wealthy, Greek women, who studied with her on the island of Lesbos. Her poems were highly romantic and erotically charged.

⁷ This was a slang term for a female prostitute, which originally means “happy”. Some people use it to refer to men who sexually desire men. Some use it as a referential shorthand for homosexuality, or for a broad range of same-sex desires and practices. Beginning in the 1950s, many lesbians resisted the word “gay” to represent all people who were attracted to the same sex because as much as this word claimed to include everyone who was homosexual, it privileged middle-class white men; thus, they preferred to call themselves “lesbians” rather than “gay people,” as they thought it was significant to have a different word to describe women who were sexually attracted to women, in order to capture the distinct characteristics and interests of women.

⁸ Sociologically speaking, lesbian and gay movement began in the 1950s in the United States. Even though way before 1950s there were people who spoke positively for gay people or defended gay people, there was no collective and organized effort before 1950s to promote social change for gay people. Only since 1950s, we have begun to see a large number of people acting together to fight for the rights of gay people in an organized, and collective way.

⁹ This is a word derived from the Persian term for young male sexual slaves. They are called “two spirits” in indigenous culture as they are believed to embody the spirits of the male and the female. They are considered transgendered persons in today’s understanding of sexuality, but they could also be included in gay and lesbian history, because broadly speaking, they are biologically males having sex with males and biologically females having sex with females.

people of Native Americans. Anthropologists like Ruth Benedict also noted that the comfortable niches invented for gender role variants would today be known as homosexual.¹⁰ However, gay people also have experienced discrimination and have suffered persecution in this country, not because of what they have done but simply because of who they are. Law professor Shannon Gilreath maintains that “gays remain one of the most inequitably treated groups in the twenty-first-century United States.” He has argued vehemently and rightly pointed out that even in this twenty-first century, gay people in the United States are still being oppressed and discriminated against:

[Gay people] have no federally mandated protection from discrimination in employment or housing, and may lose custody of their children upon divorcing a heterosexual spouse or even upon the dissolution of a same-sex relationship. Gays are blamed for disintegration of the American family and are subject of state and federal constitutional amendment efforts to curtail the possibility of same-sex marriage”¹¹

In the past, many had seen homosexuality as a form of mental illness; the problem of homosexuals was not only that they love the wrong gender of people, but they were also confused about their own gender. People had drawn a connection between deviation from sex and gender and homosexuality, and argued that homosexuals’ sexual desires were inverse to the behaviors for their sex; in other words, they were “confused.” According to this inversion theory, simply put, the gender of homosexuals was reversed. When a man was sexually attracted to men, the man assumed that he was a woman and it was actually the woman in his male body who was attracting to men. This kind of “inversion” and “confusion” is perhaps best illustrated by Iwan Bloch in his *The Sexual Life of Our Times*, published in 1907:

¹⁰ Ruth Benedict, *Patterns of Culture* (New York: Mentor Books, 1946).

¹¹ Shannon Gilreath, *The End of Straight Supremacy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 45.

More especially after removing any beard or mustache that be present, we sometimes see much more clearly the feminine expression of face in a male homosexual, whilst before the hair was removed they appeared quite man-like. Still more important for the determination of a feminine habitus are direct physical characteristics. Among these there must be mentioned a considerable deposit of fat, by which the resemblance to the feminine type is produced, the contours of the body being more rounded than in the case of the normal male. In correspondence with this the muscular system is less powerfully developed than it is in heterosexual men, the skin is delicate and soft, and the complexion is much clearer than is usual in men.¹²

Clearly, according to Bloch and his ilk, the problem of homosexuality was not only psychological, but also physiological. This understanding of homosexuality, which viewed gay men as effeminate men and lesbians as masculinized women, remains influential and prevalent in most societies, even in the twenty-first century.

Richard von Krafft-Ebing, a German psychiatrist, published *Psychopathia Sexualis* in 1886. In his book, he stated that homosexuals “had feelings that represented an abnormal congenital manifestation, and the essential feature of this strange manifestation of the sexual life is the want of sexual sensibility for the opposite sex, even to the extent of horror, while sexual inclination and impulse toward the same-sex are present.”¹³ He believed that homosexuality was congenital and the result of “a hypochondriacal fear of infection during sexual intercourse,” fear of pregnancy, and “mental or moral weakness.”¹⁴ Like most psychiatrists in his time, Krafft-Ebing believed that homosexuality was an inversion, namely, feminine-acting men and

¹² David Bristow, *Sexuality* (London: Routledge, 1997), 36.

¹³ John Fout, *Forbidden History: The State, Society, and the Regulation of Sexuality in Modern Europe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 274-275.

¹⁴ David Bristow, *Sexualitty* (Lodon: Routledge, 1997), 32.

masculine-acting women, which was a congenital defect that represented a degeneration or retrogression to a more primitive stage of development.¹⁵

Havelock Ellis, a prolific writer on sexuality and a trained British physician, argued in his book *Sexual Inversion*, which was published in 1897, adopted a relatively sympathetic position and attitude toward homosexuality. Interestingly enough, he described heterosexuality as natural, and yet, did not condemn homosexuality, even reiterating Dante's opinion that "homosexuality is especially common among men of exceptional intellect"¹⁶ In *his Studies in the Psychology of Sex*, Ellis asserted that three reasons caused sexual inversion or homosexuality: first, the absence of more natural objects of affection; second, disappointment in a romantic relationship with the opposite sex; and third, seduction by a member of the same sex. He maintained that:

These three influences, therefore...example at school, seduction, disappointment in normal love, --all of them drawing the subject away from the opposite sex and concentrating him on his own sex, are exciting causes of inversion; but they require a favourable organic predisposition to act on, while there are a large number of cases in which no exciting cause at all can be found, but in which, from earliest childhood, the subject's interest seems to be turned on his own sex, and continues to be so turned through out life.¹⁷

Karl Heinrich Ulrichs, a German attorney and theologian, was perhaps the first intellectual who argued boldly for gay people in the German courts to abolish laws that forbade consensual same-sex activity. As early as 1862, he published a collection of essays explaining same-sex attraction through the lens of philosophy and medicine and first coined the term "Urning" to describe men who were attracted sexually to men. For Ulrichs, the attraction to the

¹⁵ William N. Eskridge Jr., "Law and Construction of the Closet: American Regulation of Same-Sex Intimacy, 1880-1946." *Iowa Law Review* 82 (1997):1007-1136.

¹⁶ Havelock Ellis, *Studies in the Psychology of Sex* (New York: Random House, 1937), 26.

¹⁷ Havelock Ellis, *Studies in the Psychology of Sex* (New York: Random House, 1937), 324.

same sex was innate and the innate condition of the *Uning*, which he claimed to be a third sex, beyond men and women, was the most significant reason that the attraction to the same sex should not be considered as abnormal.¹⁸ He argued forcefully that:

The Uning, too, is a person. He, too, therefore, has inalienable rights. His sexual orientation is a right established by nature. Legislators have no right to veto nature; no right to persecute nature in the course of its work; no right to torture living creatures who are subject to those drives nature gave them. The Uning is also a citizen. He, too, has civil rights; and according to these rights, the state has certain duties to fulfill as well. The state does not have the right to act on whimsy or for the sheer love of persecution. The state is not authorized, as in the past, to treat Unings as outside the pale of the law.¹⁹

The term “homosexual” is was first coined by an Austrian-born Hungarian, Karl Maria Kertbeny, who first employed the neologism in a letter written to Karl Heinrich Ulrichs in 1868 to describe people who had sexual feelings for those of the same sex. The word became famous after he used it again in 1869 in a pamphlet he wrote to protest against Prussian antisodomy laws.²⁰

In the United States, the word “homosexual” was first used by a Chicago neurologist, Dr. James G. Kiernan, in his article of 1892 in which he stated that homosexuals were persons whose “general mental state is that of the opposite sex.” In his article, he linked homosexuality to crime, even though he did not explicitly say that it was the cause of crime. In the article, as he discussed two cases of women murdering their lovers, Kiernan wrote that “Sexual pervert crimes of all types are likely to increase, because of newspaper agitation of the subject, among hysterical females, from a desire to secure the notoriety dear to the hysteric hearts. All such cases should be

¹⁸ David Bristow, *Sexuality* (London: Routledge, 1997), 20-36.

¹⁹ Karl Heinrich Ulrichs, *Araxes: A Call to Free the Nature of the Uning from Penal Law*, quoted in Hubert Kennedy, *Ulrichs: The Life and Works of Karl Heinrich Ulrichs* (Boston: Alyson Publication, 1988), 175.

²⁰ Byrne Fone, *Homophobia: A History* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2000), 4.

carefully scrutinized, and the mere existence of the alleged perversion should never be admitted as proof of irresponsibility...²¹

The United States has a long history of discriminating against gay people and persecuting them due to the legacy of Puritanism since the seventeenth century. Harvard historian Michael Bronski poignantly write that “ laws passed in the colonies to instill personal and social sexual morality were most often as amalgam of preexisting British law, such as Henry VIII’s Buggery Act of 1533, and biblical injunctions, in particular Leviticus 20:13. Dozens of these laws existed in the new colonies.”²²

Many people had been prosecuted, and sometimes even killed, for engaging in the same-sex relations or committing sodomy.²³ In his journal, John Winthrop wrote of Guilford as “being discovered to have used some unclean practices... He had committed sodomy with two persons in England. And had corrupted a great part of the youth of Guilford by masturbations, which he had committed, and provoked others to the like above a hundred times.”²⁴

After the Civil War, a collective movement was developed to combat sexual deviance. The Comstock Society was founded in 1872 for this purpose. The Society urged officials to enforce sodomy laws against gay people, whom they referred to as inverts or sexual deviants.

²¹ Jonathan Ned Katz, *Gay/ Lesbian Almanac* (New York: Harper and Row, 1983), 231.

²² Michael Bronski, *A Queer History of the United States* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2011), 8.

²³ Historian Jonathan Ned Katz has enumerated many incidents as such in his book, see Jonathan Ned Katz, *Gay American History: Lesbians and Gay Men in the U.S.A* (New York: Crowell, 1976).

²⁴ History Project, *Improper Bostonians: Lesbians and Gays History from the Puritans to Playland* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1998), 13.

Anthony Comstock, from whom the Society got its name, had been extremely harsh on gay people to the extent that he explicitly said:

These inverts are not fit to live with the rest of mankind. They ought to have branded in their foreheads the word “unclean,” and as the lepers of old, they ought to cry “Unclean! Unclean!” as they go about, and instead of the [sodomy] law making twenty years imprisonment the penalty for their crime, it ought to be imprisonment for life.²⁵

As William Eskridge has noted, immigration laws in the United States before and after World War II had been extremely hostile to gay people by explicitly barring “the degenerate in sexual minority” from entering the country, as well as people who were known or even suspected of being “sodomites” or “sexual inverts,” would be excluded from military service.²⁶

In the 1950s, the infamous Senator Joseph McCarthy conducted widespread surveillance and investigations of numerous gay people. Gay people were in fact the favorite target of McCarthy’s anti-communist witch-hunts, which swept the United States and caused hundreds of people to lose their jobs and any employment opportunities simply because of their sexual orientations. Gay people were charged by McCarthy as being a threat to national security. McCarthy even went as far as to claim that gay people were “perhaps as dangerous as the actual Communists.”²⁷ In 1953, President Dwight D. Eisenhower signed the infamous Executive Order 10450, an order that made “sexual perversion” a sufficient reason to be excluded from a federal

²⁵ William N. Eskridge Jr., *Gaylaw: Challenging the Apartheid of the Closet* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 24.

²⁶ William N. Eskridge Jr. wrote an impressive article on how gay people were treated grossly unjustly by the laws in the United States before and after the Second World War. See William N. Eskridge Jr., “Law and Construction of the Closet: American Regulation of Same-Sex Intimacy, 1880-1946.” *Iowa Law Review* 82 (1997):1007-1136.

²⁷ McCarthy and his aids publicly referred to gay people as “perverts” and claimed that they had infiltrated the government; see Molly McCarty, *Becoming Visible: An Illustrated History of Lesbian and Gay Life in Twentieth- Century America* (New York: Penguin Studio, 1998).

employment and thus making it eight times more frequently for a gay person to be fired from federal job than before 1950.²⁸ David K. Johnson tellingly remarks, “ Over the course of the 1950s and 1960s, approximately 1,000 persons were dismissed from the Department of State for alleged homosexuality. The highest profile cases may have involved suspicion of communism, but the majority of those separated were alleged homosexuals.”²⁹

Harry Hay, one of the founders of the Mattachine Society, which was the first gay organization in the United States to fight for the rights of gay people, was called to testify in 1955 before the House Committee on Un-American Activities. The message to the public could not be clearer or louder, namely, that being gay and fighting for gay rights were un-American.³⁰

Before 1973, even though some writers celebrated same-sex love in their writings,³¹ homosexuality was seen as a serious problem by many psychologists and psychoanalysts in the

²⁸ Molly McCarry, *Becoming Visible: An Illustrated History of Lesbian and Gay Life in Twentieth- Century America* (New York: Penguin Studio, 1998), 37.

²⁹ David K. Johnson, *The Lavender Scare* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 76.

³⁰ Shannon Gilreath, *Sexual Politics: The Gay Person in America Today* (Akron: The University of Akron Press, 2006), 17.

³¹ Notwithstanding persecution and general negative attitudes toward homosexuality, some individuals had expressed their support for, and even celebration of same sex love in their writings, even as early as in the mid-nineteenth century. Literary works by Emily Dickinson, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Herman Melville and Henry David Thoreau are good examples. Perhaps the best example is Walt Whitman. Whitman is arguably one of the finest American poets. His unabashed descriptions of the human “body electric” has made him the prophet of homosexuality. The expression of gay consciousness in his poems collected in *Leaves of Grass* is undeniably original and obvious by any standard. He, however, did not identify himself as an exclusive lover of men. In 1883, John Addington Symonds, an English art historian, published *A Problem in Greek Ethics*, a historical analysis of same sex love, and in 1891, he published *A Problem in Modern Ethics*. Edward Carpenter’s published the pamphlet *Homogenic Love and its Place in a Free society* in 1894, and, in 1908, he published his book *The Intermediate Sex: A Study of Some Traditional Types of Men and Women*, which is believed to have been

United States. Frank S. Caprio, another noted psychoanalyst, when he discussed same-sex love between women in 1954, did not believe that it was a disease; however, he believed that it was a problem. He concluded that lesbianism “is a symptom, and not a disease entity. It is the result of a deep-seated neurosis which involves narcissistic gratifications and sexual immaturity. It also represents a neurotics defense mechanism for feelings of insecurity.”³² Edmund Bergler, another psychoanalyst, believed, like most psychoanalysts, that homosexuality was a neurotic condition, which could be cured. In this book, *Homosexuality: Disease or a Way of Life?*, which was published in 1956, he explicitly said that “specific neurotic defenses and personality traits that are partly or entirely psychopathic are specifically and exclusively characteristic of homosexuals, and ...these defenses and traits put the homosexual into a special psychiatric category.”³³ Even Albert Ellis, who was a liberal and radical theorist in the 1950s, who did not believe that adultery was wrong, and even suggested that “some of us are able to benefit from adultery,”³⁴ joined in the antigay chorus of Caprio and his ilk in 1965 to condemn homosexuality as a serious pathology. He said in no ambiguous terms that “most fixed homosexuals, I am now convinced, are borderline psychotic or outrightly psychotic.”³⁵

instrumental in constructing the language, as well as the mode of political thinking, for the formation of the lesbian and gay movement in the 1950s.

³² Frank S. Caprio, *Female Homosexuality: A Psychodynamic Study of Lesbianism* (New York: Citadel Press, 1954), 120.

³³ Edmund Bergler, *Homosexuality: Disease or a Way of Life?* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1956), 13.

³⁴ Albert Ellis, *Sex without Guilt* (New York: Lyle Stuart, 1958), 65.

³⁵ Albert Ellis, *Homosexuality: Its Causes and Cures* (New York: Lyle Stuart, 1965), 81. Ellis, however, changed his position on homosexuality in the 1970s and became an active supporter of lesbian and gay movement.

By medicalizing homosexuality, one can easily imagine that people who have sex with the same sex are further stigmatized. As Eskridge argued in his paper, antigay sentiment escalated during the twentieth century as the result of joint efforts between scientific authorities, religious authorities, and state authorities to legitimize homophobia. Many gay people and people who were suspected of being gay were forced into mandatory psychiatric counseling, shock therapy, hormone injections, and other aversion therapies; many were arrested under sodomy laws and were imprisoned, losing their jobs as a result and suffering tarnished reputations.³⁶

One of the most significant events, however, which has changed how people think sexuality and discuss it, and which prepared the way for the Lesbian and Gay movement of the 1950s was the publication in January 1948 of Alfred Kinsey's *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male*.³⁷ His works on human sexuality had inspired Evelyn Hooker, a professor of psychology at UCLA, to pioneer research on the relations between sexual orientation and mental health, which

³⁶ William N. Eskridge Jr., "Law and Construction of the Closet: American Regulation of Same-Sex Intimacy, 1880-1946." *Iowa Law Review* 82 (1997): 1066.

³⁷ Kinsey's book also better known as the Kinsey Report. His research team gathered data from twelve thousand men. His statistics and analysis discussed multiple dimensions and aspects of human sexuality, including fantasy, masturbation, premarital sex, same-sex behavior, and even sexual contacts with animals. Kinsey also published *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female* in 1953. The significance of the Kinsey Report is twofold. First, his research exposed the fact that the so-called Puritan America is a nation of sexual hypocrites. Many people had engaged in sexual behaviors, which were deemed taboo in the society. Second, the findings of Kinsey on homosexual behavior among men in the United States was shocking to many people; for the very first time, people realized that homosexuality was widespread, despite laws and public condemnation. It also suggested that the laws were not effective in discouraging homosexual behavior, and it thus forced people to ponder the reasons. The Kinsey Report has a great impact on Americans in many ways, singers, comedians, popular magazines, newspapers, cartoonists, not to mention academe, were inspired by his research and almost no one could ignore the Kinsey Report. Two hundred thousand copies of *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* were sold in the first two months after its publication in January 1948. One of the most important contributions of the Kinsey Report to people's understanding of same-sex behavior is that he created a seven-point scale upon which people could describe or chart their degree of sexual orientation of either homosexuality or heterosexuality.

had yielded the conclusion that there was no inherent connection between homosexuality and psychopathology. The conclusion of her research has forever changed the views of psychologists and psychiatrists on homosexuality, and contributed to the ultimate removal of homosexuality from the American Psychiatric Association's *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual* in 1973.

According to Kinsey Report on male sexual behavior published in 1948 and the report on female sexual behavior published in 1953, 4% of the country's population was exclusively homosexual in terms of sexual behaviors, another 5% had virtually no heterosexual experience, and almost 20% of the population had at least as many homosexual as heterosexual experiences in terms of their sexual behaviors.³⁸ These numbers not only shocked the American public, but also alarmed them of their gross ignorance of the invisible population who had lived among them.

Even though the American Psychiatric Association (APA) had removed homosexuality from their list of mental disorders, it did not mean that all psychiatrists in the United States believed that homosexuality was no longer a social or mental problem. The twenty thousand members of the association were deeply divided, but the board voted 13-0. Irving Bierber, a psychoanalyst in New York City remained steadfast in his belief that homosexuality was a form of illness; he even told the press in the year after the APA removed homosexuality from its *Diagnosics and Statistical Manual* that "a homosexual is a person whose heterosexual function is crippled, like the legs of a polio victim."³⁹ He told a *New York Times*' reporter on December

³⁸ Alfred C. Kinsey, et al., *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* (Philadelphia: W.B. Saunders, 1948); *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female* (Philadelphia: W.B. Saunders, 1953).

³⁹ Steven Lee Myers, "Irving Bierber, 80, A Psychoanalyst Who Studied Homosexuality, Dies." *New York Times*, August 28, 1991. <http://www.nytimes.com/1991/08/28/nyregion/irving-bieber-80-a-psychoanalyst-who-studied-homosexuality-dies.html> (accessed September 14, 2012).

23, 1973 that he strongly disagreed with the APA vote, and that he was “interested in the implications this has for children...I can pick out the entire population at risk in male homosexuality at the age of five, six, seven, and eight. If these children are treated, and their parents are treated, they will not become homosexual.”⁴⁰

The Stonewall rebellion or Stonewall riot has been seen by many gay people and historians as the beginning of a highly visible lesbian and gay rights movement in the United States.⁴¹ It was not the first known act of collective, violent resistance to the social oppression of gay people in the United States, however, it was the one that sparked the anger and protest of gay people to fight for equal rights on an unprecedented scale. Since then, the rage against the oppressive structures that demonize gay people has continued to gain momentum even to this day. Bluntly put, it was the Stonewall rebellion that first caught the American public’s attention regarding the lesbian and gay movement in this country.⁴²

The riot erupted on the night of June 27, 1969, when police raided the Stonewall Inn, a popular gay bar in New York City located at Christopher Street in Greenwich Village. The bar was closed down for the night and patrons of the bar were asked to leave but they gathered outside the building. However, while the patrons were released and asked to leave, the bar staff,

⁴⁰ Michael Bronski, *A Queer History of the United States* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2011), 218.

⁴¹ The Stonewall Rebellion was a famous incident in the history of the lesbian and gay movement in the United States. However, it is not the first collective, violent resistant to the social oppression of gay people in this country. There are two known collective, violent acts of resistance before 1969. The first was the Cooper’s Donuts riot, which happened in 1959 in Los Angeles; the second was the Compton Cafeteria riot in August 1966 in San Francisco; see Deaniel Vilarreal, “Before Stonewall, There was the Cooper’s Donuts and Compton Cafeteria Riots. QUEERTY, October 7, 2011. <http://www.queerty.com/before-stonewall-there-was-the-coopers-donuts-and-comptons-cafeteria-riots-20111007/> (accessed September 14, 2012).

⁴² Martin Duberman, *Stonewall* (New York: Dutton, 1993).

three drag queens, and two male to female transgendered persons were held by the police and escorted outside to be loaded into a paddy wagon. The crowd standing outside suddenly became angry and began to throw bricks and trashcans at the police. It was the first time the gay bar patrons acted violently against police officers, who were so used to raiding gay bars and harassing gay people without having any resistance. But that night was different. Police were caught by surprise; it was the last thing they expected from gay people. As more and more people swarmed around the Stonewall Inn, police had to lock themselves inside the bar for their own safety. More police came; more gay people, both patrons and passersby, joined in to fight back. The riot lasted several days in the neighborhood. Yet, press coverage of the Stonewall rebellion was fleeting. For the first time, the words “gay,” “faggot,” and “riot” were printed together in newspapers around the country. The atmosphere had changed; and it had changed for the good.⁴³

As significant as the Stonewall Rebellion was to the lesbian and gay movement in the United States and even to the world, the lesbian and gay movement in this country did not begin on the fateful day of the riot. It already began in the 1950s, As the Stonewall Rebellion perhaps could be seen as a result of a movement that started almost twenty years ago.⁴⁴ Within a month of the Stonewall rebellion, the Gay Liberation Front was formed. It was one of the most significant events in the lesbian and gay movement because before that fateful night, no any

⁴³ Dudley Clendinen and Adam Nagourney, *Out for Good: The Struggle to Build a Gay Rights Movement in America* (New York: Touchstone, 1999), 21-23.

⁴⁴ I would argue that the Stonewall Rebellion was the indirect result of a two-decade movement instead of the direct result of the movement for two reasons. First, the patrons of the bar or gay people in New York City fought back using tactics that no gay organization had embraced or promoted before the incident. Second, people who played leading roles in the riot, like Sylvia Rivera, were mostly not white, middle class, and gender normative like the leaders and most members of lesbian and gay organizations in the 1950s and 1960s.

homosexual organization had used the word “gay” in its name. Gay organizations, which existed before the riot, were strengthened and empowered; gay people began to come out publicly, loud and proud, to call for job protection for gay employees, to end police harassment, and to decriminalize same-sex behaviors.⁴⁵

As Marc Stein has pointed out, the lesbian and gay movement in the United States, which was called the homophile movement, began in 1950, when “...thousands participated in homophile political projects. Inspired by other national and transnational struggles, including the civil rights and women’s movements, gay and lesbian activists used multiple tactics and strategies to achieve their goals...”⁴⁶ Before the Stonewall rebellion, there were gay organizations and gay activists. World War II had literally changed the lives of many gay people by putting them in single-sex and alternative sexual contexts, which they never had imagined before. Many women had entered the workplace and had become financially independent and had thus begun to take control of their lives. However, gay people also experienced unjust and homophobic policies and practices. Gay soldiers were punished and discharged for having same-sex behaviors, and some even faced imprisonment. As Stein has written, “roughly 9000 people discharged based on homosexuality faced not only the dishonor associated with sexual transgression, gender deviance, and failure to provide military service, but also lost eligibility for the educational, employment, financial, health, housing, and other benefits otherwise available to veterans.”⁴⁷ Lesbians and gays began to understand that they were being discriminated against

⁴⁵ Dudley Clendinen and Adam Nagourney, *Out for Good: The Struggle to Build a Gay Rights Movement in America* (New York: Touchstone, 1999), 31-32.

⁴⁶ Marc Stein, *Rethinking the Gay and Lesbian Movement* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 41.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 42.

collectively and began to see themselves as a social minority. This new understanding of themselves as an oppressed minority empowered them to form organizations like other minority groups to fight for their rights and to gain acceptance for gay people by heterosexuals. The Mattachine Society was founded in this social environment by Harry Hay in November, 1950. It was the first public gay group in the United States to fight for gay rights.⁴⁸

The Mattachine Society was named after a group of French townsmen who called “mattachine,” who “conducted dances and rituals in the countryside during the Feast of Fools at the vernal equinox.”⁴⁹ In order to fight for gay rights and call the attention of the public to the oppressive structures in society that were demeaning gay people, Mattachine members, like many civil rights activists, had picketed the White House and other federal buildings from 1965 to 1969. Mattachine New York played a significant role in mobilizing gay people into political actions in the aftermath of the Stonewall rebellion.

While the Mattachine Society was dominated by gay men, the Daughters of Bilitis was a lesbian organization. Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon founded the Daughters of Bilitis (DOB) in 1955 in San Francisco. The name of the lesbian organization was inspired by the heroine of the fictional *Songs of Bilitis*, which was written by Pierre Louys, a late nineteenth-century writer.

⁴⁸ It is important to note that Mattachine was not the first gay organization in the United States; a gay veterans group was founded in the 1940s in New York City. Even as early as the 1920s, there was a gay group organized in Chicago. Mattachine, however, was the first gay organization, which fought for gay rights and had served as a significant foundation on which the lesbian and gay rights movement could build, which has lasting impact to this today. See Eric Marcus, *Making History: The Struggle for Gay and Lesbian Equal Rights 1945-1990* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1992), 26.

⁴⁹ Neil Miller, *Out of the Past: Gay and Lesbian History from 1869 to the Present* (New York: Vintage, 1995), 334.

Bilitis was a sometime lesbian and contemporary of Sappho.⁵⁰ They made a plea for social tolerance toward gay people by educating the public on what homosexuality is. They published magazines and held public forums. Members of DOB were similar in many ways to the Mattachine Society. The reason that the lesbians wanted to form their own group as the DOB was because “it strongly defended the need for a separate women’s group within the homophile movement.”⁵¹

In the aftermath of the Stonewall rebellion, one of the significant developments of lesbian and gay movement in the United States was that it had become more diverse and welcoming to transgendered persons.⁵² Transgendered people also began to organize their own groups. Sylvia Rivera and Marsha Johnson, both male-to-female transgendered persons, created STAR, in 1970 for young and homeless transgendered people in New York City; Judy Bowen founded Transsexuals and Transvestites in New York; Douglas founded the Transvestite-Transsexual Action Organization in Los Angeles in 1970; Lee Brewster published *Drag Queen* magazine in 1971. Bisexuals also became much more visible and organized; the National Bisexual Liberation Group was founded in 1972 in New York⁵³

⁵⁰ Eric Marcus, *Making History: The Struggle for Gay and Lesbian Equal Rights, 1945-1990* (New York: HarperCollins Publisher, 1992), 70.

⁵¹ Marc Stein, “Sex Politics in the City of Sisterly and Brotherly Love.” *Radical History Review* [1994]: 64.

⁵² However, it was not always the case in every city and for every lesbian and gay organization. For instance, in 1972, drag queens were welcomed by some Philadelphia lesbians to participate in the city’s first major march commemorating Stonewall, but some participants objected. In 1973, Jean O’Leary of Lesbian Feminist Liberation denounced drag as misogynist at the post-march rally event.

⁵³ Marc Stein, *Rethinking the Gay and Lesbian Movement* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 83-84.

The lesbian and gay movement in the United States that began in the 1950s⁵⁴ was profoundly influenced by civil rights movement of African Americans. The strategies of fighting racism to demand equal rights by African Americans had inspired many lesbians and gays in this country to confront heterosexism politically. Michael Bronski has written:

The structure of racial prejudice and resistance to racism have profoundly shaped how Americans have conceptualized and responded to most problems of social inequality. In this context, questions of sexuality and gender inequality have been fitted into paradigms created to understand racial prejudice. The movement to free homosexuals from oppression has become predominantly a legal, right-based movement. This approach has largely eclipsed the idea of a sexual liberation movement and narrowed its vision to a simple struggle for legal equality.⁵⁵

Just as Black Power movement declared that “Black is Beautiful,” gay activists declared that “Gay is Good.” Gay activists had learned tremendously from the strategies of African Americans fighting for civil rights, from their boycotts, and sit-ins, to their organized large-scale marches. The lesbian and gay movement in this country was not only inspired by the civil rights movement, but also by feminist women and the suffrage movement. Lesbian gay activists appealed to the individual liberties protected by the Constitution. Michael Nava and Robert Dawidoff have summarized:

The traditional American doctrine that governments are instituted for the purpose of protecting the fundamental rights of individuals, and the historical process by which these rights have been extended to groups who were enslaved, oppressed, and otherwise unacknowledged at the time of the founding, are the twin pillars of the gay rights

⁵⁴ Historians refer to the period of the lesbian and gay movement Before the Stonewall rebellion, in the 1950s and 1960s as “homophile” movement. It is simply because it was the term many activists used to refer to the movement during the period. One of the reasons for this was that they wanted to emphasize “love,” as this was what *philia* meant in ancient Greek, rather than “sex.”

⁵⁵ Michael Bronski, *A Queer History of the United States* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2011), 93.

movement—as they have been of every struggle to extend the promise of individual liberty to Americans.⁵⁶

To put it bluntly, gay activists, just like activists of every other civil rights movement in this country, were asserting their citizenship.

One of the major forces which had motivated the lesbian and gay movement and had promoted social acceptance of homosexuality in the 1960s and 1970s surprisingly, came from the academy. Social scientists such as Donald Webster Cory⁵⁷, Evelyn Hooker⁵⁸, Thomas Szasz⁵⁹, Hendrik Ruitenbeek⁶⁰, and Howard Becker⁶¹, to mention just a few, had challenged negative public perspectives and stereotypes of gay people through their research and writings.

⁵⁶ Michael Nava and Robert Dawidoff, *Created Equal: Why Gay Rights Matter to America* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994), 8.

⁵⁷ Donald Webster Cory is a pen name of Edward Sagarin. Sagarin was a sociology professor at City University of New York. One of the most influential books he published was his 1951 work *The Homosexual in America*, which defended gay people and urged decriminalization of same-sex behaviors. It was also the first widely read non-fiction book on homosexuality and the plight of homosexuals in the United States by a homosexual. It is the first work of American popular sociology on homosexuality written by an insider instead of an outsider of the community.

⁵⁸ Evelyn Hooker was a psychologist at UCLA. Her most notable writing was her paper “The Adjustment of the Male Overt Homosexual” in which she exposed the false correlation between homosexuality and mental illness. Her research had contributed to the removal of homosexuality from the list of mental illnesses of the APA in 1973.

⁵⁹ Thomas Szasz was a psychiatrist at State University of New York at Syracuse. He published the *Myth of Mental Illness* in 1961, arguing that there was no reason to say that homosexuality was sick, immoral or unnatural and that the label of mental illness was a social construction used for social control.

⁶⁰ Hendrik Ruitenbeek was a psychoanalyst who identified himself as a Neo-Freudian. His most important book on homosexuality, perhaps, is his anthology *The Problem of Homosexuality in Modern Society* in which he collected many important scholarly essays on homosexuality, including Evelyn Hooker's research paper on psychologically well-adjusted homosexuals. It was the only time Hooker's paper was made available to the broad public.

One of the major objectives of the lesbian and gay movement in the United States during the twentieth century was to eliminate sodomy laws. Many have cited laws to justify homophobia and discrimination against gay people, especially those laws preventing legalized gay marriage. All fifty states had sodomy laws until Illinois repealed its statute in 1961, followed by Connecticut in 1969⁶². As Gary Mucciaroni has pointed out, “during the twentieth century, the number of men arrested for sodomy and lesser offences, like disorderly conduct and lewd and lascivious conduct, rose dramatically.”⁶³ Sodomy laws had not only made gay people vulnerable to police surveillance and rest, but the negative implications went far beyond their infringement on privacy rights of gay people, inevitably institutionalizing homophobia. Richard Posner, a federal judge and law professor, illustrated this point vividly when he concluded that there is “a gratuitousness, an egregiousness, a cruelty and a meanness” about such laws. He writes:

Statutes which criminalize homosexual behavior express an irrational fear and loathing of a group that has been subjected to discrimination, much like that directed against the Jews, with whom indeed homosexuals- who, like the Jews, are despised more for who they are than for what they do – were frequently bracketed in medieval persecutions. The statutes thus have a quality of invidiousness missing from statutes prohibiting abortion or contraception. The position of the homosexual is difficult at best, even in a tolerant society, which our society is not quite; and it is made worse, though probably not much worse, by statutes that condemn the homosexual’s characteristic methods of sexual expression as vile crime.⁶⁴

⁶¹ Howard Becker was a sociologist who published extensively on the sociology of deviance. His book *The Outsiders*, which was published in 1963, provided the foundation for labeling theory. He used homosexuality as an example to demonstrate how people had used stereotypes and negative labels to demonize a group of people and outlaw homosexuality.

⁶² In twenty-three states sodomy laws criminalized not only same-sex sex, but oral and anal sex engaged either in between homosexuals or heterosexuals. In 1986, however, in the case *Bowers v. Hardwich*, the Supreme Court held, in effect, that these laws are valid when applied to homosexuals, not heterosexuals.

⁶³ Gary Mucciaroni, *Same Sex, Different Politics: Success and Failure in the Struggles over Gay Rights* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2008), 115.

⁶⁴ Posner Richard, *Sex and Reason* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), 346.

Thus, many gay activists in the twentieth century in this country had worked vigilantly to repeal the Sodomy laws, because many of them believed that to outlaw them would have a far-reaching impact for gay rights and could diminish the homophobia prevalent in the society of the United States to its minimum.

The emergence of psychiatry as a medical field in the late nineteenth century and the belief that homosexuality was a form of illness and a medical condition which could be cured, had definitely contributed to the efforts of the state to regulate sex. Hence, after the American Psychiatric Association removed homosexuality from its list of mental illnesses in 1973, gay activists were empowered to make the decriminalization of private same-sex sex for consenting adults one of the highest priorities of the lesbian and gay and movement in the 1970s. By 1981, same-sex sex was no longer a crime between consenting adults in twenty-four states; and laws against cross-dressing were also invalidated in Chicago, Cincinnati, Columbus, Denver, Detroit, and Houston.⁶⁵ Notwithstanding these successes, Marc Stein has written that:

Same-sex sex remained illegal in twenty-six states; in Washington, D.C., Puerto Rico, and various U.S territories; and in the U.S military and U.S. prisons. By 1981, several of these states had decriminalized cross-sex adultery, cohabitation, fornication, and sodomy, but retained or created newly specific prohibitions on same-sex sex. In many locations, laws against cross-dressing, disorderly conduct, indecency, lewdness, loitering, sex with minors, solicitation, and other crimes continued to be enforced in ways that discriminated against gays, lesbians, and others who engaged in same-sex sex.⁶⁶

Many states in the United States had repealed their sodomy laws by the last decade of the twentieth century; finally in 2003, the U.S. Supreme Court declared sodomy laws as unconstitutional in the rest of the thirteen states, which were among the most conservative in the

⁶⁵ Marc Stein, *Rethinking the Gay and Lesbian Movement* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 127.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 127.

United States, and which had refused to repeal sodomy laws up to that point.⁶⁷ The ruling on *Lawrence v. Texas* was significant both for the lesbian and gay movement and for all gay people.

Gary Mucciaroni has poignantly commented that:

In *Lawrence*, the Court recognized the powerfully negative symbolic force of sodomy laws when it wrote that the “continuance [of *Bowers*] as precedent demeans the lives of homosexual persons...[and] control[s] their destiny”. ...The court did not simply decriminalize sexual acts that were closely associated with the gay “lifestyle” (although undertaken by heterosexuals as well). More importantly, it sought to combat the dehumanizing stereotype of same-sex couples’ intimate relationships as nothing more than physical and erotic.⁶⁸

Even though gay people had made tremendous progress in the 1970s, they also experienced unforeseeable setbacks in the next decade. Ronald Reagan was put in the White House by conservatives and Christian fundamentalists from 1981 to 1989, and George Bush for the next four years. During the administrations of Reagan and Bush, five Supreme Court justices were appointed by the Republican presidents; conservatives ruled. Even worse, there was AIDS.

In 1981, Ronald Reagan was elected as the President of the United States, winning the election with substantial support from the New Right and Christian Right. Several months after he moved into the White House, a deadly new disease, which seemed viral in nature, appeared among gay men and was coined in the beginning as “gay cancer.” Panic spread like wildfire in gay communities in particular and then among the general public. Later the disease was found not only among gay men, but also drug users, prostitutes, children, heterosexuals, and those whose immune systems were compromised; the disease was relabeled as AIDS- Acquired

⁶⁷ In *Lawrence v. Texas*, the Supreme Court ruled in favor of the two men who were arrested and charged under the sodomy laws. The Court ruled in 2003 that sodomy laws violated the rights guaranteed in the Fourteenth Amendment and they were unconstitutional.

⁶⁸ Gary Mucciaroni, *Same Sex, Different Politics: Success and Failure in the Struggles over Gay Rights* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2008), 130-131.

Immune Deficiency Syndrome. The virus that causes AIDS was identified in 1983 and was named HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus) in 1986.

The AIDS epidemic, which was erupted in the 1980s, had changed the lesbian and gay movements in this country forever. Thousands of gay people passed away, and Christian fundamentalists now seemed to have the best reason to say that being gay was wrong and that it was condemned by God.

AIDS, however, had also galvanized lesbians and gays in ways that more abstract political issues such as repeal of sodomy laws had not. As Marc Stein has observed, “AIDS contributed to the mobilization of the gay and lesbian movement in the first half of the decade, its radicalization in the second half, and its changing fortune throughout this period.”⁶⁹

However, since in the beginning of the epidemic most of the patients were gay men, the general public associated AIDS with homosexuality. It added the fuel to Christian fundamentalists to condemn homosexuality. The Reagan Administration was reluctant to identify it as a public health concern; not only that, Reagan had never supported meaningful funding for AIDS research during his presidency⁷⁰. Needless to say, gay people were outraged at the apathy of the government and began to organize politically to protest against the government’s inaction and assist those who were diagnosed with AIDS.

Before the AIDS epidemic, gay activists fought for understanding and the right not to be discriminated against due to their sexual orientation. After AIDS, in the 1980s, the nature of the political movement of lesbians and gays had changed, and now they called for government

⁶⁹ Marc Stein, *Rethinking the Gay and Lesbian Movement* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 143.

⁷⁰ Reagan did not talk about AIDS in any substantial terms until 1987, by which at least 4000 Americans had died as the result of AIDS- related disease.

support and funding. The significance of AIDS in the development of the lesbian and gay movement cannot be emphasized enough. More and more gay people realized after the AIDS epidemic that silence equaled to death, without government support and funding, AIDS could never be overcome. In 1982, Gay Men's Health Crisis (GMHC) was founded in New York and the Kaposi's Sarcoma Research and Educational Foundation was founded in San Francisco; the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT UP) was formed in 1987. Since AIDS is a matter of life or death, gay activists had become more aggressive and confrontational.⁷¹ ACT UP described itself as a "diverse, non-partisan group of individuals united in anger and committed to direct action to end the AIDS crisis."⁷² At this time, many gay activists began to use the term "queer" to identify themselves, and to describe their politics.

AIDS has also changed gay sexual culture, as many began to practice safe sex and sought monogamous relationships. Marc Stein has pointed out that lesbians responded to AIDS with great compassion toward gay men as more gay men than lesbians were affected by the epidemic. He has observed that, "there was a convergence between gay and lesbian sexual cultures in the 1980s, as more gay men embraced domesticity and monogamy and more lesbians became interested in pornography, promiscuity, and sadomasochism."⁷³

⁷¹ This was especially true for ACT UP activists. They yelled slogans and threw condoms during a mass in 1989 held by Cardinal John Henry O'Connor, who was extremely hostile toward gay people and outspokenly opposed gay rights; they hung a huge banner "silence = death" on the White House gate, protesting against the apathy of the government. Gay people in general has also become much more aggressive in the 1980s; for instance, in 1987, more than 500,000 people participated in the National March on Washington for gay people. Since 1988, October 11 has become the National Coming Out Day, which was the anniversary of the 1987 march.

⁷² Douglas Crimp and Adam Rolston, *AIDS Demographics* (Seattle: Bay Press, 1990), 13.

⁷³ Marc Stein, *Rethinking the Gay and Lesbian Movement* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 148.

As Stein has observed, AIDS had slow down the lesbian and gay movement in the 1980s to fight for legal reform as most gay activists focused on AIDS⁷⁴; the AIDS and gay activists, however, were determined to capture public attention and succeed in their endeavors.⁷⁵ This at least broke the conspiracy of silence about homosexuality. The crisis of the epidemic nonetheless had a deep impact and lasting effects on the lesbian and gay movement. Lesbian and gay activists grasped the opportunity to educate the public in general and gay people in particular to come out and fight for their rights. In the late 1980s, gay activists also began to demand that same-sex relationships be recognized.⁷⁶

The recognition of same-sex marriage is important for gay people because it has everything to do with equal rights by legally recognizing the relationship of a gay couple; marriage in the United States involves more than 1000 rights, benefits and privileges which are not available to unmarried couples.⁷⁷ In other words, as John Corvino has asserted, “marriage promotes mutual lifelong caregiving in a way that no other institution does, a task that is important for gay and

⁷⁴ Ibid., 164.

⁷⁵ For instance, in March 1989, approximately 5000 people demonstrated at New York city Hall criticizing Mayor Ed Koch for his inadequate support for effective AIDS programs; in June of that same year, 200 members of ACT UP of New York disrupted traffic on the Brooklyn Bridge, demonstrating against the Health Commissioner; in March 1990, at about 2500 AIDS activists wrapped the Mansion of the Governor of New York in red tape.

⁷⁶ It is in fact the first demand of the 1987 March on Washington, although they did not mention gay marriage, they called for legal recognition of same-sex relationships.

⁷⁷ The U.S General Accounting Office has identified 1138 federal legal incidentals of marriage, which involve benefits, privileges and responsibilities.

straight citizens alike.”⁷⁸ Lesbian and gay activists have thus argued that to deny gay people the right to marriage is an unconstitutional discrimination.

As of January, 2013, while the United States refuses to recognize same-sex marriage, there are nine states in this country, as well as the District of Columbia, which recognize same-sex marriage. This is nonetheless one of the greatest achievements of lesbian and gay activists in the United States.

One of the most disturbing events to happen to gay activists in the late twentieth century, however, was when President Clinton signed the federal Defense of Marriage Act. The Democratic Party was the most receptive party to the pleas of gay people; however, on September 21, 1996, Democratic President Clinton signed the federal Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA), which reads:

In determining the meaning of any Act of Congress, or of any ruling, regulation, or interpretation of the various administrative bureaus and agencies of the United States, the word “marriage” means only a legal union between one man and one woman as husband and wife, and the word “spouse” refers only to a person of the opposite sex who is a husband or a wife.⁷⁹

Compared with other presidents before him, Clinton was perhaps the most gay-friendly president. He had done more for gay people than any of his predecessors, such as removing difficulties in security clearances, changing the federal bureaucracy to prohibit discrimination in employment, and escalating the AIDS war during his administration.⁸⁰ However, when it comes to gay marriage, Clinton refused to risk offending the powerful conservative further.

⁷⁸ John Cornivo and Maggie Gallagher, *Debating Same-Sex Marriage* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

⁷⁹ Shannon Gilreath, *Sexual Politics: The Gay Person in America Today* (Akron: The University of Akron Press, 2006), 108.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 106.

In spite of the DOMA, Americans' view on gay marriage, has undergone radical changes over the last thirty years. According to a Gallup's polling in 1996, 27 percent of Americans favored same-sex marriage. But in May, 2011, 53 percent of Americans were in favor, with 45 percent opposed, almost the opposite of the result in 2010.⁸¹

It is important to note that in the 1990s, and continues to this day, the lesbian and gay movement has become more inclusive. Many activists have changed the name of their movement to the LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender) movement, or simply the "queer" movement. The lesbian and gay movement of the 1990s has now become "queer," as it has transformed itself into a broader coalition of gender and sexual orientation⁸².

The word "queer" was used widely by activists and academics in 1990s, and is still employed today⁸³. Many activists have used "queer" not only as a synonym for "lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender," but also because they believe that the labels of lesbian, gay, bisexual,

⁸¹ For First Time, Majority of Americans Favor Legal Gay Marriage, May 20, 2011. <http://www.gallup.com/poll/147662/first-time-majority-americans-favor-legal-gay-marriage.aspx> (accessed October 1, 2012).

⁸² The emergence of the queer movement was also affected by the transformation of "trans" activism and its recognition by lesbian and gay activists, as well as by the emergence of bisexual activism. During the 1990s the term "transgender" came to embrace a broad range of people who are more radical in expressing their nonnormative genders and sexual identities. There was also a significant upsurge in bisexual activism in the 1990s as more and more bisexuals came out to demand respect from both the heterosexual and the homosexual communities. In addition to that, race issues within the gay community were raised in 1990s and critiques of racism in the lesbian and gay movement was increasing. All of this has made the lesbian and gay movement no longer a movement of today such that they are no longer only concern exclusively with sexual orientation or the sexual orientations of lesbians and gay men.

⁸³ In February 1990, film studies scholar, Teresa de Laurets mentioned "queer theory" at a conference held at the University of California at Santa Cruz. In April 1990, a group of activists in New York formed Queer Nation to promote the visibility of the LGBT community and to promote sexual liberation. In June of that same year, New York activists distributed leaflets entitled "Queers Read This" at their gay pride parade.

and transgender were inadequate to describe and represent their identities. The objective of the movement has been diversified. Queer activists are not only rejecting homophobia in society, but all kinds of gender and sexual norms constructed by it. “Queer,” simply put, encompasses a wider range of identities and issues. The usage of the term “queer” is the result of the realization that not only lesbian and gay or women and men, but even LGBT identities, fail to constitute an exhaustive or exclusive list of alternatives to heterosexual norms and gender identities. As Stein has noted:

Many queers claimed that they were critical of all fixed gender and sexual identities and all forms of identities politics. One of the reasons they liked the term “queer,” for example, was that it did not reference sex differences in the same ways that “gay and lesbian” did. The term also was embraced by people whose sexes, genders, and sexualities did not align in conventional ways: by gays and lesbians who had straight sex, straights who had gay and lesbian sex, gays and lesbians who had sex with each other, people whose gender and sexual preferences changed over time, individuals who rejected binary gender and sexual categories, and trans people and their partners...the term “queer” became increasingly popular, but its meanings continued to change and diversify.⁸⁴

Homophobia and Christianity

Homophobia in the United States is perpetuated by, if it is not the case that it has its roots in, many religions. In the situation in the United States, it is the religion of Christianity. Even though there is a long tradition of separation of church and state in the United States, and scriptural views have no special status within the constitutional framework, Christianity has always played an important role in shaping the majority of the public’s views. The Bible has been used to justify slavery and segregation laws. Letha Scanzoni and Virginia Mollenkott has acutely asserted that, “there is little doubt that much of the current discrimination against homosexual women and men is rooted in and fostered by the antigay sentiments voiced by

⁸⁴ Marc Stein, *Rethinking the Gay and Lesbian Movement* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 184-185.

certain religious leaders.”⁸⁵ The United States was the last country in NATO, besides Turkey, to lift the ban on gay people serving in military. As Shannon Gilreath has accurately said, “in no other progressive nation must gays face the treatment that they face in the United States, the birthplace of democracy and equality.” He attributed this to Christian fundamentalism and the religious Right in the country.⁸⁶

While before 1973 psychiatrists medicalized sexual orientation, or to be more specific, homosexuality, Christian churches have further stigmatized same-sex desire by calling it an abomination. The Bible has been used to condemn gay people, to legitimate antigay fervor, and to fuel antigay zeal in this country. Just as Christians in the past quoted Leviticus 25:44, 46 to justify slavery, many Christians have quoted the story of Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 18-19), Leviticus 18:22, 20:13, Romans 1:26-27, 1 Corinthians 6:9-10, and 1 Timothy 1:10 to condemn homosexuality and gay people.⁸⁷ The Christian Life Commission (CLC) of the Southern Baptist Convention explicitly has stated that:

The CLC opposes homosexuality, because it is clear in the Bible, God condemns it as a sinful lifestyle harmful to the individual and society. Therefore, the CLC opposes the granting of civil rights normally reserved for immutable characteristics, such as race, to a group based on its members’ sexual behavior... The CLC proclaims the gospel because the Scriptures declare the Lord Jesus can change homosexuals. To accept homosexuality

⁸⁵ Letha Scanzoni and Virginia Ramey Mollenkott, *Is the Homosexual My Neighbor? : A Positive Christian Response* (New York: HarperCollins, 1994), 3.

⁸⁶ Shannon Gilreath, *Sexual Politics: The Gay Person in America Today* (Akron: The University of Akron Press, 2006), 52.

⁸⁷ Some have also used the creation story/stories in Genesis 1-3 to condemn gay people by arguing that heterosexuality is normative; perhaps the most famous saying of Christians who appeal to the creation story to argue that being gay is wrong is “God created Adam and Eve, not Adam and Steve.”

as an appropriate, alternative lifestyle would betray the life-changing sacrifice of Christ and leave homosexuals without hope for a new and eternal life.⁸⁸

As the Bible has been used to condemn gay people, John Boswell argued forcefully that the attribution of the sacred Scriptures to condemn gay people is in fact a manifestation of prejudices against gay people. He poignantly observes:

Religious belief may cloak or incorporate intolerance, especially among adherents of revealed religions which specifically reject rationality as an ultimate criterion of judgment or tolerance as a major goal in human relations. But careful analysis can almost always differentiate between conscientious application of religious ethics and the use of religious precepts as justification for personal animosity or prejudice. If religious strictures are used to justify oppression by people who regularly disregard precepts of equal gravity from the same moral code, or if prohibitions which restrain a disliked minority are upheld in their most literal sense as absolutely inviolable while comparable precepts affecting the majority are relaxed or reinterpreted, one must suspect something other than religious belief as the motivating cause of oppression.⁸⁹

Religious hatred toward homosexuality has escalated in the later part of the twentieth century and has become better organized than before, just as the lesbian and gay movement has begun to grow and expand its influence. Marc Stein has acutely observed that gay people in this country faced an empowered New Right and a strengthened Christian Right in the 1970s. He has written:

By the 1980s, the Christian Right had become more than a movement seeking influence government from the outside; it was a powerful party faction that often was a necessary component of Republican electoral success... Some prominent New Right and Christian Right leaders depicted AIDS as divine retribution for the sins of homosexuality; some called for quarantining, segregating, and tattooing people with HIV/AIDS. Leading the

⁸⁸ The statement was published in 1993 in *Salt*, the Washington Newsletter of the CLC of the Southern Baptist Convention; quoted from Michael Nava and Robert Dawidoff, *Created Equal: Why Gay Rights Matter to America* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994), 98.

⁸⁹ John Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance and Homosexuality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 6-7.

charge were many conservative groups founded in the 1970s along with new ones such as the Christian Coalition, Family Research Council, and Family Research Institute.⁹⁰

The Family Research Institute, even today, in the twenty-first century, continues to perpetuate the stereotype that gay men are child molesters, and thus argues that gay teachers pose a risk to their students.⁹¹ Paul Cameron⁹², Chairman of the Family Research Institute of Colorado Springs, claimed that “[a]bout a third of the reports of molestation by the populace have involved homosexuality. Likewise, between a fifth and a third of those who have been caught and/or convicted practiced homosexuality. Finally, a fifth to a third of surveyed gays admitted to child molestation.” He even concluded in his pamphlet, *Child Molestation and Homosexuality*, that “[t]he gay movement is forthright about seeking to legitimize child-adult homosexual sex.”⁹³

While Christian fundamentalism has profoundly constructed and perpetuated antigay bias and homophobia in this country, the Roman Catholic Church is no less significant in its role to cultivate heterosexism by stigmatizing gay people. It has been the Church’s long tradition to see

⁹⁰ Marc Stein, *Rethinking the Gay and Lesbian Movement* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 145.

⁹¹ Do Homosexual Teachers Pose a Risk? <http://www.familyresearchinst.org/2012/01/do-homosexual-teachers-pose-a-risk/> (accessed September 21, 2012).

⁹² Paul Cameron is a Christian psychologist who is notorious for misrepresenting and distorting psychological and sociological research to sensationalize his view on gay people and homosexuality. In 1984, the Nebraska Psychological Association adopted a resolution that “formally disassociates itself from the representations and interpretations of scientific literature offered by Dr. Paul Cameron in his writings and public statements on sexuality.” The American Sociological Association in 1985 adopted a resolution that “Dr. Paul Cameron has consistently misinterpreted and misrepresented sociological research on sexuality, homosexuality and lesbianism.” In 1985, a U.S. District Court judge in Dallas even called Cameron’s sworn statement on homosexuals “fraud.” See Wayne R. Besen, *Anything but Straight: Unmasking the Scandals and Lies Behind the Ex-Gay Myth* (New York: Harrington Park Press, 2003), 111.

⁹³ Paul Cameron, “Child Molestation and Homosexuality.” <http://www.familyresearchinst.org/2009/02/child-molestation-and-homosexuality-2/> (accessed September 21, 2012).

same-sex sex as anything but natural, and thus sinful. In 2002, shortly after the child abuse scandal became the headline news in the United States and had provoked widespread anger toward the Catholic Church and the priests who allegedly and in some cases were found guilty molesting children, Bishop Wilton Gregory, who was the head of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, openly blamed homosexuality and gay people by saying that the problem of pederasty within the Church was essentially a problem of homosexuals in the Church. It echoed the statement released by Joaquin Navarro-Valls, the spokesperson of the Pope, that homosexuals could not be ordained even if they took the vow of celibacy.⁹⁴

Even though Paul Cameron and his ilk claim that their belief that homosexuality to be wrong is based on psychological and sociological research and that their position on homosexuality therefore have scientific foundation, their anti gay position is founded on biblical texts and their campaign is driven by their belief that the Bible is against homosexuality.

Gay Christians and Gay Theology

While it is true that the Bible and Christianity have been used to perpetuate homophobia and to condemn gay people, one should also not overlook the fact that many gay people have also been empowered by their faith. Chris Glaser, a gay pastor, argued that without his faith, he would not have come to accept his homosexuality. He writes:

In my spiritual development, I moved from lonely place to lonely place in search of God and in search of myself. I first believed my homosexuality was both sin and sickness. God did not deliver me from my homosexuality, but did free me from my guilt about my condition. Then I believed that my homosexuality was my “thorn in the flesh” or “cross to bear.” I suffered from feelings that I could not express, let alone fulfill, and believed that this would shape me into a better Christian. God did not deliver me from my feelings, but

⁹⁴ Melinda Henneberger, “Vatican Weighs Reaction to Accusations of Molesting by Clergy,” *New York Times*, March 3, 2002.

did free me to accept the gift of my sexuality. When I fell in love with my closet male friend in college, I cried secretly in the closet. God did not deliver me from my love, but did free me from my closet. As I sought to serve the church in the professional ministry, I felt devastated when denied ordination. God did not deliver me from my calling, but freed me for ministry. Throughout my personal history, prayer offered me the perspective to see what God was accomplishing, in and through the lonely places of my life.⁹⁵

Because of his belief in Christianity and God, Troy Perry, another gay pastor, founded the Metropolitan Community Church (MCC) in Los Angeles in 1968. It is the first gay Church not only in the United States, but also in the world, which eventually became an international denomination and the largest gay organization in the world. Since its founding in 1968, MCC has faced resistance from Christian churches and homophobic society. In 1972, MCC in San Francisco was attacked and damaged by arson. The following year, MCCs in Los Angeles and Nashville were damaged by suspicious fires. Even today, the National Council of Churches still refuses to accept MCC as a member.

The impact of lesbian and gay activists on society's and Christians' views and attitudes towards homosexuality, however, should not be overlooked. While lesbian and gay activists were coming out to fight for their civil rights, gay Christians also came out to their churches. This forced Christians and churches not only to talk about homosexuality as a social issue, but also to deal with gay people within and without the churches.⁹⁶

Two incidents which not only created controversy in Christian churches but also captured the attention of the public in this country, and which also had global impact, were the coming out

⁹⁵ Chris Glaser, *Come Home* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1990), 101-102.

⁹⁶ In 1982, a Methodist bishop ordained a gay pastor in Denver, contradicting the Methodists' antihomosexual policy. In 1990, two lesbians and a gay man were ordained in San Francisco by two Lutheran churches. The two churches were expelled by the Evangelical Lutheran churches later. Both occurrences stirred up the controversy in Christian churches in the United States.

of Rev. Mel White in 1994 and the election of Gene Robinson as a bishop in 2003. Mel White came out publicly by publishing his coming out story, *Stranger at the Gate*, in 1994. Mel White was not an ordinary Christian. For twenty-five years, he served the evangelical community, as pastor, successful filmmaker, seminary professor, and above all, the ghostwriter of fundamentalist leaders in this country, like Pat Robertson, Jerry Falwell and Billy Graham⁹⁷. In 2003, Gene Robinson was elected as the first openly gay bishop in the Episcopal Church. In the aftermath, nineteen bishops came out with a public statement warning of the possible schism between the Episcopal Church and the Anglican Communion. The Archbishop of Canterbury commented on the decision of the Episcopal Church of the United States to confirm the election of Canon Gene Robinson as bishop that it “will inevitably have a significant impact on the Anglican Communion throughout the world....”⁹⁸

The hostility of Christianity towards gay people cannot be overemphasized. However, Christianity is never a homogeneous voice. Historically, Christianity has produced diametrically opposed positions among its believers on many issues. Just as American Baptists were divided over the issue of slavery in the nineteenth century, and black and white Southern Christian churches were split in the twentieth century over the issue of the civil rights movement, homosexuality is no exception; it has increasingly become a heated controversy that troubles many churches and denominations.

⁹⁷ Mel White, *Stranger at the Gate: To be Gay and Christian in America* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994).

⁹⁸ Difficult Days Ahead, August 3, 2003. <http://web.archive.org/web/20060625092748/http://www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/releases/2003/030806.html> (accessed October 1, 2012).

Perhaps the first major theological and biblical reflection on traditional attitudes towards homosexuality was the Derrick Sherwin Bailey's *Homosexuality and the Western Christian Tradition*. Published by an Anglican Priest in the United Kingdom in 1955, the book argued forcefully for the inherent nature of homosexuality, and concluded that the biological condition is morally neutral and that the Western Christian Tradition about homosexuality was "erroneous" and "defective."⁹⁹

In 1974, John McNeil, a Catholic priest, founded the New York chapter of Dignity, a spiritual group for Catholic gays and lesbians. Two years later, he published his famous book *The Church and the Homosexual* with the Roman Catholic Church's official *imprimi potest* (permission to print). The significance of this book cannot be overemphasized, as it was the first attempt by a Catholic theologian and scholar to argue for gay people and to challenge the official teachings of the Church on homosexuality. However, because of his gay activism, he was silenced by the Church in 1977. He refused to follow the order and was eventually expelled from the Jesuit order in 1987.

John McNeil is not the only Catholic priest who spoke up against the official teaching of the Church on homosexuality. In the 1980s, many Catholic priests and Catholics in this country publicly showed their support for gay people. In 1982, Milwaukee's archbishop joined Episcopalian, Lutheran, and Methodist leaders to endorse sexual-orientation antidiscrimination legislation in Wisconsin. In the same year, Baltimore's archbishop celebrated a mass for more than 300 Dignity members.

In the last two decades of the twentieth century, many important works defending gay people from homophobic culture in Christian communities appeared, arguing that the Bible was

⁹⁹ Derrick Sherwin Bailey, *Homosexuality and the Western Christian Tradition* (London: Longmans Green, 1955).

not meant to condemn homosexuality. The most important book perhaps was Yale historian John Boswell's *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality*, which was published in 1980. This groundbreaking book is a historical study of the phenomenon of medieval tolerance of same-sex behavior between men. In the book, Boswell argued that, contrary to the conventional belief, homosexual behavior between men was tolerated, if not celebrated, by Roman Catholics prior to the thirteenth century. He also challenged the use of 1 Corinthians 6:9 and 1 Timothy 1:10 to condemn homosexuality by providing an analysis of the Greek word *Arsenokoitai* in both texts. He argued that the proper translation of the word should be "male prostitute" instead of homosexual. He also provided alternative scriptural interpretations of historical criticism of the story of Sodom in Genesis 19, Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 and Romans 1:26-27, which had been employed by most Christians to go against homosexuality. According to him, perhaps the only unambiguous references of the condemnation of same-sex behavior between men are in Leviticus. He argued, however, that they were not read by early Christian authorities to prohibit homosexual behavior, for they believed that Jewish law was not applicable to Christians.¹⁰⁰

One of the most exhaustive studies on homosexuality and the New Testament perhaps is Robin Scroggs' *The New Testament and Homosexuality*, which was published in 1983. Scroggs, a seminary professor and a biblical scholar, attacked the scriptures most Christians used to condemn homosexuality head on in his book. He examined the use of the Bible in recent Christian discussion about homosexuality and argued that the Bible, especially the New

¹⁰⁰ Boswell also demonstrates that the most fertile of all Christian periods in the West was from 1050 to 1150 in which homosexuality was allowed. He articulates his point by documenting the gay literatures of gay monks and the lively gay European subculture existing from the mid-eleventh to the mid-twelfth centuries. One of the conclusions drawn from this study is that tolerance had given rise to the vibrant development of Christianity in the West. See John Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality: Gay People in Western Europe from the Beginning of the Christian Era to the Fourteenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980).

Testament, did not oppose homosexuality. The major objective of this book is to look at what the biblical authors were really rejecting by scrutinizing the historical contexts in which the texts were written. Scroggs argued that one cannot make biblical injunctions into necessarily eternal ethical truths, independent of the historical and cultural context. He thus employed historical criticism in examining all the scriptures that are used by the church to oppose homosexuals and to describe at length the practices of and attitudes toward homosexuality in the Greco-Roman world. He delineated different forms of pederastic practices in the Greco-Roman world from the educational process between youths and adults to slave prostitution, and also several others in between. In addition to that, he also looked at a second cultural phenomenon that influenced the belief system of the early church, namely, biblical and postbiblical Judaism in both its Palestinian and Hellenistic forms. In light of the research mentioned above, Scroggs critically examined the infamous scriptures in the New Testament that were used to argue against homosexuality, namely 1 Corinthians 6:9-10, Romans 1:26-27, and 1 Timothy 1:9-10.¹⁰¹

It is important to note that in the 1980s most of the books defending gay Christians were written by white men, and mostly gay in terms of sexual orientation¹⁰². Not until the 1990s, did lesbians begin to publish books from lesbian and women's perspectives and from the perspective

¹⁰¹ Robin Scroggs, *The New Testament and Homosexuality* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983).

¹⁰² Mary Daly and Heyward Carter were both lesbian theologians and had written and published in the 1980s. Daly published her works as early as the 1960s. She, however, focused on women's issues and feminist theology instead of homosexuality or lesbianism. Her *The Church and the Second Sex* was published in 1968 and *Beyond God the Father* in 1973. Both are considered foundational works in feminist theology. Heyward, a seminary professor and an Episcopal priest, published *Our Passion for Justice* in 1984, and *Touching Our Strength: The Erotic as Power and the Love of God* in 1989. The significance of Heyward's books is that she went beyond defending homosexuality, drawing directly upon her experience as a sexual being, and as a lesbian, to do theology.

of lesbianism challenging the male perspective of gay theology.¹⁰³ One of the most important books is Bernadette Brooten's *Love Between Women: Early Christian Responses to Female Homoeroticism*, published in 1996.

Love Between Women is arguably the most comprehensive work on eroticism between women in early Christianity, putting together many previously unexamined ancient sources concerning love between women. Brooten surveyed homoeroticism between women and the role of women in the ancient Roman world and early Christianity in great detail and with meticulous scholarship. Her documentation and analyses of primary and secondary sources in her research on the subject matter is impressive. Among the most significant contributions of the book is that the author has used are many important and previously unexamined resources, from Greek erotic spells to astrological texts. The second part of the book is Brooten's thorough treatment of Romans 1:18-32, which is Romans 1:26-27 is the primary, and perhaps the most unambiguous biblical text employed by Christian churches to reject homoeroticism between women in particular and homosexuality in general. She discusses every respected and important scholar's interpretation of the text in depth, and meticulously articulates her agreement and disagreement with these scholars in detail. Unlike Boswell, her research demonstrated that love between women was discriminated against by the early Christian Church and that the attitudes of the Church toward homoeroticism between women were overwhelmingly negative. One of the most significant contributions of Brooten is that, unlike most biblical scholars and theologians who are sympathetic to both homosexuality and the Bible, she argued that Paul indeed believed that sexual relationships between the same sex were wrong, and that he unabashedly discriminated

¹⁰³ This does not mean that lesbians did not write or publish prior to the 1990s. Lesbians wrote as early as the 1960s to defend gay Christians but they published essays instead of book-length publications. For instance, Barbara B. Gittings wrote "The Homosexual and the Church" in 1969, Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon wrote "A Lesbian Approach to Theology" in 1971.

against homosexuality. In short, instead of defending the Bible or rescuing the Bible from homophobia and heterosexism, like most biblical scholars and gay writers before her, she defended gay Christians in particular, and gay people in general, by criticizing the root of homophobia in Christianity.¹⁰⁴

As Elizabeth Stuart has written, “in the late 1980s a new strand of theology began to emerge from self-identified gay male theologians”¹⁰⁵ Their theologies have thus been labeled by themselves and others as gay and lesbian theology. Gay Christians and theologians have reflected theologically upon their sexuality and have written critically about the teachings of the Church on sexuality. In the late twentieth century, many gay Christians benefited from historical criticism and sought to justify who they were sexually by arguing that the Bible did not oppose homosexuality. They critically examined scriptures that had been used against homosexuals by

¹⁰⁴ Like every important book ever published, Brooten’s *Love between Women* has stirred up controversy and widely discussed and debated. *GLQ: Journal and Lesbian and Gay Studies* published a collection of essays in 1998 on her book. See Castelli, Elizabeth A., David Halperin, Ann Pellegrini, Ken Stone, Deirdre Good, and Natalie Boymel Kampen, “Lesbian Historiography before the Name?” *GLQ: Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 4 (1998): 557-630. It is a collection of reviews by biblical scholars and historians of Bernadette Brooten’s landmark work in lesbian historiography, and also her responses to her reviewers. Almost all scholars engaged in this conversation with Brooten on her book highly appreciated her contributions to the fields of Classics, biblical studies, cultural studies, and the history of sexuality, however, her ideas are not without criticism. For instance, David Halperin criticized Brooten for translating ancient astrological categories into modern sexological concepts and believing that the ancients had a concept of sexual orientation as we recognize it today. He deemed that Brooten blunders in her interpretation of ancient sexual ideology in light of contemporary knowledge. Ann Pellegrini criticized Brooten for ignoring sex in lesbianism and also thinks that Brooten’s analysis and “conception of sexual love between women and lesbian identity was rooted in contemporary politics.” Ken Stone, however, praised Brooten’s analysis on Romans 1:26-27 and deemed it more persuasive than Boswell, in which the latter does not think Paul condemns homoeroticism. Natalie Boymel Kampen was critical of Brooten for presenting “love and nonexploitative same-sex relationships at the heart of her Roman and early Christian women’s lives” for she intended to claim them as the ancestors of lesbians today, who sought a legitimate place in today’s church. Dierde Good also criticized Brooten for not engaging theologically in debate with Hays.

¹⁰⁵ Elizabeth Stuart, *Gay and Lesbians Theologies* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2003), 33.

arguing that they did not mean what they appeared to mean literally; one needed to apply historical criticism in order to grasp the teachings of the scriptures and it would be anachronism to suggest that Paul had taught that homosexuality was wrong for the term “homosexuality” did not exist until the late nineteenth century. People in the past might have understood sexual relationships between men as a form of sexual behaviors, but they had no idea about homosexuality as a sexual orientation. Gay theologians asserted that the scriptures should be put into their original historical and cultural context before we decide what they mean to their readers, and that the interpretation of the scriptures required careful thought and detailed analysis of the text. The historical-critical approach understands biblical inspiration differently. Biblical writers were not entranced secretaries. God speaks in human history and thus the Bible is constrained by human language and cultures. Hence, in order to understand the Bible, one needs to go back to history. For instance, Daniel Helminiak in his book *What the Bible Really Says about Homosexuality* argues that the sin of Sodom is not the sin of homosexuality, as many religious right claim to be, it is the sin of inhospitality; for, the story of Sodom when understood in its own historical setting, can easily be seen as having nothing to do with homosexuality *per se*.¹⁰⁶

From Gay Theology to Queer Theology

In the 1990s, building on the works of gay Christians and biblical scholars who defended gay Christians, many gay theologians started to queer their theologies. These gay Christians and theologians drew on their experience with the intersections of sexuality, spirituality, and

¹⁰⁶ Daniel Helminiak, *What the Bible Really Says about Homosexuality* (San Francisco: Alamo Square Press, 2000), 35-41.

academic scholarship to speak about some of the more provocative and insightful edges of theology and sexuality. Their theologies have been labeled as “queer theology.”

Queer theology has its roots in queer theory. Queer theory distrusts and rejects binary and hierarchical reasoning in general, especially in terms of sex, gender, and sexuality. It challenges the binary opposition between female and male, women and men, heterosexuality and homosexuality, feminine and masculine, and nature and culture.

As Jeffrey Escoffier has written:

The term “queer” plays on the double entendre of its pejorative meaning in relation to homosexuals and its more benign implication of “odd” or “marginal”; together, the two types of connotations assert the relation of the stigmatized “queer” to the dominant “normal.” The name “queer theory” appeals to those in the field because it moves away from the simple assertion of identity politics indicated by the name “lesbian and gay studies,” and includes all hybrid forms of identity that are different from hegemonic heterosexual identities.¹⁰⁷

In short, one can conclude that queer theory seeks to problematize the boundary between the members of a given category of sex, gender and sexuality. As explained by Annamarie Jagose, “queer describes those gestures or analytical models which dramatize incoherencies in this allegedly stable relations between chromosomal sex, gender and sexual desire.”¹⁰⁸

According to David Halperin, Teresa de Lauretis, a media studies scholar, coined the term “queer theory.” He has written:

Queer theory originally came into being as a joke. Teresa de Lauretis coined the phrase “queer theory” to serve as the title of a conference that she held in February of 1990 at the University of California, Santa Cruz, where she is Professor of The History of Consciousness. She had heard the word “queer” being tossed about in a gay-affirmative sense by activities, street kids, and members of the art world in New York during the late

¹⁰⁷ Jeffrey Escoffier, *American Homo: Community and Perversity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 174.

¹⁰⁸ Annamarie Jagose, *Queer Theory: An Introduction* (New York: New York University Press, 1997), 3.

1980s. She had the courage, and the conviction, to pair that scurrilous term with the academic holy word, “theory.” Her usage was scandalously offensive. Sympathetic faculty at UCSC asked, in wounded tones, “Why do they have to call it that?” But the conjunction was more than merely mischievous: it was deliberately disruptive.¹⁰⁹

Halperin has defined queer as “whatever is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant...” In other words, it is not synonymous with “gay,” as many gay people who use it to self-identify themselves believe, but to put it bluntly, it is simply something strange, “not a positivity but a positionality vis-à-vis the normative – a positionality that is not restricted to lesbians and gay men.”¹¹⁰ In short, “queer” includes lesbians and gays, but also goes beyond homosexuality.

There are three major seminal texts of queer theory, namely, Michel Foucault’s *The History of Sexuality*, Judith Butler’s *Gender Trouble*, and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s *The Epistemology of the Closet*. The contribution of Foucault to queer theory is his analysis of the link between power and knowledge, which regulate discourse and construct truths. Discourses of truth, and of sexuality, in the case of homosexuality, are thus produced and influenced by power dynamics and the social locations of those who possess the power to regulate, rather than something innate or unmarked. This is his major thesis in his books *Discipline and Punish* and *The History of Sexuality*.

Judith Butler, perhaps one of the most famous queer theorists, argues that “queer,” unlike homosexual or gay or heterosexual, is not an identity, it is more like an attitude or the denial of absoluteness. She has noted that “if identity is a necessary error, then the assertion of “queer” will be necessary as a term of affiliation, but it will not fully describe those it purports to

¹⁰⁹ David M. Halperin, “The Normalization of Queer Theory,” *Journal of Homosexuality*, 45 (2-4) [2003] :339-340.

¹¹⁰ David Halperin, *Saint Foucault: Toward a Gay Hagiography* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 62.

represent. As a result, it will be necessary to affirm the contingency of the term: to let it be vanquished by those who are excluded by the term but who justifiably expert representation by it.¹¹¹

Sedgwick has a similar understanding of “queer.” She argues that “queer” refers to:

The open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning when the constituent elements of anyone’s gender, of anyone’s sexuality aren’t made (or can’t be made) to signify monolithically. The experimental linguistic, epistemological, representational, political adventures attaching to the very many of us who may at times be moved to describe ourselves as (among many other possibilities) pushy femmes, radical faeries, fantasists, drags, clones, leatherfolk, ladies in tuxedos, feminist women or feminist men, masturbators, bulldaggers, divas, Snap! Queens, butch bottoms, storytellers, transsexuals, aunties, wannabes, lesbian-identified men or lesbians who sleep with men, or...people able to relish, learn from, or identify with such.¹¹²

“Queer,” according to the theorists above, is embedded with the idea of elusiveness, flexibility, the non-static, and uncertainty. It has no closed definition, as it is always defined in opposition to what is considered the mainstream and the normative. Therefore would be much more accurate to say that “queer” is an attitude, a position, or even a process of resistance and opposition to heteronormativity. As Susannah Cornwall has poignantly asserted, queer theology, which has its roots in queer theory, “is not only controversial in contrast to a theological ‘mainstream,’ if such a thing exists, but is also controversial internally, because it contains a plethora of interior arguments and contradictions.”¹¹³

According to Stuart, queer theology is radically different from lesbian and gay theology. The reason is that “...queer theorists, unlike gay liberationists, do not fight for the liberation of

¹¹¹ Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of “Sex”* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 230.

¹¹² Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Tendencies* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), 7.

¹¹³ Susannah Cornwall, *Controversies in Queer Theology* (London: SCM Press, 2011), 13.

oppressed sexuality, their rallying cry is not to ‘come out’, rather their goal is to liberate everyone from contemporary constructions of sexuality (Foucault) and gender (Butler).” She argues that queer theology is not like lesbian and gay theology as the latter is identity-based theology, but queer theology is anti-identity – it is to subvert sexual and gender codes.¹¹⁴

Stuart believed that the most significant book on queer theology is Robert Goss’ *Jesus Acted Up*. She argued that this book was significant as it “marks the transition from gay and lesbian theology to queer theology.”¹¹⁵ Goss constructed his theology in *Jesus Acted Up* by employing Foucault’s methodology and theory. Goss began his queer theology and queering enterprise by alluding to Foucault’s idea of “the insurrection of subjugated knowledges” against the discourses of sexuality constructed by Christian churches and homophobic society. Just like many gay theologians, Goss began his theology by first describing his own personal development from being a gay Christian, through being alienated from that religious heritage and pioneering a queer way forward. Goss labeled his theology as “queer theology” as he defined queer as “a term of political dissidence and sexual difference.” According to him, at the height of the epidemic of AIDS, many lesbians had worked actively to help HIV-positive gay men confronting the disease and the new coalitions between lesbians and gays in the 1980s had motivated them to adopt the common term “queer” to describe themselves and sexual difference.¹¹⁶

Goss, one of the most important gay theologians in the United States, has written two important books on queer theology, namely *Jesus Acted Up* and *Queering Christ* in which he

¹¹⁴ Robert E Goss. *Queering Christ*. (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press. 2003), 89.

¹¹⁵ Elizabeth Stuart, *Gay and Lesbians Theologies* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2003), 79.

¹¹⁶ Robert E Goss. *Queering Christ*. (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press. 2003), xix.

seeks to queer sexuality, the Christ, the Bible, and theology, and which form the quadrants of his own spirituality. These quadrants aim at the queer reconstruction of Christianity and reflect a life that aims to integrate the depths of spirituality and sexuality with a practice of justice. His *Queering Christ* is of paramount importance in understanding his theology and is arguably the most significant contribution to the scholarship of gay theology in the United States. Rather than arguing obsessively with traditionalists and religious fundamentalists about whether specific biblical passages are anti-gay, a debate that many Christian gay rights advocates engaged in intensely from the 1960s to the 1980s, Goss prefers instead to offer a general reading of Scripture from a queer perspective and goes a step further to assert that homosexuality is a blessed characteristic. These statements indeed represent a bold new gay theology.¹¹⁷

Goss's *Queering Christ* has its intellectual roots in the work of Marcella Althaus-Reid, who proposed the Bi/Christ. Drawing on her writings and theory, Goss brilliantly expands her work so that the framework can include the Trans/Christ, the Drag/Christ, the Leather/Christ, the Heterosexual/Christ, the Gay/Christ, and the Lesbian/Christ'. The image of a queer Christ is important for it is not only a representative figure for queer Christians that could queer people could find mirrors their experiences, it is also a basis for activism against the network of exclusive, hierarchical, misogynist, homophobic and racist power relations. In addition to that, the queer Christ also provides queer people with a counter-weapon against oppression. According to Goss, the churches 'have used the heterosexual Christ for queer bashing and all sorts of systematic violence directed at translesbigays;' the queer Christ stands as the defender of translesbigays. Thus, the crucifixion is seen by Goss as an example of Jesus' solidarity with the oppressed, marginalized and 'throwaway people' and the resurrection as God's 'no' to the 'lethal

¹¹⁷ Robert E Goss. *Queering Christ*. (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press. 2003).

silencing' of Jesus. 'God came out for justice-love for all oppressed peoples. Easter thus communicated God's erotic and compassionate solidarity with queers and their sufferings.'¹¹⁸

One of the most significant contributions of queer theologies is that they question the legitimacy of viewing sexual pleasure as something sinful at worst and something less good at best. To put this question bluntly, what's wrong with sexual pleasure? Queer theologies also question procreationism, which is the assumption that sex is naturally oriented toward the creation of human life. This assumption remains central to most Western cultural understandings of sexual activity. And because of this understanding of sex, penile-vaginal intercourse is the only legitimate sexual act, oral sex and anal sex are deemed as against nature. Or at least many view penile-vaginal intercourse as the only "real sex." In other words, from a procreationist perspective, lesbians and gays do not have real or legitimate sex, or they are simply wrong and sinful, because real and legitimate sex requires an impregnating penis and a receptive vagina.

Queer theology is arguably beyond lesbian and gay theology as it is not only about homosexuality, but also includes bisexuality, transgender and intersex. It is therefore more than an apologetics for sexual orientation, per se. Justin Tanis, a transgender man, believes that theology constructed by a transgender person would be significantly different from theology constructed by gay people for they are distinctive groups who have significantly different social experiences. Tanis has contended that, "if transgendered persons, by our presence, break down binary thinking by inhabiting a middle place, then this disintegration of polemic categories

¹¹⁸ Robert E. Goss, *Queering Christ: Beyond Jesus Acted Up* (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2002), 160-163.

affects the way we do theology as well. Theology is different if we apply to it a transgendered way of thinking.”¹¹⁹

Tanis brings his experience to queer theology and demonstrates clearly that the breakdown in our binary world is vital to bringing about God’s new realm here on earth, and forming it as it is heaven. His theological reflections, as well as his social location, have brought invaluable insight to the theological discourse about God and the community of faith. Tanis has found that life and theology are not an either/or, but that middle ground can and does exist between oppositional ideas. He believes that transgendered people have challenged the notion of the binary of male-female.

Human sexuality is a significant element of queer theology. Queer theology has its roots in queer theory. As Mimi Marinucci poignantly asserted, “queer theory challenges and avoids binary and hierarchical reasoning in general, and in connection with gender, sex, and sexuality in particular,”¹²⁰ and since “queer” also means “out of the norms” and is critical of social constructions, It is why queer theory or queer theology is notoriously difficult to define. As Stuart has stated:

Queer theology, though it usually begins with issues of sexuality, is not really “about” sexuality in the way that gay and lesbian theology is about sexuality. Queer theology is actually about theology. In gay and lesbian theology sexuality interrogated theology; in queer theology, theology interrogates sexuality but from a different place than modern theology has traditionally done, the place of tradition. Queer theology denies the “truth” of sexuality and hence declares that it is not stable enough to build a theology upon.¹²¹

¹¹⁹ Justin Tanis, *Transgendered: Theology, Ministries and Communities of Faith* (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2003).

¹²⁰ Mimi Marinucci, *Feminism is Queer* (New York: Zed Books, 2010), 33.

¹²¹ Elizabeth Stuart, *Gay and Lesbian Theologies: Repetitions with Critical Difference* (Aldershor: Ashgate, 2003), 102-103.

Queer theology which has its roots in queer theory should be critical of all kinds of binary and hierarchical reasoning, not only of those associated with gender, sex and sexuality. Queer theology, to put it bluntly, should recognize the logic of domination in all forms of oppression due to the binary and hierarchical reasoning; not only it should stretch, or in some cases erase them at all, the boundaries of established categories of gender, sex, and sexuality, but also of established categories of sacred and profane, Creator and creations, God and human beings. In other words, God, the subject of Christian theology, must be examined critically and “queered” radically, otherwise our queer theology is still not queer enough. For so long, queer theologians have only focused on human sexuality. They have interrogated sexuality in theology, but not the subject of theology, namely God. This is the critical problem in queer theology today. God, thus, is the subject matter of the next chapter.

CHAPTER TWO

THE CONCEPT OF GOD IN TRADITIONAL THEOLOGY

Today there is but one religious dogma in debate: What do you mean by ‘God’? And in this respect, today is like all its yesterdays. This is the fundamental religious dogma, and all other dogmas are subsidiary to it.¹

---- Alfred North Whitehead

As we have seen, queer theology has its roots in queer theory, as well as in gay and lesbian theology. Gay and lesbian theology began in the 1970s and is a theology of apologetics for gay people.² It provides a hermeneutical lens to gay people with which to examine the scriptures, which many Christians and churches have used to condemn gay people. Many biblical scholars and gay theologians, much as Robin Scroggs, argue that the Bible, especially the New Testament, does not oppose homosexuality. The major objective of their writings is to look at what the biblical authors were really rejecting by scrutinizing the historical contexts in which the texts were written. They argue forcefully that one cannot make biblical injunctions into necessarily eternal ethical truths, independent of their historical and cultural contexts and thus they stress the need to employ historical criticism in examining all the scriptures that are used by Christians and the church to oppose homosexuals. For instance, in his book *The New Testament and Homosexuality*, Robin Scroggs describes at length the practices of and attitudes toward homosexuality in the Greco-Roman world. He delineates different forms of pederastic practices in the Greco-Roman world, from the educational process between youths and adults to

¹ Alfred North Whitehead, *Religion in the Making* (New American Library, 1926), 66.

² Patrick S.Cheng has pointed this out in his *Radical Love*. As he said, the early gay and lesbian theologians were primarily concerned with how gays and lesbians “can be faithful Christians...and how the Christian church should accept gays and lesbians as full members.” See Patrick S. Cheng, *Radical Love: An Introduction to Queer Theology* (New York: Seabury Books, 2011), 17.

slave prostitution, as well as others. In addition to that, Scroggs also looks at a second cultural phenomenon that influenced the belief system of the early church, namely, biblical and postbiblical Judaism in both its Palestinian and Hellenistic forms.³

The Problems

I perceive three major problems with this approach of gay theology to justify gay people or homosexuality in particular, and queer people in general. First, this historical –critical approach intends to whitewash the Bible by insisting that the Bible or the biblical writers are not against homosexuality or same-sex sexual behaviors, as if we could really know for sure about the intentions of the writers. In other words, biblical scholars like Scroggs, place too much confidence on historical criticism as if we could know what was exactly happened in the past. The reality is that historical criticism is not the recovery of history but the interpretation of history at best, and as much as nothing more than speculation. Other biblical scholars or theologians might come to different conclusions even if they examine the scriptures through historical criticism. For instance, by employing the same method, Boswell argued in his book *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality* that the New Testament writers were not meant to condemn gay people or same-sex sex per se. Bernadette J. Brooten, however, in her book *Love between Women: Early Christian Responses to Female Homoeroticism*, disagreed. Her research in historical criticism demonstrated that love between women was discriminated against by the early Christian Church and that the attitudes of the Church toward homoeroticism between women were overwhelmingly negative. Unlike most biblical scholars and theologians who are sympathetic to homosexuality, who have argued that Paul did not condemn

³ Robin Scroggs, *The New Testament and Homosexuality* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983).

homosexuality per se, Brooten argued that Paul indeed believed that sexual relationships between the same sex were wrong, and thus he unabashedly discriminated against homosexuality, had he had the concept of homosexuality.

Second, gay apologetic theology fails to embrace the experiences of all queer people. If queer theology is only concerned with gay people or homosexuality, but not all queer people, including transgender and intersex people, it should not be called “queer theology.” For instance, while many gay men have claimed that they are “born this way,” that “God made me gay” and thus “gay is good,” and that gay people need not change, many transgender people would say that it was a mistake for them to be born this way and they seek to change their bodies and morphology. Many queer theologians also overlook the fact that monotheistic religions are, in general, extremely hostile toward gay people and homosexuality, and fail to ask the question why. My hypothesis is that the problem is deeply embedded in the traditional monotheistic theological construction of God. And this the third problem I perceive, namely, that the idea of God as an omnipotent being is the core problem which has not been critically examined and “queered” by queer theologians. The problem of God which is the problem that have not yet to be identified and confronted by many gay and queer theologians, is the topic of this chapter. Until the idea of omnipotence is dismantled, and queer theologians begin to reconstruct their theology of God, queer theology will be inadequate to explain and embrace the experiences of all queer people; queer theology is not queer enough.

Monotheistic religions, including Christianity, believe in One God who has absolute power, or, in other words, God is omnipotent. By believing in one true God who is omnipotent, Christians believe that their, and only their religion, is the truth and consign all other religions to falsehood. Everything that disagrees and is incompatible with the Words of God, namely, the

Bible, is wrong. The Bible has thus become the life-shaping authority and normativity of Christians, because God's Word is absolute and irrefutable.

Throughout history, countless acts of violence and bloodshed have been committed by people who hold this concept of God. Hatred, intolerance, and exclusion are the inevitable consequences of the monotheistic religions that believe in the omnipotence of God. The God of monotheism is omnipotent and this theology of God is inherently exclusive and has the essential potential for its exclusion to explode into violence.⁴ It is no surprise that Christians throughout history have been dismissive, if not downright hostile, towards everything and everyone who disagrees with the Bible. It also explains why the Bible has been and can be used to maintain political power, wage wars, justify slavery, regulate behaviors, and persecute minorities. It also explains why monotheistic religions like Christianity, Judaism and Islam, have lashed out at each other in violence, again and again. Their omnipotent God compels the full submission of their followers and requires them to exclude the other.

The theological concepts of monotheism and omnipotence presuppose that God is not only all-powerful, but that God is right in everything He does. The distinction between truth and falsehood is highlighted; everything that disagrees with the teaching of God is, by definition, wrong. The followers of the omnipotent God refuse to tolerate differing opinions and practices, which are thought to be despicable, and are thus condemned by these religions. Differences are

⁴ Jonathan Goldstein has illustrated this point vividly by looking at how the ancient Israelites and Babylonians have constructed their identities as "peoples of an Almighty God" and how these two monotheistic religions vied for power in the ancient world to convince their followers that they are the chosen people and that their enemies were stubborn sinners deserved to be wiped out by the Divine Protector of the "peoples of an Almighty God." See Jonathan Goldstein, *Peoples of An Almighty God* (New York: Doubleday, 2002).

condemned, not only because they are deemed to be false, but also because they are viewed as the threats to the truth.

Homophobia, violence and monotheistic religion are highly interrelated. Bishop Gene Robinson, the first openly gay Bishop in the world, writes:

Not long ago I had a conversation with six gay teens, not one of whom had ever had any formal religious training or influence. Every one of them knew the word “abomination,” and every one of them thought that was what God thought of them. They couldn't have located the Book of Leviticus in the Bible if their lives depended on it yet they had absorbed this message from the antigay air they breathe every day...[B]ullyng behaviors would not exist without the undergirding and the patina of respect provided by religious fervor against LGBT people. It's time for “tolerant” religious people to acknowledge the straight line between the official anti-gay theologies of their denominations and the deaths of these young people. Nothing short of changing our theology of human sexuality will save these young and precious lives.⁵

The exclusive and exclusionary negation by which monotheism defines itself – “No other Gods” – not only demonizes and denounces all other religions, it has also perpetuated violence against anyone deemed to be promoting falsehood among believers. Intolerance is inherent in monotheism and in the theological idea of omnipotence.

Gay theology or queer theology is in many ways similar to black theology and feminist theology. While black theology is associated with and accentuates skin color or race, and feminist theology accentuates gender, gay theology and queer theology accentuate sexuality. They are critical of the systematic subordination of those who lack power by those who possess it due to their race, gender, and sexual orientation. They provide critiques of the logic of domination. It is therefore important for gay and queer theologians to learn from black and feminist theologians so that they can eliminate or avoid the blunders committed by black and

⁵ Gene Robinson, “How Religion is Killing our most vulnerable Youth?” The Huffington Post, [October 24, 2012], http://www.huffingtonpost.com/bishop-gene-robinson/how-religion-is-killing-o_b_764568.html (accessed October 24, 2012).

feminist theologians. In this case, I will consider the example the founding father of Black theology, James Cone.

When one reads *A Black Theology of Liberation* written by James Cone, one might disagree with Cone's theology, which advocates the identity of Jesus as black and argues that God has to be black, for love of God cannot be discussed in the abstract; or one may not believe that God is the ground of being such that to say that God is creator means that "my being finds its source in God. I am black because God is black;"⁶ or one may reject that God is a God of righteousness, as God has to deny whiteness and affirm blackness as the essence of God. But one would not deny Cone's passion for justice and righteousness. Cone's sense of justice makes this question so intriguing, namely, how good scholar like Cone who wrote *A Black Theology of Liberation* in 1970, can still be blind to heterosexism and homophobia, in the black community and in black churches twenty years later?⁷

My hypothesis is that it has everything to do with his concept of God. Cone has challenged the theology constructed by white people, but he has not deconstructed and reconstructed traditional theism. Cone's understanding of God and his theology not only fail to address the problem of evil, namely, why African-Americans have suffered so much, which still believing that God is all-good and all-powerful; his theology of God has somehow dulled his sensitivity to the oppression experienced by others. He is blind to experiences that are not his

⁶ James Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation* – Twentieth Anniversary Edition (New York: Orbis Books, 1990), 75.

⁷ Cone published the twentieth anniversary edition of *A Black Theology of Liberation* in 1990 in which he demonstrates a highly appreciated and courageous self-criticism to acknowledge unreservedly he was blind to sexism; his failure to incorporate a global analysis of oppression; the absence of a class analysis of oppression and too great a tendency to rely on the neoorthodoxy of Karl Barth, but he says nothing about heterosexism. He, however, has been a strong advocate for gay people recently.

own, and is incapable of understanding what oppression really means, if he is not one of the victims. That being said, Cone is no better than the white people that he attacks vehemently in his writings. I will argue that this particular theological problem is also a problem of white racists and of religious terrorists who deem that they could and should do anything in the name of God and for God, even kill.

Cone's blindness to heterosexism and homophobia, and religious terrorists' blindness to their crudeness and brutality towards other human beings, are not without reason. Their theology of God as omnipotent and as controller has profoundly influenced what they see and feel about other people. They can only see violence that is done to them, but fail to see that they could be the oppressors of others in different situations. Their theology of God has terribly handicapped their capability to reflect critically about what the Bible really says when they say "because the Bible tells me so," for if they believe God to be a tyrant that commands what is good and bad, moral and immoral, their only obligation is to follow submissively without questioning anything, not even if their understanding of God's will is incorrect. This chapter of my dissertation will examine the traditional or classical theism constructed by Augustine and Thomas Aquinas, which has begotten the theology of God as the greatest of tyrants.

Classical Theism

According to both Augustine and Aquinas, the transcendence of God illustrates God's majesty and holiness. God is wholly other, is absolutely different from all creatures, as only God is the Creator. In biblical language, the transcendence of God is expressed as "above the heavens" (Ps. 8:1), "enthroned on high" (Ps. 113:5), "the Most High over all the earth," (Ps. 79:9). God is different from human beings for God is the wholly other as God is in Heaven, and human beings are on earth (Eccl. 5:2). The point of all these sayings about God is to refer to God

as “the Most High” and the one who dwells above human beings. They are not speaking about the location of God, as God is not a physical being that occupies any space. God exists beyond all space. God in His atemporal and nonspatial existence cannot be a physical being.

Since God as the creator, who created space and time, God transcends space and time. All these expressions are merely metaphorical language to illustrate the omnipotence of God. God’s presence cannot be limited by space, nor does God occupy any particular space in the universe. It is to be interpreted as God’s transcendence.

All the expressions of God’s characteristics mentioned above illustrate the transcendence of God, and these expressions are employed primarily to describe God’s royal dignity. Thus, transcendence refers to the lordship of God. The expressions of God’s transcendence refer to God’s rule and kingship, so to speak. They refer to God’s royal control and authority, and mean that God is sovereign over all creatures.

God is greater than space, for God creates space, and transcends space all together. The totality of the heavens and the earth constitutes the totality of space. Space cannot contain the Creator. God is greater than space, is beyond space, and is immense. Thus, the transcendence of God is about God’s immensity and incorporeality. Whereas the immanence of God refers to God’s nearness and presence, the immanence of God emphasizes the involvement of God with human affairs.

However, transcendence could also mean that God is far away from us, or way above all of us such that it is impossible for any of us to talk about God. In this sense, we can say nothing about God because God transcends human language and human understanding, and anything we say about God is inadequate at best, and misleading at worst. In other words, God is incomprehensible and there is no human mind capable of understanding God, nor is there any

human language that is capable of illustrating what God really is, we truly can say nothing about God. According to Kant, God is “noumenal,” beyond any possible human experience and therefore unknowable. Unlike the phenomenal world, we just cannot gain any knowledge about God based on our experience. Thus, the transcendence of God suggests that God is wholly other and wholly hidden.

As John M. Rist accurately pointed out, Augustine’s writings “are almost all the work of a controversialist: they grow from arguments with his earlier self and with views current among his contemporaries, both with North Africa and throughout the wider world of the late Roman Empire.”⁸ His theology of God is his conversations with Cicero, the Platonists, and Manichaeism. One should know that even though Augustine was born into a Christian family, he considered himself to be an adherent of the Manichaeans for several years. However, it is also equally important to note that Manichaeism, even though it originated in Persia, was not really an exotic religion, for as Eugene Teselle has rightly asserted, it had “absorbed a considerable amount of Christianity, specifically the Gnosticizing Christianity of Edessa;” the Manichaeism that Augustine adhered to was “probably quite thoroughly Westernized” and had “philosophical pretensions and utilized Stoicism and Pythagoreanism to buttress its claims.”⁹

The *Confessions* is perhaps the best known of Augustine’s writings, and is his prayer to God. In the *Confessions*, Augustine articulates his theology of God by speaking to his God. The God of Augustine is the God of dialogue. One can easily see the dialectical nature of God in Augustine’s *Confessions*.

⁸ John M. Risk *Augustine*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 11.

⁹Eugene TeSelle, *Augustine the Theologian* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1970) , 28.

Stanislaus J. Grabowski has poignantly pointed out that omnipresence is a significant characteristic of God for Augustine:

The concept of presence constitutes one of the essential and primary traits of Augustine's notion of God."¹⁰ The divine omnipresence of God is an important element in Augustine's theology of God. As he argues, when human beings think "of a certain substance---living, perpetual, omnipotent, infinite, everywhere present, everywhere whole, nowhere included," and when they combine all these characteristic into one being, or when we combine all these perfections in thought, we are entertaining a notion of God.¹¹

To Augustine, God is the Lord of his faith. In God, as he says, "it is not one thing to be and another to live: the supreme degree of being and the supreme degree of life are one and the same thing." He continues, "You are being in a supreme degree and are immutable. In you the present day has no ending, and yet in you it has no end: 'all these things have their being in you' (Rom. 11:36). They would have no way of passing away unless you set a limit to them. Because 'your years do not fail' (Ps.101:28), your years are one today."¹²

According to Augustine, God is "that which is changed does not retain its own being, and that which can be changed, even it is not actually changed, is able not to be that which it had been. For this reason, only that which not only is not changed, but also is unable to be changed in any way, is most truly said to be."¹³ However, Augustine does emphasize the unchangeable characteristic and the absoluteness of God. As he says in his *Confessions*:

¹⁰ Grabowski, Stanislaus J. *The All-Present God- A Study in St. Augustine* (London: B. Herder Book Co, 1954), 61.

¹¹ Grabowski, *The All- Present God*, 61.

¹² Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Chadwick, Henry (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 81.

¹³ Augustine, *The Trinity*, Book V, ii, 3.

To know you as you are in the absolute sense is for you alone. You are immutably, you know immutably, you will immutably. Your essence knows and wills immutably. Your knowledge is and knows immutably. Your will is and knows immutably. In your sight it does not seem right that the kind of self-knowledge possessed by unchangeable light should also be possessed by changeable existence which receives light.¹⁴

To Augustine, the essence of God is the immutability of God's characteristics. In his *De Trinitate*, he says this very clearly: "for the essence of God, whereby He is, has absolutely nothing mutable in it, neither in eternity, nor in truth, nor in will, since in it truth is eternal, charity is eternal; and in it charity is true and eternity is true; in it, too, eternity is loved and truth is loved."¹⁵

He continues this line of thought in his *Confessions*:

I wish that human disputants would reflect upon the triad within their own selves. These three aspects of the self are very different from the Trinity... the three aspects I mean are being, knowing, willing. For I am and I know and I will. Knowing and willing I am. I know that I am and I will. I will to be and to know. In these three, therefore, let him who is capable of so doing contemplate how inseparable in life they are: one life, one mind, and one essence, yet ultimately there is distinction, for they are inseparable, yet distinct. The fact is certain to anyone by introspection. Let him consider himself and reflect and tell me what is there. When, however, through his investigation of these three, he has found something out and has made his report on that, he should not suppose that he discovered the immutable that transcends them—that which immutably is, immutably knows, and immutably wills. It baffles thought to inquire whether these three functions are the ground which constitute the divine Trinity, or whether the three components are present in each Person so that each Person has all three, or whether both these alternatives are true, in the sense that, in ways beyond finite understanding, the ultimate Being exists in both simplicity and multiplicity, the Persons being defined by relation to each other, yet infinite in themselves. So the divine Being is and knows itself and is immutably sufficient to itself, because of the overflowing greatness of the unity.¹⁶

¹⁴ Augustine, *Confessions*, 284.

¹⁵ Augustine, *De Trin.* IV, I. quoted from Erich Przywara, *An Augustine Synthesis* (New York: Sheed & Ward Inc, 1936), 141.

¹⁶ Augustine, *Confessions*, 280.

Augustine believes that God is the ultimate good and the utmost power, the utmost perfection. He writes in his *Confessions* and describes God as the “most high, utterly good, utterly powerful, most omnipotent, most merciful and most just”, and yet God is also full of paradoxes. As he continues, he states that God is:

deeply hidden yet most intimately present, perfection of both beauty and strength, stable, and incomprehensible, immutable... never new, never old, making everything new and “leading” the proud “to be old without their knowledge” (Job 9:5); always active, always in repose, gathering to yourself but not in need, supporting and filling and protecting, creating and nurturing and bringing to maturity, searching even though to you nothing is lacking: you love without burning, you are jealous in way that is free of anxiety, you ‘repent’ (Gen. 6:6) without the pain of regret, you are wrathful and remain tranquil. You will a change without any change in your design. You recover what you find, yet have never lost. Never in need, you rejoice in your gains (Luke 15:7); you are never avaricious, yet you require interest (Matt. 25:27).”¹⁷

In his commentary on John, Augustine writes, “Seek ye God, and your soul shall live (Ps.68:33). It is because He is hidden that he must be sought in order to be found; and being found He must still be sought because of His immensity...For he satisfies the seeker in the measure of his capacity and He makes the finder to have greater capacity so that he may again seek to be filled when his ability to receive has grown.”¹⁸ Obviously, it is an eternal search for the eternal God; God is seen as exterior to human beings, the utterly Other without us. In the *Confessions*, Augustine demonstrates his amazing rhetorical skill. One can clearly see that the dialectical force in his theology is profound. To him, God is “deeply hidden, yet most intimately present.”

Even though Augustine is acutely aware of the sharp distinction between God and human being, namely that God is God, human is human and God is not human being, and human being

¹⁷ Augustine, *Confessions*, 4-5.

¹⁸ In *Joan. Evang.*LXIII,I. quoted from Przywaea, *An Augustine Synthesis*, 75-76.

cannot be God. He also says that God “is more inward than my most inward part and higher than the highest element with me.”¹⁹ He says, God, “ You are most high and most near, most secret and most present, have no bodily members, some larger, other smaller, but are everywhere a whole and never limited in space. You are certainly not our physical shape. Yet you made humanity in your image, and man from head to foot is contained in space.”²⁰

According to Augustine, to say that God is within us and is closer to us than we are to ourselves, is to recognize the correlation between the God of the self and the self. It is to say that God is not an external object of worship only; God is not only to be thought about, God is correlative with our deepest desires and feelings. God constitutes the human subject as the inner Word of love that overflows within one and as the outer Word.

Augustine attempts to combine the transcendence and immanence of God in a strikingly beautiful statement: “God is higher than my highest and more inward than my inner self.” God is transcendent above all creatures, and yet God also has some very intimate relationships with all creatures.

While some theologians like Augustine have argued forcefully that God is wholly other, and unknowable as the transcendent God, others, like Schleiermacher, say that God could be known even in His transcendent nature. Because the transcendence of God could be positioned in self-consciousness. In other words, through the immediate intuition of consciousness, one could feel the transcendence of God. Since consciousness also leads to thinking and thoughtfulness, it is through self-consciousness, that we might “know” God and God is “knowable” to us. Thus,

¹⁹ Augustine, *Confessions*, 43.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 93-94.

God is no longer wholly other in the absolute sense of being impenetrable. Thus, God becomes the immanent transcendent.

Augustine believes that God is all-transcending, and yet utterly imminent. Basil Studer has pointed out that Augustine's theology of God is full of paradoxes; God is both far and near, distant and with us. He has written:

With the aid of Cicero and especially of the Platonic tradition, Augustine had discovered that God is truth (*veritas*) and changeless being (*ipsum esse*). But, following the Judeo-Christian tradition, he also reached the point of distinguishing between God as Creator and all good but mutable things. At the same time, he also came to realize that our Creator, God is also near to us, carries us in the divine hands, guides our life, and brings to life everything good in us.²¹

It is interesting to note how Augustine describes our relationship with God. He asserts that:

When people see these things with the help of your Spirit, it is you who are seeing in them. When, therefore, they see that things are good, you are seeing that they are good. Whatever pleases them for your sake is pleasing you in them. The things which by the help of your Spirit delight us are delighting you in us...therefore, they see to be good by the Spirit of God, it is not they but God who is seeing that it is good."²²

The use of antithesis is a distinctive feature of Augustine's theology of God as it is articulated in his *Confessions*. Augustine's theology of God is a Zen-like riddle. God is, and yet God is not. God is transcendent, and yet immanent. Chinese philosopher Lou Zi captures this wisdom succinctly as he argues that the *Dao* that could be fully articulated is not the eternal Tao. If one thinks that one can fully capture and grasp who is God, one is dealing with something else, something less than God. Augustine shares this view as he writes in his commentary on John's Gospel. He says: "all things can be said of God, yet is nothing worthily said of God. Nothing is

²¹ Studer, Basil. *The Grace of Christ and the Grace of God in Augustine Hippo: Christocentrism or Theocentrism?* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1997). 83.

²² Augustine, *Confessions*, 300-301.

wider than this utter want. Thou seekest a name befitting Him and findest none; thou seekest in what way soever to speak of Him and thou findest Him in all things.”²³

One can clearly see that it is of significant importance to recognize the fact that all theologies of God are simply human constructions. In other words, all concepts of our understanding of God are anthropomorphic, and thus, all are inadequate concepts when speaking about God. However, all these concepts are that we human beings can do when we talk about God, for when we speak about God as subject who confronts us in the midst of our human, earthly, historical reality, God inevitably has an anthropomorphic character. To say that our idea of God is anthropomorphic is also to say that it is subject to constant change, for human beings are historical beings, always in the process of changing.

Augustine believes that God is beyond human comprehension. No human language could fully capture and describe the essence of God. He speaks of “...God of whom we ought always to be thinking, and of whom we are not able to think worthily, in praise of whom blessing must at all times be rendered, and whom no speech is sufficient to declare...”²⁴

According to Augustine, God is a mystery. God is beyond our comprehension. About the mystery of God, Augustine says more explicitly,

What then, brethren, shall we say of God? For if thou hast been able to understand what thou wouldest say, it is not God. If thou hast been able to comprehend it, thou hast comprehended something else instead of God. If thou hast been able to comprehend Him as thou thinkest, by so thinking thou hast deceived thyself. This then is not God, if thou hast comprehended it, but if this be God, thou hast not comprehended it. How therefore wouldest thou speak of that which thou canst not comprehend?²⁵

²³ In Joan, Evang. XIII,5. Quoted from Przywara, Erich, S.J. *An Augustine Synthesis*. (New York: Sheed & Ward INC., 1936), 83.

²⁴ Augustine, De Trin.V.i., Quoted from Przwara, *An Augustine Synthesis*, 83.

²⁵ In *Serm.* (de Script.N.T.) LII,vi, 16. From Przywara, *An Augustine Synthesis*, 81.

The significant of God as creator is that, it unlike other creatures, God is a self-contained God. To say that God is a creator also means that God is not a contingent being; God is independent from everything and everyone. God as creator refers to God as he is in himself. God as creator implies the independence, self-existence, self-sufficiency, and self-containment of the transcendent God. God is the uncaused first cause, and thus God has within himself sufficient reason for his existence. God is self-caused, unlike every other creature. To speak of God as creator also means that God has absolute control over everything that, nothing can escape the power of God, that God is absolute in his atemporal decrees and is concurrently working in time. God governs the universe within time and space, and everything within it is created by God and dependent on God for its very existence, but God does not depend on anything except himself. Creation cannot exist without God, but God exists or simply *IS*, even without creation. The image of God as creator is of significant importance to Augustine, as well as to Aquinas, which will be elaborated later in this chapter.

Augustine describes God as the Creator, who created the world out from nothing, and God's goodness underlies creation. God is the maker of heaven earth, the creator of the source of the earthly body we carry.²⁶ According to Augustine, everything is from God, and yet God made something out of nothing. He has written:

the further away from you things are, the more unlike you they become—though this distance is not spatial. And so you, Lord, are not one thing here, another thing there, but the selfsame, very being itself, 'holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty (Isa. 6:3; Rev. 4:8). In the beginning, that is from yourself, in your wisdom which is begotten of your substance, you made something and made it out of nothing. For you made heaven and earth not out of your own self, or it would be equal to your only-begotten Son and therefore to yourself. It cannot possibly be right for anything which is not of you to be

²⁶ Augustine, *Confessions*, 246.

equal to you. Moreover, there was nothing apart from you out of which you could make them, God one in three and three in one. That is why you made heaven and earth out of nothing, a great thing and a little thing, since you, both omnipotent and good, make all things good, a great heaven and a little earth. You were, the rest was nothing. Out of nothing you made heaven and earth, two entities, one close to you, the other close to being nothing; the one to which only you are superior, the other to which what is inferior is nothingness.²⁷

According to Augustine, God as the creator is the reason for our existence. As he says, “without you, whatever exists would not exist.”²⁸ While in Paul Tillich’s language, God is the ground of our being, Augustine asserts that we are beings and have any existence simply because God is in us; and we have being because we are in God. As Augustine writes so eloquently in his *Confessions*:

My God, I would have no being, I would not have any existence, unless you were in me. Or rather, I would have no being if I were not in you ‘of whom are all things, through whom are all things, in whom are all things’ (Rom. 11:36). Even so, Lord, even so. How can I call on you to come if I am already in you? Or where can you come from so as to be in me? Can I move outside heaven and earth so that my God may come to me from there?...you are not scattered but reassemble us. In filling all things, you fill them all with the whole of yourself.²⁹

Augustine also says explicitly that God is the foundation of our very existence. He writes:

In Him is the cause of continued existence, the light of understanding, and the rule of life...If then man was so created that by that in Him which excels he may approach that which is above all things, namely, the one, true, almighty God, without whom no nature can have being, no teaching can instruct, and no use can assist, let him seek Him in whom all things are joined, in whom all things have security for us. Let him behold Him in whom is all our certainty; let him love Him in whom is all our morality.³⁰

²⁷ Augustine, *Confessions*, 249.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 4.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ Augustine, *De civ. Dei* XIII, 4. Quoted from Przywara, *An Augustine Synthesis*, 141.

In other words, the God of Augustine is the God of the transcendent and the immanent. God is the reason of our existence, and yet God is also the creator within us. It is of paramount importance to note that Augustine disagrees with the pantheism of his time and refutes the pantheistic tenets embraced by philosophers of his age. As Grabowski rightly argues, Augustine “rejected the grosser philosophical theories of the Greeks concerning the divine Being and the universe because they did not make adequate distinction between the Creator and creatures.”³¹ To Augustine, God is immanent in the universe by actively participating in its activities, but is not part of it. The God of Augustine is not of the same substance as the universe, so God is transcendental to the universe and by nature superior to it.

The distinction between the Creator and His creations cannot be emphasized more in Augustine’s theology of God. As he writes in his *Confessions*:

And I considered the other things below You, and I saw that neither can they be said absolutely to be or absolutely not to be. They are because they come from you. But they are not because they are not what you are. That which truly is is that which unchangeably abides. But ‘it is good for me to stick fast to God’ (Ps. 72:28); for if I do not abide in him, I can do nothing (Jn 15:5). But he ‘abiding in Himself makes all things new’ (Wisd.7:27). ‘You are my Lord because you have no need of my goodness’ (Ps.15:2).³²

Augustine believes in creation *ex nihilo*. He argues against the Manicheans and the Plotinians. He rejects emanationism as taught by the Manichees and the Gnostics and believes that the world did not emerge from the substance of God, for God and the world are absolutely different. If the world emerged from the substance of God, then God would be subjected to finitude and to change. But God is absolutely unchangeable, and God alone is the absolute Being

³¹ Grabowski, *The All-Present God*, 219.

³² Augustine, *Confessions*, 124.

that gives existence to things.³³ Augustine argues that the past and the future of human time are human constructions that are reducible to present memory and anticipation. The past and the future exist in the present and allow for the measurement of time. The notions of “before” and “after” are from human consciousness. But with God, in God’s eternal mind, there is no before or after, for God is “unchangeably eternal.”³⁴

In connection with Augustine’s theology of creation, Augustine purports that God does not create blindly. God knows creatures in the eternal reasons, and we human beings can know God through creation. God is for and with creation. God sustains creation and in God’s divine providence leads it to its fulfillment instead of leaving the world aside to the play of chance. He writes,

He knew beforehand, without any beginning, all things to come in time, and among them also what we should ask of Him and when, and to whom He would listen or not listen, and on what subjects. And with respect to all His creatures, both spiritual and corporeal, it is not because they are that He knows them, but they are because He knows them. For He was not ignorant of what He was to create; hence He created because He knew, He did not know because He created. Nor did he know them when created in any other way than He knew them when still to be created; for nothing accrued to His wisdom from them, but that wisdom remained as it was, while they came into being as it was fitting and when it was fitting.³⁵

The City of God is another major and well known writing of Augustine. It is an apology in which he defends the Christian religion against paganism. He delineates the history of humankind in this book and describes how God in his providence works in secular history to

³³ Augustine, *Confessions*, 224-225.

³⁴ Augustine, *Confessions*, 221-245.

³⁵ Augustine, *De Trn.* XV, xiii,22. Quoted from Przywara, *An Augustine Synthesis*, 112.

bring forth salvation and the fulfillment of human individuals. The theological significance of *The City of God* cannot be overlooked or overemphasized.

According to Augustine in *The City of God*, God alone is the giver of all good. The divine self is not above the earthy kingdom or order but is its master and governor. Without undermining human freedom, God foresees and preordains the future and everything. He argues:

God knows all things before they come to pass, and that we do by our free will whatsoever we know and feel to be done by us only because we will it. But all things come to pass by fate; for we demonstrate that the name of fate, as it is wont to be used by those who speak of fate...our wills themselves are included in that order of causes which is certain to God, and is embraced by His foreknowledge, for human wills are also causes of human actions; and He who foreknew all the causes of things would certainly among those causes not have been ignorant of our will...the cause of things, therefore, which makes but is not made, is God; but all other causes both make and are made.³⁶

In other words, God knows and determines all causes in advance, because God does what God wills and does not suffer what God does not will, for God is all-powerful. To Augustine, God is the God of history and is in history.

Augustine believes that it is easier for us to say what God is not than what God is. Thomas Aquinas³⁷ would not disagree with him. Aquinas, however, denies that we can have any positive knowledge about God's essential being, for God transcends our language and human reason, for God is infinite and all creatures are finite beings.

³⁶ Augustine, *The City of God* (New York: The Modern Library, 1950), 154-155.

³⁷ Thomas Aquinas is not only one of the most important theologians in the Catholic Church, he is perhaps the most important. He is the foremost classical proponent of natural theology and has profoundly influenced Western theology and philosophy. Modern theologians and philosophers, especially in the West, are engaging in constant dialogue with him, either to react against, or agree with, his ideas on ethics, religions, and even political theory. His *Summa Theologica* is his best-known writing, and represents the most complete statement of his philosophical and theological systems.

Aquinas believes that God is infinite and that nothing else but God can be essentially infinite. He argues this forcefully in his *Summa Theologica*:

A thing is called infinite because it is not finite. Now matter is in a way made finite by form, and the form by matter. Matter indeed is made finite by form, inasmuch as matter, before it receives its form, is in potentiality to many forms; but on receiving a form, it is terminated by that one...on the other hand form is not made perfect by matter, but rather is contracted by matter; and hence the infinite, regarded on the part of the form not determined by matter, has the nature of something perfect. Now being is the most formal of all things. Since therefore the divine being is not a being received in anything, but He is His own subsistent being, it is clear that God Himself is infinite and perfect.³⁸

Aquinas believes that all things are finite. Some things could be “relatively infinite, but not absolutely infinite.” Only God can be essentially infinite because everything “outside God is from God as from its first principle. Therefore besides God nothing can be infinite.”³⁹

According to Aquinas:

Our natural knowledge begins from sense. Hence our natural knowledge can go as far as it can be led by sensible things. But our mind cannot be led by sense so far as to see the essence of God; because the sensible effects of God do not equal the power of God as their cause. Hence from the knowledge of sensible things the whole power of God cannot be known; nor therefore can His essence be seen. But because they are His effects and depend on their cause, we can be led from them so far as to know of God whether He exists, and to know Him, as the first cause of all things, exceeding all things caused by him. Hence we know that His relationship with creatures so far as to be the cause of them all; also that creatures differ from Him, inasmuch as He is not in any way part of what is caused by Him; and that creatures are not removed from Him by reason of any defect on His part, but because He superexceeds them all.(1.12.12)⁴⁰

The God of Aquinas is the God of the transcendental who supersedes everything. God does not enter the composition of other things. The distinction between God and creatures cannot

³⁸ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*. (New York: Beziger Brothers, Inc, 1947). 31.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 31.

⁴⁰ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 58.

be clearer and more acute. He even disagrees with Augustine, who thinks that God is the world-soul.⁴¹ His belief in this issue is due to three reasons:

First, because God is the first efficient cause. Now the efficient cause is not identical numerically with the form of the thing caused, but only specifically: for man begets man. But primary matter can be neither numerically nor specifically identical with an efficient cause; for the former is merely potential, while the latter is actual. Secondly, because since God is the first efficient cause, to act belongs to Him primarily and essentially. But that which enters into composition with anything does not act primarily and essentially, but rather the composite so acts; for the hand does not act, but the man by his hand; and, fire warms by its heat. Hence God cannot be part of a compound. Thirdly, because no part of a compound can be absolutely primal among things ---not even matter, nor form, though they are the primal parts of every compound. For matter is merely potential; and potentiality is absolutely posterior to actuality...(1.4.1)⁴²

However, one should also note that even though Aquinas believes that God does not enter the composition of other things, he does uphold the belief that God may be said to be in all things. God subsists, and thus cannot be in things as part of their substance, but God could be in things as an agent is present to that in which its action is taking place. He said eloquently:

Now since God is very being by His own essence, created being must be His proper effect; as to ignite is the proper effect of fire. Now God causes this effect in things not only when they first begin to be, but as long as they are preserved in being; as light is caused in the air by the sun as long as the air remains illuminated. Therefore as long as a thing has being. God must be present to it, according to its mode of being. But being is innermost in each thing and most fundamentally inherent in all things since it is formal in respect of everything found in a thing ,...Hence it must be that God is in all things, and innermost.(1.8.1)⁴³

⁴¹ Ibid., 20.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid., 34.

Not only God is in all things, Aquinas even goes a step further to argue that God “by a common mode is in all things by His presence, power, and substance.”⁴⁴ He believes that God is in all things in two ways, namely,

In one way after the manner of an efficient cause; and thus He is in all things created by Him; in another way He is in things as the object of operation is in the operator; and this is proper to the operations of the soul, according as the thing known is in the one who knows; and the thing desired in the one desiring. In this second way God is especially in the rational creature, which knows and loves Him actually or habitually. And because the rational creature possesses this prerogative by grace, . . . He is said to be thus in the saints by grace . . . God is in all things by His power, inasmuch as all things are subject to His power; He is by His presence in all things, as all things are bare and open to His eyes; He is in all things by His essence, inasmuch as He is present to all as the cause of their being. (1.8.3)⁴⁵

Aquinas believes that God is not only in all things, but God is also everywhere. His argument is as follows:

Since place is a thing, to be in place can be understood in a twofold sense; either by way of other things—i.e., as one thing is said to be in another no matter how; and thus the accidents of a place are in place; or by a way proper to place; and thus things placed are in place. Now in both these senses in some way God is in every place; and this is to be everywhere. First, as He is in all things as giving them being, power, and operation; so He is in every place as giving it existence and locative power. Again, things placed are in place, inasmuch as they fill place; and God fills every place; not, indeed, like a body, for a body is said to fill place inasmuch as it excludes the co-presence of another body; whereas by God being in a place, others are not thereby excluded from it; indeed, by the very fact that He gives being to the things that fill every place, He himself fills every place. (1.8.2)⁴⁶

Both Augustine and Aquinas’s theologies of God present remarkable resemblance with panentheism. One should not think that panentheism is same as pantheism, for the latter argues that the world is God, and God is the world. Whereas panentheism says that the world is “in”

⁴⁴ Ibid., 36.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 35.

God. While pantheism suggests that God is synonymous with the world, panentheism argues that God is in the material world and interpenetrates everything in it, and everything is contained within God. Thus, nothing could escape God, for we are all in God. God is involved in everything and has practical influence in our lives and human affairs. It is impossible to remove God from the world or to remove God from the cause of human history, for we are all in God and God dwells everywhere.

Since God is in everything and in every place, one could conclude that God is within human beings. While emphasizing the immanence of God, Aquinas also seeks to explicate that God is at the same time transcendent. He explains this point by arguing that even though God is in everything and is everywhere, to be everywhere belongs to God alone:

a thing is everywhere absolutely when it does not belong to it to be everywhere accidentally, that is, merely on some supposition; as a grain of millet would be everywhere, supposing that no other body existed. It belongs therefore to a thing to be everywhere absolutely when, on any supposition, it must be everywhere; and this properly belongs to God alone. For whatever number of places be supposed, even if an infinite number be supposed besides what already exist, it would be necessary that God should be in all of them; for nothing can exist except by Him. Therefore to be everywhere primarily and absolutely, belongs to God, and is proper to Him: because whatever number of places be supposed to exist, God must be in all of them, not as a part of Him, but as to His very self. (1.8.4)⁴⁷

Since only God could be everywhere, God is thus exterior to human beings, even though God could be conceived in some sense an interior to our being. According to Aquinas, God is outside of us. God is in everything in the sense that God “as an agent is present to that upon which it works”; that God is in all things does not mean that God is “as part of their essence, nor as an accident.” It is possible to establish some kind of relationship with God, “for an agent must

⁴⁷ Ibid., 37.

be joined to wherein it acts immediately, and touch it by its power; hence it is proved in Physic... the thing moved and the mover must be joined together.”⁴⁸

It is important to note that Aquinas pays much attention to the transcendence of God, even though he argues that God is in everything and everywhere. It is also of paramount importance to note that the affirmation of the transcendence of God must go together with the affirmation of God as the creator of all beings. One who does not take God as creator with complete seriousness cannot really affirm the transcendence of God, for God as creator suggests that God and only God is not a contingent being. And thus, God is exalted above all beings, as they are all creatures. Both Augustine and Aquinas have paid much attention to God as creator in their theologies.

Since God is the God of creation, God’s existence is posited prior to and efficient in the causes and effects of creatures. God is the first unmoved mover; God does not require a cause, as God is not an effect. The transcendence of God is the independence of a cause from its effect. God is not conditioned to exist, God simply is. In other words, God is “being in itself” and about which nothing can be known, for God has no cause. The transcendence of God also suggests the supreme indifference in God. To put it differently, God is unknowable.

Without God, nothing could exist or could continue to exist. Everything comes into existence through God, and God alone. Aquinas believes that creation means the very dependency of the created act of being upon the principle from which it is produced. And God does not only create, He also preserves. Creation does not stop after everything is created, but the world depends on God at every moment, not only in its moment of origin. Thus, God keeps on creating, and creates everything anew.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 34.

Thus, to say that God is the creator, means that there is a continuous dependency of the world on God. In this sense, God is not really the wholly other that has nothing to do with the world. The continuous dependency of the world on God implies the intimate relationship between the creator and His creatures.

The continuous dependency of creatures on their creator also implies God's providence, which reveals the power and the presence of God in the world he makes. In God as creator, God is portrayed as the Lord of the world, God is wholly other, the transcendent . However, in God preserving creation, God is portrayed as the immanent God, the God of the covenant that is within the community of creatures. However, it seems that Aquinas does not pay much attention to the preservation and providence of God to elaborate the immanence of God so as. He rather chooses to emphasize God as creator and thus highlight the transcendence of God.

Aquinas does not only argue forcefully about the identity of God as creator, but he also argues for the immutability of God. To Aquinas, God as creator and the immutability of God are highly correlated. According to him, as the Bible says, God changes not:

God is altogether immutable. First, because it was shown...there is some first being, whom we call God; and that this first being must be pure act, without the admixture of any potentiality, for the reason that, absolutely, potentiality is posterior to act. Now everything which is in any way changed, is in some way in potentiality. Hence it is evident that it is impossible for God to be in any way changeable. Secondly, because everything which is moved, remains as it was in part, and passes away in part; as what is moved from whiteness to blackness, remains the same as to substance; thus in everything which is moved, there is some kind of composition to be found...God is no composition, for He is altogether simple. Hence it is manifest that God cannot be moved. Thirdly, because everything which is moved acquires something by its movement, and attains to what it had not attained previously. But since God is infinite, comprehending in Himself all the plenitude of perfection of all being, He cannot acquire anything new, nor extend Himself to anything whereto He was not extended previously. Hence movement in no way belongs to Him. So, some of the ancients, constrained, as it were, by the truth, decided that the first principle was immovable.(1.9.1)⁴⁹

⁴⁹ Ibid., 38.

According to Aquinas, the uniqueness of all creations lies in the characteristic of mutability. Since God is not the creature but the Creator, who is absolutely different from what other creatures, God is thus absolutely immutable:

in every creature there is potentiality to change either as regards substantial being as in the case of things corruptible; or as regards locality only, as in the case of the celestial bodies; or as regards the order to their end, and the application of their powers to divers objects, as is the case with the angels; and universally all creatures generally are mutable by the power of the Creator, in Whose power is their existence and non-existence. Hence since God is in none of these ways mutable, it belongs to Him alone to be altogether immutable. (1.9.2)⁵⁰

As David B. Burrell rightly points out, “a most articulate objector to Aquinas’ account is Charles Hartshorne, who stands at the center of a movement called ‘process theology.’”⁵¹ To Hartshorne, Aquinas’ God is a God who is in no sense finite; wholly absolute; pure being that is in no sense becoming; and wholly transcendent and unchangeable. God in process theology is utterly transcendent, and yet also profoundly immanent. God is temporal, and an actual entity who prehends physically and conceptually. Most importantly, God is an integral part of the process of all reality. However, God also has a perfection and ultimacy relative to all other things. To process theology, God is recognized as the divine di-polarity.

According to Aquinas, God is viewed as the unchanging God. As Iltyd Trethowan rightly asserts, Aquinas is concerned about the immutability of God. Aquinas wanted to show that God is not changed by God’s knowledge of the world. God does not change and His knowledge does not change, simply because He knows timelessly.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 39.

⁵¹ David B. Burrell. *Aquinas: God and Action* (Norte Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1979), 78.

According to Aquinas, God sees all events as present. He writes:

Were someone to see many travelers along a road successively, over a certain period of time, in each part of that time he would see some passersby as present, so that over the whole time of his vision he would see every traveler as present. He would not see all as present at once because the time of his seeing is not all-at-once. If his seeing were able to exist all at once, he would see at once all as present, although they do not all pass by as present at once. Whence because the vision of God's knowledge is measured by eternity, which is all at once yet includes all of time...God sees what happens in time not as future but as present.⁵²

Aquinas also believes that the knowledge of God is the cause of things: "...it is manifest that God causes things by His intellect, since His being is His act of understanding; and hence His knowledge must be the cause of things, in so far as His will is joined to it."⁵³

Both Augustine and Aquinas try to construct their theologies of God from the Bible. They appeal to the authority of the Bible to analyze the concept and image of God as creator, even though their arguments are highly philosophical -- especially those of Aquinas. However, the God of the Bible is profoundly immanent and mutable as well, as He has an intimate relationship with human beings and even has covenants with them, some of which God regrets on many occasions. But Aquinas seems not to elaborate on this much and prefers to pay more attention to the transcendence and immutability of God. It is obviously that both Augustine and Aquinas believe in the transcendence and the omnipotence of God. They also believe that if God were not transcendent and omnipotent, it would be meaningless to worship God. Power, or absolute power, has always been a central concept of God in many religions. As Lewis Farnell has written,

⁵² Aquinas, *Of the Truth*, 2.12. Quoted from Douglass Kennard, *The Classical Christian God*. (Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2002), 47.

⁵³ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 79.

In Vedic and Vedantic theology, in the Hellenic, the Judaic, the Christian, the Islamic and the Zarathustrian systems, the multiplicity of divine attributes could be brought under the three great categories, Potentia, Sapientia, Bonitas – Power, Wisdom, and Goodness -- which was the quasi-trinitarian formula summing up the medieval schoolmen’s ideal of God.⁵⁴

The Theological Criticism of Omnipotence

Why is power so basic to many people’s concept of God? Why is the belief in God’s omnipotence so important to many people? Anna Case-Winters poignantly answers by stating that “...human need is the chief cause for the imputation to the divine of great power...because we want our needs to be met and our prayers to be answered, we project an image of an all-powerful God who is able to do.”⁵⁵ “Almighty God,” is still the most common appellation used in contemporary Christian practice as Christians address God in church and in personal prayers.

As Charles Hartshorne has pointed out, the theological idea of God as omnipotent is highly problematic. To say that God is omnipotent, or all powerful, is to say that God has the highest controlling power that “is capable of monopolizing decision-making, of fully determining the details of the world,”⁵⁶ and leaving no room or freedom to human beings. Put simply, it is to deny the freedom of individuals.

To say that God is omnipotent also means that, as Hartshorne put it, “God is wholly active, independent, or absolute in relation to the creatures and that the creatures are wholly passive in

⁵⁴ Lewis Ricchard Farnell, *The Attributes of God: The Gifford Lectures* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1925), 11.

⁵⁵ Anna Case-Winters, *God’s Power: Traditional Understandings and Contemporary Challenges* (Louisville: Westminster/ John Knox Press, 1990), 24.

⁵⁶ Charles Hartshorne, *Omnipotence and other Theological Mistakes* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1984), 38.

relation to God.” This contradicts the idea of God as love, because it is nonsense and absurd to claim “a lover is uninfluenced by a partly self-made loved one.”⁵⁷ In other words, it is the tyrant conception of God. God does nothing but command, and all God’s creatures are expected to do nothing but merely obey. Bluntly put, God is the master, we are merely slaves, or worse still, we are merely puppets who are permitted to think that we make decisions when in reality we just follow the decisions made by God, the supreme tyrant.

According to Hartshorne, to say that God is not omnipotent is not to limit the power of God: “omnipotence as usually conceived is a false or indeed absurd ideal, which in truth limits God, denies to him any world worth talking about: a world of living, that is to say, significantly decision-making, agents. It is the tradition which did indeed terribly limit divine power, the power to foster creativity even in the least of the creatures.”⁵⁸

Hartshorne’s theology has its roots in Alfred North Whitehead’s philosophy. The concept of God advocated by Whitehead, which will be explicated in Chapter Four, is crucial not only because it solves the problem of evil, but also because it could save humanity from the self-destruction of believing in God as a tyrant. Before I turn to Whitehead to look for an alternative theology of God, in next chapter, I will explore the concept of God in Confucianism, which is very different from the classical theism of Christianity.

⁵⁷ Charles Hartshorne, *Omnipotence and other Theological Mistakes* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1984), 45.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 18.

CHAPTER THREE

THE CONCEPT OF *TIAN* AND *DAO* IN CONFUCIANISM

Spirituality has meant a great many things in the history of religions, affected by different conceptions of human, the transcendent, and the world as susceptible to a spiritual dimension.

----- Robert Cummings Neville

Confucianism has had a pervasive influence on all aspect of Chinese life for more than two thousand years. But it is only recently that the West has begun to express its interest in knowing more about Confucianism, largely due to the remarkable economic success of the so-called “Four Tigers” or “Four Little Dragons” of Asia, Hong Kong, Singapore, Taiwan and South Korea. Westerners are impressed by the dramatic success of these countries in rapid modernization and have found Confucianism to be their common background.¹

When Christian missionaries from the West encountered Confucianism in China, most of them tended to argue that Confucianism was not a religion. According to them, unlike Daoism and Buddhism, Confucianism was a non-religious philosophical system that perfectly compatible with Christian teachings. In other words, one could be a Chinese Confucian and also a Christian. In order to save Confucianism from the wrath of Christian monotheism, Confucianism has been construed as a secular humanism. However, many Chinese Confucians also began to question the necessity of having a religion, or in this case, of believing in Christianity if the most respected educator, Confucius, did not seem to be interested in religion. In order to evangelize the Chinese

¹ Wm. Theodore de Bary, a renowned scholar in Asian civilization at Columbia University, poignantly asserts this in his book. See Wm. Theodore De Bary, *Neo-Confucianism Orthodoxy and the Learning of the Mind-and-Heart* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981), ix-x.

and gain converts, many missionaries, Chinese and non-Chinese alike, have worked hard to justify Confucius by maintaining that he was not against religion, but that he in fact embraced spirituality by appealing to the spiritual dimension of Confucianism². Today, the religiousness of Confucianism is once again at the center of discussions. Tu Weiming, philosopher at Harvard, is one of the strongest advocates in the West arguing for the religiousness of Confucianism.³ Robert Cummings Neville, author of *Boston Confucianism*, explores the spiritual dimension of Confucianism by looking at the understanding of transcendence in both ancient Confucianism and Neo-Confucianism. He also compares John Wesley's emphasis on holiness or attaining perfection with the Confucian project of becoming a sage.⁴ According to Neville, like Wang Yangming, Wesley believed that the heart must show itself in actions and he "organized his groups for reforming the world and believed that increasing holiness is as holiness does."⁵ Both Wesley's theology and Wang Yangming's Neo-Confucianism "regard the transcendent as definitive of the self because it is its source"; while Christianity has the notion of the creator God

² In order to gain converts, Matteo Ricci, the Jesuit priest who was assigned to the China Mission in the sixteenth century, gave up dressing as a Confucian monk and thereafter wore the silk garment of a literati. He has been criticized vehemently by Protestant missionaries, such as S. Wells Williams, for being more of a politician than a theologian because Ricci allowed Chinese Christians to continue embracing and practicing Confucian ceremonies. Ricci believed that it was part of Chinese tradition that had no religious significance. However, he also believed that the idea of God was evident in the Confucian classics. He repeatedly argued that the ancient Chinese believed in the idea of a single creator. More analysis and criticism of the missionary works of Ricci can be found in John D. Young, *Confucianism and Christianity—The First Encounter* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1983).

³ Tu Weiming's two-volume *Confucian Spirituality* provides highly scholarly and detailed analysis of the spiritual thought and practices in Confucianism. It is arguably the most important work ever published on the topic in the English Language.

⁴ Robert Cummings Neville, *Boston Confucianism* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2000), 161.

⁵ Neville, *Boston Confucianism*, 164.

and the *logos*, Confucianism has the heavenly principle “*Tianming*” or “*Dao*.” As John Berthrong has observed:

Confucianism is an internally complicated cultural artifact with different cultural manifestations, only some of which are clearly religious in nature. It is equally true to argue that Confucianism is also a philosophic tradition as well as a historical, poetic, artistic, economic and political set of related movements. There were clearly ancient, medieval, early modern and modern Confucians who were tone-deaf to the religious dimensions of their tradition. . . Yet it is more and more clear, on the basis of modern understanding of religion, that there is a profound religious dimension to the tradition. If this religious dimension is ignored then a significant part of the historical and modern story of the Confucian Way is neglected to the detriment of true humane scholarship.⁶

In this chapter, I seek to understand the religiosity of Confucianism and the element of spirituality in this tradition, and its theology of God by looking at the concepts of “*Tian*,” “*Shangdi*,” “*Dao*” and “*Taiji*” in both their classical period and in Neo-Confucianism. During the Song dynasty (960-1279), there was a revival and reformation of Confucianism as the result of the influence of Buddhism, which later gave Confucianism new appeal as a religious way of life for a lot of Chinese; this movement is well known as Neo-Confucianism. I will also compare the concept of *Tian* and *Dao* with Gordon Kaufman’s theology of God as creativity.

Confucianism and its Brief Historical Development

Confucius (孔子) (551-479 BCE) is arguably the first great teacher in China chronologically and in his importance to Chinese philosophy. His teachings and ideas have influenced Chinese culture and tradition in the most fundamental and profoundest of ways. But his influence does not end with mainland China or Chinese culture. Confucius’s ideas have been the fertile soil of many cultures of East Asian countries like Korea, Japan and Vietnam. Just like other great teachers, such as Socrates and Jesus, Confucius does not seem to have written

⁶ John H. Berthrong, *All Under Heaven: Transforming Paradigms in Confucian- Christian Dialogue* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 70-71.

anything. What we know about him and his teachings is found in the *Analects* and other sources such as *Mencius* (孟子) and the *Zuo Commentary of the Spring and Autumn Annals* (左傳). In the later years of his life, Confucius devoted his time to editing the *Spring and Autumn Annals*, which is a chronicle of events at the court of Lu (722-481 BCE). The *Spring and Autumn Annals* was so important to Confucius that he explicitly said that “future generations shall understand me through the *Spring and Autumn Annals* and shall judge me on the basis of the *Spring and Autumn Annals*.” (Mencius, 3B:9).⁷

Confucianism has undergone some changes under the influences and challenges of Buddhism, which was imported from India. In order to counter the challenges of Buddhist metaphysics and its Daoist variant, neo-Confucianism emerged to construct a metaphysical system that was absent in the ancient writings. This intellectual movement reached its height in the Song dynasty (960-1279) under the influence of Zhu Xi (朱熹) (1130-1200). According to Yu-Lan Fung, one of the greatest Chinese philosophers of the 20th century, Zhu Xi transformed and reconstituted Confucianism and developed a new type of Confucianism, which is called Neo-Confucianism.⁸ Fung writes:

With [Zhu Xi] we now reach the man who synthesized the ideas of all these predecessors into one all-embracing system and who, indeed, is probably the greatest synthesizer in the history of Chinese thought. Through his prolific writings and his commentaries on the

⁷ Xinzhong Yao, *An Introduction to Confucianism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 51.

⁸ Wing-Tsit Chan has argued in his book, *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy*, that the contribution of Zhu Xi is that he developed, systematized and synthesized six major concepts of Neo-Confucianism, namely, the Great Ultimate, principle (li), material force (qi), nature, the investigation of things, and humanity. See Wing-Tsit Chan, *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1953), 589-590.

classics, he brought the Rationalistic school to full maturity, and in the process created a version of Confucianism that was to remain orthodox until the twentieth century.⁹

John H. Berthrong echoes Fung and has asserted:

[Zhu Xi] is second to Confucius and Mencius as a Confucian thinker. [Zhu Xi] is often compared to St. Aquinas in the West, and here again, there is a great deal of merit in the comparison. Chinese thought would never be the same after [Zhu Xi] reworked and arranged the records of his beloved Northern Sung masters.¹⁰

Zhu Xi did not break from tradition, but rather used his metaphysics to enhance the sense of religious fellowship to justify the Confucian way of life. ZhuXi's commentaries on the *Analects* and *Mencius* had become the orthodox doctrine of Confucianism since the fourteenth century. He emphasized the importance of another two ancient writings, the *Great Learning* (大學) and the *Doctrine of the Mean* (中庸); joined with the *Analects* and *Mencius*, these became the four major textbooks of China's civil-service examinations for over six hundred years.

The teachings and philosophy of Confucius became Confucianism as the invention of Jesuits in the 16th century. As Paul Rule has written,

Until Nicholas Trigault published his version of Ricci's journals in 1615, there was hardly any knowledge of, not to say debate about, Confucianism...The Jesuits were virtually the first Europeans to discover Confucius and Confucianism, 'the sect of the literati' as they not inaccurately called it...The Jesuits, representatives of European values and intellectual methods, attempted to understand Chinese intellectual life in terms of systems, and transmuted the tradition of the Ju or Chinese 'scholars' into an '-ism', Confucianism.¹¹

⁹ Yu-lan Fung, *A History of Chinese Philosophy*, trans. Derk Bodde (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953), vol. II, 533.

¹⁰ John H. Berthrong, *Transformations of the Confucian Way* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 19989), 109.

¹¹ Paul A Rule, *K'ung-Tzu or Confucius- The Jesuit Interpretation of Confucianism* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1986), 195.

Confucianism is not a new religion or a belief system invented by Confucius, even though a distinctive “school” of philosophy began with Confucius. Confucianism is an ancient Chinese culture and philosophy that succeeded and was transmitted by Confucius and his disciples. As Xingzhong Yao asserts, Confucianism is a “misnomer for the tradition that is normally referred to as *Rujia*, *Rujiao*, *Ruxue* or simply *Ru* in China and other East Asian countries.”¹² *Rujia*, *Ruxue* and *Rujiao*, all these three terms have been reduced to simply “Confucianism” in the English language. Thus, in order to retrieve its richness, it is important to capture the nuances of meanings in the term “Confucianism” in its original language.

Confucius mentioned *Ru* (儒) in the *Analects* in which he said to his disciples that they should be a *Ru* of virtuous gentlemen (君子儒), not a morally deficient man or vulgar *Ru*. (小人儒) (6.13)¹³ It is not a term that coined by Confucius. Some scholars like Liu Xin believe that it is a government officer that “assists the ruler to follow the way of the *yin-yang* and to enlighten the people by education.”¹⁴ But *Ru* later is known as Confucian scholars.

Even though “*Jia*” (家) means “family”, “*Rujia*” means the school or tradition or scholars that committed to the tradition of *Ru*. *Rujia* believes in the study of the classics of Confucianism and is committed to correcting disorder and transforming society, as well as striving to promote order in the state and peace in the world.

¹² Yao, *An Introduction to Confucianism*, 17.

¹³ David H. Li translates “*junzi ru*” as “gentleman with six arts” and “*xiaoren ru*” as “common man with six arts.” See David H.L. *The Analects of Confucius* (Maryland: Premier Publishing Company, 1999), 72.

¹⁴ Yao, *An Introduction to Confucianism*, 18.

Confucianism could also mean “*Ruxue*” (儒學) in the Chinese language. “*Xue*” means “a form of learning”. It is a tradition that committed to the study and transmission of ancient classics of the Confucian tradition. It is a school of thought or philosophy. The purpose of this learning is to promote virtuous actions.

“*Jiao*” means “cult” or “religion”. For a long time, Confucianism was a school among hundred schools of philosophy in China (*BaiJia* 百家) Confucianism was given the name of *Jiao* and became *Rujiao* (儒教) during the reign of the emperor of Wu (141-87 BCE), when it became a dominant school and an orthodox ideology. It is one of the three “*jiao*” in China, Confucianism, Buddhism (*Fuojiao* 佛教) and Daoism (*Daojiao* 道教). Kang Youwei, a Confucian scholar in the late Qing Dynasty (1644-1911), launched a reform movement that sought to transform the Confucian tradition into some sort of a state religion that made the reverence and worship of Confucius to be part of state religious activities.¹⁵ Tu Weming argues that “we can define the Confucian way of being religious as ultimate self-transformation as a communal act and as a faithful dialogical response to the transcendent.”¹⁶

Tian and *Dao* in Confucianism

Some scholars have argued that Confucianism is more of a philosophy of social ethics than a religion.¹⁷ Confucianism does not seem to fit conventional understanding of religion. It has no church, it has no clergy, and no “Pope.” There is no leadership elite or authoritative figure in Confucianism to make any absolute value judgment to distinguish right doctrines from wrong

¹⁵ Yao, *An Introduction to Confucianism*, 28.

¹⁶ Tu Weiming, *Centrality and Commonality* (Albany: SUNY, 1989), 94.

¹⁷ For more arguments on matter as such, see Wm. Theodore De Bary, *East Asian Civilizations: A Dialogue in Five Stages* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), 109.

ones. In addition to that, Confucianism has no missionary nature like other “higher world religions.”

Thus, before I seek to explore the spirituality or religiosity of Confucianism, it is important for us to define religion first. According to French sociologist Emile Durkheim, who is arguably one of the most important sociologists of religion, religion is “a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden--- beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a Church, all those who adhere to them.”¹⁸ In his widely read *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, he identified three major elements in religion: (1) a system of beliefs and practices; (2) a community that translates the first element into something shared; and (3) sacred things that consist of objects or ideas that are treated with reverence and awe and that set them apart from the realm of the mundane and the non-spiritual.

In light of Durkheim’s understanding and definition of religion, Confucianism is nothing less than a religion. While it is true that Confucianism seems to be lacking some features of most of the world religions mentioned above, it nonetheless fit the definition of religion asserted by Durkheim because of its transcendent dimension. Confucianism might not be like any other world religion in terms of its organization and power structures, but one needs to distinguish between “religion” and “being religious.”¹⁹

¹⁸ Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, (New York: Free Press, 1926) 47.

¹⁹ Religion scholars like W. C. Smith argues this forcefully in his book, see W. C. Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991) 19-74.

Tu Weiming also argues that the religiosity of Confucianism lies in its “spiritual self-identification of the living members of a faith community.”²⁰ He defines Confucianism as a faith, and says:

The Confucian “faith” in the intrinsic meaningfulness of humanity is a faith in the living person’s authentic possibility for self-transcendence. The body, the mind, the soul, and the spirit of the living person are all laden with profound ethicoreligious significance. To be religious, in the Confucian sense, it to be engaged in ultimate self-transformation as a communal act. Salvation means the full realization of the anthropocosmic reality inherent in our human nature.²¹

In order to explore the religiosity and spirituality of Confucianism, one should not overlook the concepts of *Tian* and *Dao* in Confucianism. Confucianism espouses *Tianren Heyi* (天人合一), which is the “Unity of Heaven and humanity” and teaches that the ultimate goal of religious practice is “universal harmony” (大同). This “universal harmony,” as Confucius taught his students, is mainly about social ethics. However, this social ethic has its roots in its theology. The word “*Tian*” (天) has been translated as “Heaven,” “sky,” and “nature” in English. Both “sky” and “nature” speak to Confucianism's cosmographical sense, referring to a visible, natural phenomenon. On the other hand, the world *Tian* is also an abstract concept that in its metaphysical sense refers to an invisible, supreme moral force that dispenses justice. Thus, it has a religious connotation. For instance, Confucius once said, “When one has offended the Heaven [sic], appealing to others will not do.”²² (3.13) (獲罪於天，無所禱也。)

²⁰ See Tu Weiming, *Confucian Thought: Selfhood as Creative Transformation* (New York: SUNY Press, 1985) 51.

²¹ Tu, *Confucian Thought*, 64.

²² Ames translates it as “A person who offends against *tian*, has nowhere else to pray.” See Roger T. Ames and Henry Rosemont, Jr., *The Analects of Confucius: A Philosophical Translation* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1998), 85.

The “Unity of Heaven and humanity” (*Tianren heyi* 天人合一) is an important principle in Confucianism. It might be also translated as “the harmonious oneness of Heaven and humanity.” According to Tu Weiming:

The relationship between Heaven and man is not an antinomic biunity but an indivisibly single oneness. In this sense, the sage as the most authentic manifestation of humanity does not coexist with Heaven; he forms a coincidence with Heaven...Despite the possibility of a conceptual separation between Heaven and man, inwardly, in their deepest reality, they form an unbreakable organismic continuum.²³

Scholars like Tu Weiming and Mou Zhongsan believe that *Tian* has a transcendent dimension. Mou even uses Kant’s philosophy to explain his point:

The way of *Tian* as...high above denotes transcendence. When the way of *Tian* is invested in human person and resides internally in him as human nature, it is then immanent. On this basis, we can use an expression that Kant liked to use, and say that in one sense the way *Tian* is transcendent, and in another way it is immanent (immanent and transcendent are opposites). When the way *Tian* is both transcendent and immanent, it can be said to have both religious and moral import: religion stresses the transcendent meaning, and morality stresses the immanent...²⁴

The concept of *Tianming* is of paramount importance in Confucianism. It can be translated literally as the “Mandate of Heaven.” Berthrong succinctly summarizes it as “the very source of creation itself; this is the ceaseless productivity of the Tao.”²⁵ He also describes it as the

²³ Tu Weiming, *Neo-Confucian Thought in Action—Wang Yang Ming’s Youth* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), 84.

²⁴ David Hall and Roger T. Ames, *Thinking Through Confucius* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987), 205.

²⁵ John H. Berthrong, *Transformations of the Confucian Way* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1998), 11.

“primordial creativity of the cosmos that provides a model for the special human virtues in the context of a living history and civilization.”²⁶

Whereas in Tu's *Centrality and Commonality* (*Zhongyong* 中庸), “Heaven” is described as the will of people. In other words, according to Tu, the religiousness of Confucianism does not go beyond the humanity.²⁷ He describes, “the Confucian way of being religious as ultimate self-transformation as a communal act and as a faithful dialogical response to the transcendent.” Tu also argues that “Confucian religiosity is expressed through the infinite potential and the inexhaustible strength of each human being for self-transcendence.”²⁸ In other words, according to Tu, the religiousness of Confucianism emphasizes the fiduciary community as an irreducible reality in ultimate self-transformation. As Tu points out, the religiousness of Confucianism does not go beyond humanity, and therefore both Heaven and human beings need mutual dialogue to bind humanity and human beings together.²⁹ In short, while Confucianism recognizes and acknowledges a transcendent reality, it focuses on self-cultivation rather than “divine salvation.”

In Confucianism, concepts of “*jingtian*” (敬天) and “*weitianming*” (畏天命) are important. The former means “treating Heaven with reverence”; the latter means “standing in awe of the mandate of Heaven”. Obedience to the emperor was considered to be a religious act.

²⁶ John H. Berthrong, *All under Heaven* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 73.

²⁷ Tu Weiming, *Centrality and Commonality: an Essay on Confucian Religiousness* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), 96.

²⁸ Tu Weiming, *Centrality and Commonality: an Essay on Confucian Religiousness* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), 94.

²⁹ Tu, *Centrality*, 97.

In his widely read *All under Heaven*, John H. Berthrong asserts that *tianming* is “the universal Mandate of Heaven, the primordial creativity of the cosmos that provides a model for the special human virtues in the context of a living history and civilization.”³⁰ Confucius once said that at the age of fifty, he understood the *tianming*, namely the mandate of Heaven or the Decree of Heaven (*Analects* 2:4). As Fung Yu-Lan points out, *tian* in Confucianism could be meant a ruling or a personal Being. He writes, “when Confucius spoke of Heaven, he meant a ruling or personal Heaven. The Heaven of Mencius was at times personal, at times fatalistic, and at times ethical.”³¹ According to Ying-Shih Yu, *tianming* can be understood as the Decree of Heaven and every human being is subject to the *tianming* which enjoins him or her to be moral. He writes:

With *tianming* being conferred on every individual, the direct line of communication between Heaven and individual human was established after a long period of “separation of Heaven and earth.” As a result, Confucius often spoke as if he were constantly in personal contact with Heaven: “Heaven is author of the virtue that is in me” (7:23) or “If I am understood at all, it is, perhaps, by Heaven (14:35). Statements like these clearly suggest that Confucius as an individual was capable of communicating with Heaven directly.³²

Irene Bloom provides a succinct summary of Lee H. Yearley’s analysis on the idea of *tianming* articulated by Mencius. He writes,

Yearley notes that Heaven’s Mandate (or simply, “the mandate”) is variously depicted in three kinds of utterances in the Mencius text: (1) those pronouncements that acknowledge Heaven as the valid source of political authority, with a focus “on ‘political’ leadership and the validation of certain people or actions”; (2) those that represent heaven as the source or cause of human nature, a notion seen to involve “the internalization of sacred

³⁰ See John H. Berthrong, *All under Heaven – Transforming Paradigms in Confucian-Christian Dialogue* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1994) 73.

³¹ See Yu-Lan Fung, *A History of Chinese Philosophy Vol. 1* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1952), 284.

³² See Ying-Shih Yu’s article “Between the Heavenly and the Human” in Tu’s *Confucian Spirituality*, 70.

power”; and (3) those that recognize Heaven (or the ordinance, decree, or destiny) as the source for happenings and events that are beyond human understanding or comprehension.³³

While God speaks in the Hebrew Bible, *Tian* or Heaven does not Speak. However, it does not mean that *tian* is not a person or a Being, or should not be understood as such. Even though *tian* does not speak, *tian* still can be understood as a personalistic metaphor for ultimacy in Confucianism³⁴. Irene Bloom has argued this point forcefully in “Practicality and Spirituality in the Mencius.” She writes:

Heaven does, at times, intervene decisively in the human world, notably in validating the choice of Shun as ruler. It was not Yao but Heaven that gave the realm to Shun to rule, Mencius says. But “Heaven does not speak. This was manifested simply through his actions and his conduct of affairs.” Despite the muteness of Heaven, and the fact that its way too cannot always be readily or fully comprehended, human beings are not distanced from Heaven as Job was distanced from his God. In fact, the line between Heaven’s instructions and Shun’s actions is virtually indistinguishable. So close can a sagely human being come to Heaven.³⁵

Therefore, one can conclude that *tian* can be conceived as a person and interactive. In order to cultivate the human way, to develop our sensitivity and to deepen our common spring of humanity, Tu Wei-Ming argues that we need to be “continuously responding to the mandate of Heaven.”³⁶

³³ See Irene Bloom’s article “Practicality and Spirituality in the Mencius” in Tu’s *Confucian Spirituality*, 239.

³⁴ Even though *tian* or Heaven does not speak, Heaven does see and hear, as there is a famous statement of Mencius that “Heaven sees according as my people see. Heaven hears according as my people hear.” See *Mencius*, chapter 18: 8 translated by James Legge.

³⁵ See Irene Bloom’s article “Practicality and Spirituality in the Mencius” in Tu’s *Confucian Spirituality*, 244.

³⁶ Wei-Ming Tu, *Centrality and Commonality: An Essay on Confucian Religiousness* (Albany: State University of New York, 1989), 101.

Rodney L Taylor rightly contends, “The identification of the absolute with *tian* and *tianli* represents the most frequently found categories that might match the way in which the absolute is identified.”³⁷ However, he also points out succinctly that there are some others terms that have been used to describe or identify the absolute, one of them being *Dao*.

In the *Analects*, the word “*Dao*” occurs no less than one hundred times. It is a word of central importance for the interpretation of Confucius’s thinking and for the understanding of the spirituality and religiosity of Confucianism. The word “*Dao*” (道) is translated as “The Way” or “The Path” in English. It has been explained as a “preexisting ideal to which conformity [sic] enjoined.”³⁸ Hyun Hochsmann argues that if the *Dao* applied to human action, it is the *Dao* of humankind, namely “a way in which one does something.” If it applied to nature, the *Dao* of nature is “the way in which all life takes form.” According to Hochsmann,

[the *Dao* is] the way in which the universe and everything within it—man, nature, and the ten thousand things under all of heaven—unfold, develop their nature, and come to be what they are. All things that exist form one continuum and one great chain of being. The *dao* is infinite potentiality which coincides with actuality: this is the *dao* of heaven. The *dao* of heaven is a single perspective from which the totality of all existing things can be seen and comprehended. The knowledge that all undergoes constant transformation is from the standpoint of the *dao* of heaven. The view of the totality of all phenomena given by the *dao* is that reality is a flux, transformation, and an eternal process.³⁹

In light of Hochsmann’s analysis and understanding of *Dao*, one can see clearly why the word *Dao* is the word Chinese have used to translate the word *logos* or the “Word” in the Gospel according to John, “In the beginning was the *Dao*, and the *Dao* was with God, and the *Dao* was

³⁷ See Taylor’s article “Confucian Spirituality and Qing Thought” in Tu’s *Confucian Spirituality*, 164.

³⁸ David Hall and Roger T. Ames, *Thinking Through Confucius*, 227.

³⁹ See Hyun Hochsmann, *On Philosophy in China* (Toronto: Wadsworth, 2004) 55.

God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people”.⁴⁰

Confucius believed that “*li*” or “piety” is not culturally conditioned but is rather aligned with the *Dao* of *Tian* (heaven). It resembles the idea of natural law. As Laozi, the author of *Daodejing*, points out, “all things are produced by the *Dao* and nourished by its outflowing operation. They receive their forms according to the nature of each, and are completed according to the circumstances of their condition.”⁴¹

Hyun Hochsmann argues that the concept of *Dao* in Chinese philosophy and Confucianism has religious significance for it is seen as the origin of all things and is analogous with the idea of a creator, “primordial reason,” or the sublime intelligence which creates, governs and sustains the world.⁴² As D.C. Lau writes, “the way (*dao*), then, is a highly emotive term and comes very close to the term ‘Truth’ as found in philosophical and religious writings in the West.”⁴³ According to Hall and Ames, Herbert Fingarette’s understanding of *Dao* represent the fullest, most elaborate, most sustained statement of this interpretation of *Dao* as Fingarette

⁴⁰ John 1:1-4. New Revised Standard Version. I substitute the word “*logos*” with “*dao*.”

⁴¹ Laozi, *Tao Te Ching: The Book of Meaning and Life*, trans. Richard Wilhelm (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1989).

⁴² See Hyun Hochsmann, *On Philosophy in China* (Toronto: Wadsworth, 2004) 56.

⁴³ Lau D.C, *Confucius: The Analects*. Chinese Classics: Chinese-English Series. (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 1983), ix.

defines *Dao* as a ‘way without crossroads.’ In other words, the *Dao* is simply a ‘single, definite order.’⁴⁴

It is important to note that *Dao* is not a being in Chinese philosophy. Chinese philosophers like He Yan and Wang Bi made a strong connection between “*Dao*” and “*Wu*”. “*Wu*” literally means “nothingness”, or “nonbeing”. As Alan K.L Chan has pointed out, the concept of “*Wu*” under the understanding of He Yan and Wang Bi served to bring out the meaning of *Dao* which is the mother of all phenomena.⁴⁵ In his discourse on *Dao*, He Yan writes:

Beings depend on *Wu* in coming into existence, in becoming what they are. Affairs on account of *Wu* come to fruition and become what they are. Now, one tries to speak about *Wu*, but no words could describe it; name it, but it has no name; look at it, but it does not have any form; listen to it, but it does not give any sound. Then, indeed, it is clear that the *Dao* is complete. Thus, it can bring forth sounds and echoes; generate qi-energies and things; establish form and spirit; and illuminate light and shadows. What is dark obtains its blackness from it; what is plain obtains its whiteness from it. The carpenter’s square is able to make a square because of it; the compass is able to make a circle because of it. The round and the square obtain their form, but that which gives them their form itself does not have any form. The white and the black obtain their name, but that which gives them their name itself does not have any name.⁴⁶

In short, the concept of “*Wu*”, the non-being and its namelessness, has allowed He Yan to make sense of the mystery of *Dao*.

“*Dao*”, however, in Confucianism has the sense of “religious absoluteness”. As Taylor asserts, “whether it is called sagehood or the pursuit of *dao*, there was a process of attempting to

⁴⁴ David L Hall and Roger T. Ames, *Thinking through Confucius*, 234.

⁴⁵ Allan K.L Chan and Yuet-Keung Lo, *Philosophy and Religion in Early Medieval China* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2010), 23.

⁴⁶ Chan and Lo, *Philosophy and Religion in Early Medieval China*, 25.

pursue the understanding of what was regarded as the absolute.⁴⁷ Dao also could be the source of morality, as Daniel K. Gardner has drawn the distinction between human mind and dao mind in his article “Attentiveness and Meditative Reading in Chen-zhu Neo-Confucianism” in which he says the dao mind is “the aspect of mind associated with the moral nature (*xing*) endowed by heaven in each and everyone of us at birth.”⁴⁸

Tian, Dao, and God

From the discussion above, one can conclude that *Tian* is the Ultimate Principle. In Confucianism, it is the source of morality. *Dao* in Confucianism is more like Paul Tillich’s understanding of God in which he defines God as the ground of being instead of an extraordinary or almighty being. To say that God is the ground of being means that God is beyond personal being. It is to say that the existence of God is something that is truly existing and genuinely full in a mysterious and inconceivable way. God is more than “a being” among other beings, God is “being-itself” or “non-being” or “the ground of all being.”⁴⁹ Thus, Confucius’s understanding of *Dao* is very close to Paul Tillich’s understanding of God.

It is not easy for Christian fundamentalists or any religious fundamentalists who believe in monotheism to accept that God is just like *Dao*. As Joseph Campbell has rightly pointed out,

⁴⁷ See Rodney L Taylor, “Confucian Spiritually and Qing Thought” *Confucian Spirituality*, Volume Two, ed. Tu Weiming and Mary Evelyn Tucker (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2004), 173.

⁴⁸ Tu and Tucker, *Confucian Spirituality*, volume two, 101.

⁴⁹ See Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1 (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1951), 211 & 215.

[I]n Christianity, Islam, and Judaism....the personality of the divinity is taught to be final-which makes it completely difficult for the members of these communions to understand how one may go beyond the limitations of their own anthropomorphic divinity. The result has been, on the one hand, a general obfuscation of the symbols, and on the other, a god-ridden bigotry such as is unmatched elsewhere in the history of religion.⁵⁰

If modern Christians attempt to engage in a serious dialogue with Confucians or believers of other faiths and spiritual traditions, they need to understand that our conception of God and our way of speaking about God are socially constructed and culturally conditioned. God has many names and none of them is the single name of God that can fully capture the essence of God.

In the Hebrew Bible, God is called “*Elohim*”, “*Yahweh*”, or simply “*YHWH*”. Some people call their God the Absolute or the Divine. Paul Tillich identifies God as “Being-itself,” or better still, “the ground of being.” To Karl Jaspers, God is “the encompassing” (*das Umgreifende*); and to Rudolf Otto, God is “the numinous.” In Confucianism, it is “*Tian*” or “*Dao*”. In Daoism, it is “*Dao*” or the Way; in Hinduism it is called “Brahman”, or the “reality of all realities”(*satyasya satyam*); In Buddhism, gods are just like human beings but in a different stage of reality, even though Buddhism does have the notion of “the true nature of things” (*dharmata*), “the world of reality” and “the ground of being” (*dharmadhatu*). In Islam, God is “Allah” or “the eternal Truth”(*alhaqq*). All these names of God do not share the exact same meaning. However, they do indicate a fundamental in commonality: in all of them, God is the ultimate and the greatest or something so great that it is beyond what we can name. Gordon D. Kaufman, a theologian at Harvard Divinity School, has proposed the very interesting concept of

⁵⁰ See Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968), 258.

“serendipitous creativity” as a more appropriate metaphor for thinking of God.⁵¹ According to Kaufman, one of his purposes in identifying God as “serendipitous creativity” is to stress that God is not the private possession of any religious faith or spiritual tradition that humans have created. He argues forcefully that the profound mystery of creativity is manifest in and through overall human biohistorical evolution and development everywhere on the planet; and it continues to show itself throughout the entire human project, no matter what the particular religious and or cultural beliefs or practices.

A decade later, Kaufman published another book to further illustrate his point. In his equally fine and provocative book, *In the Beginning... Creativity*, Kaufman outlines an understanding of the history and development of the word or symbol “God.” He uses negative theology to understand God; instead of stating what God is, he prefers to think of what God is not. He argues that the positive statement of God is a human creation or projection and that God is not like human beings; God is not personal, but God’s activity as creative.⁵² The significance of Kaufman’s theology is that, as he writes,

[It] will evoke a significantly different faith and hope and piety than that associated with the Christian symbol-system as traditionally interpreted. Since creativity is present and manifest throughout the cosmos, as well as in all human cultural and religious traditions, this understanding of God should directly undercut the arrogant stance of much traditional Christianity toward other religious and secular communities, and vis-à-vis the rest of the natural order. We Christians may no longer consider ourselves to be at the center of things, authorized in what we say and do by God's special revelation to us. Nevertheless, important continuities with traditional Christian understandings still remain here, continuities significant enough, in my opinion, to warrant considering this picture of the world, and the human place within it, appropriate for Christian faith today.⁵³

⁵¹ Gordon D. Kaufman, *In face of Mystery* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993).

⁵² Gordon D. Kaufman, *In the Beginning...Creativity* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Publishers, 2004).

⁵³ See his full argument at <http://www.crosscurrents.org/kaufman.htm>

Confucian's understanding of *Dao* makes an excellent point and resonates with the thesis of Kaufman both his writings *In face of Mystery* and *In the Beginning... Creativity*. The metaphor of God as *Creativity* makes better sense to modern minds than the conception of God constructed in the traditional anthropomorphic terms as King or Father. Besides, the notion of God as creativity also has some profound serendipitous mystery implied in it. Kaufman's idea is not so provocative after all if we look at one of the notions of God in the New Testament, namely God as love. To say God is love is definitely not a conception of God constructed in the traditional anthropomorphic terms. And for centuries, it makes perfect sense to a lot of Christians. As a matter of fact, I could hardly think of any Christian or theologian label this notion of God as heresy.

Dao in Confucianism resonates well with Kaufman's God as creativity as David Nivison has asserted that *Dao* "is the center of gravity of all nature," and that "*Dao* allows and enables everything to be what it is; it claims no credit, does no pushing, and all is ordered."⁵⁴

The subject matter of theology is God. Thus, theology certainly should not be human-centered. However, since theology is done by human beings, theology ironically and inevitably cannot not be human-centered; at least we just cannot do theology or to articulate our theology without appealing to human understanding. Hence, what is most important, perhaps, is not to criticize theology as human enterprise but to be fully aware of the fact that our theology is a social construction. Theological truths should not be treated as dogmatic truths or the absolute Truth. We should always seek to deconstruct and reconstruct our theology so that the subject

⁵⁴ David S. Nivison, *The Ways of Confucianism* (Chicago: Open Court, 1996), 33.

matter of theology as the ultimate mystery makes better sense to the relativity of our human understanding of that mystery.

In her book, *Theories of Culture*, Kathryn Tanner seeks to examine the task of theology in light of the postmodern understanding of the concept of culture. She does this by focusing on questions concerning Christian identity, as she deems that theological activities are mostly informed and directed by our judgments concerning Christian identity. For her, too much contemporary theology continues to address matters of Christian identity with the aid of modern notions of culture, which she thinks are problematic in the light of a postmodern understanding of culture. Tanner argues that, regardless of whether we hold a modern or postmodern understanding of culture, theology is part of culture; it is “a form of cultural activity.” According to her, it is of paramount importance to recognize that “theology is something that human beings produce. Like all human activities, it is historically and socially conditioned; it cannot be understood in isolation from the rest of human socialcultural practices.” In other words, theology is social construction.⁵⁵

In light of Tanner’s theory of culture and understanding of theology, interreligious dialogue is not only possible but imperative in this pluralistic world. As John Berthrong argues, “from the Confucianism perspective, there are elements in Christianity that make sense to New Confucians of a religious inclination.” He believes that new Confucians will find “process movement derived from the speculative metaphysic of Whitehead to be appealing.”⁵⁶ He also

⁵⁵ Kathryn Tanner’s *Theories of Culture: A New Agenda for Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997), 63.

⁵⁶ John Berthrong, “New Confucian Spirituality in Interreligious Dialogue” in *Confucian Spirituality*, Volume Two, ed. Tu Weiming and Mary Evelyn Tucker (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2004), 434.

says that Christian theism can “provide a useful methodology for Confucian reflection on ultimate things.”⁵⁷ I believe that the notion of *Dao* and *Tian* as ultimate reality of Confucianism can enrich late-modern Christian theology in reconstructing a theology of God, which will make better sense to us. Neo-Confucianism is the result of the interreligious dialogue between Confucianism and Buddhism, and it has demonstrated that how religions could enrich each other, or even transformed them by engaging in interreligious dialogue. I will argue in this dissertation that the growing awareness and knowledge of Confucianism and its transcendence dimension in the West will certainly make interreligious dialogue between the East and West more interesting and the result will be promising in this twenty-first century. But before that, we need to examine the concept of God of Alfred North Whitehead, which is highly compatible to Confucianism.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 436.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE CONCEPT OF GOD IN WHITEHEAD'S PHILOSOPHY

Monotheisms do not have a monopoly on God.

--- Robert Cummings Neville

To speak of the Christian theology, is to speak of God. There is nothing more important than articulating the theology of God and having a logically consistent understanding of the idea of God when one begins to talk about any kind of theology. As John B. Cobb has rightly asserted in his book *A Christian Natural Theology*,

We live in a time when the categories in which the Christian message has traditionally been presented have lost all meaning for major segments of the population, the crux of the matter has to do with the concepts of man and God...For much of the culture that is growing up about us and within us, "God" has become an empty sound. This is no longer a problem only for those Christians trying to communicate with a special segment of the intelligentsia estranged from the church. It has become the problem of the suburban pastor in his dealings with his most sensitive church leaders and youth. Perhaps most of all it has become the problem of the perceptive minister in dealing with himself and his own understanding of his ministry.¹

Cobb goes so far as to suggest that to define "God" and to give the word a meaningful definition, so that it would have its appropriate reference, is "a matter of ultimate importance for the health even the survival, of Christian faith."²

Whitehead and God

In this chapter, I will examine the theology of God proposed by Alfred North Whitehead as it is articulated in two of his most important books, *Religion in the Making* and *Process and Reality*, which I think is of paramount importance not only to correct, modify, and improve the

¹ See John B. Cobb, *A Christian Natural Theology* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1965), 13-14.

² Cobb, *A Christian Natural Theology*, 14-15.

traditional theism in Christian theology, but also to benefit the construction of a queer theology.

Robert Neville³ has succinctly pointed out two reasons to argue for Whitehead's conception of God as the most important philosophy idea for contemporary theology. He writes:

First, it is an intimate part of a general philosophical system that, better than any other, restores cosmology to its rightful place in our intellectual concerns. The revolution in the conception of nature and of nature's unity with human affairs that has been wrought by Whitehead's theory of causation should be accepted... Second, and more important, Whitehead's conception of God forces us to reconsider our religious experience, assaying again which elements are basic and which merely appear basic because of the commitments of some interpretive scheme. In a world society where one tradition's experience must contest with the experience of alien cultures, nothing could be more

³ Robert Neville is arguably one of the most important philosophical theologians in today's world who not only has taken Whitehead's metaphysical scheme seriously, but has also been inspired by Whitehead's process philosophy, although his philosophical writings are more profoundly influenced by Pierce than Whitehead. As a great theologian who has continued to teach and work on speculative theology, and who has publicly acknowledged the brilliance and genuine significance of Whitehead's conception of systematic philosophy, Neville is nonetheless the most insightful critic of Whitehead philosophy, especially of his conception of God. The most significant distinction between Whitehead and Neville in their metaphysics and conceptions of God is that Whitehead separates creativity from God, and according to Neville, it is the fundamental blunder in his systematic metaphysics. Whitehead sees God as an actual entity, or an individual being, which cannot be an exception to the metaphysical principles, while Neville argues against this by asserting that God is the ground of being, or being-itself. Neville has vehemently criticized Whitehead's the conception of God as the determinate-being and has advocated forcefully for his conception of God as the ex-nihilo ground of being in his *Creativity and God: A Challenge to Process Theology*. Many process philosophers and theologians have come to Whitehead's rescue by modifying his conception of God based on his metaphysical scheme, for they recognize the legitimacy as well as the force of Neville's criticism. Neville, however, was not the first to see the problem of Whitehead's conception of God as an actual entity, but he is the most systematic and persistent critic. Whitehead's disciple, Charles Hartshorne, for one, has seen the problem and addressed it by constructing God as a society of actual entities, instead of an actual entity proposed by Whitehead. In this dissertation, I have no intention of arguing for or against the conception of God as a determinate being, because it deserves to be another book-length project. My intention here is to utilize the metaphysical scheme of Whitehead which even Neville, the most acute critic of Whitehead's philosophy, can recognize as a significant contribution to speculative theology. Suffice it to say here that I fully recognize and agree with Neville that metaphysics as a speculative theory of reality and determinate principles, by definition, as its prefix suggests, should be grounded *beyond* the determinate or in that which is absolutely indeterminate.

important for theology.⁴

The concept of God is an important subject matter of Whitehead's philosophy. According to him, we need to answer the question of what is God, because this is "the fundamental religious dogma, and all other dogmas are subsidiary to it."⁵

Whitehead presents one aspect of his concept of God in his book *Religion in the Making* by categorizing the concepts of God in world religions into three major categories, namely, the Eastern Asiatic concept, the Semitic concept, and the Pantheistic concept. He writes:

1. The Eastern Asiatic concept of an impersonal order to which the world conforms. This order is the self-ordering of the world; it is not the world obeying an imposed rule. The concept expresses the extreme doctrine of immanence. 2. The Semitic concept of a definite personal individual entity, whose existence is the once ultimate metaphysical fact, absolute and underivative, and who decreed and ordered the derivative existence which we call the actual world...3. The Pantheistic concept of an entity to be described in terms of Semitic concept, except that the actual world is a phrase within the complete fact which is this ultimate individual entity. The actual world, conceived apart from God, is unreal. Its only reality is God's reality. The actual world has the reality of being a partial description of what God is. But in itself it is merely a certain mutuality of "appearance," which is a phrase of the being of God. This is the extreme doctrine of monism.⁶

Whitehead's concept of God is the fusion of the three concepts of God, namely the Eastern concept of an impersonal God, the Semitic concept of the monotheistic and transcendent God, and the pantheistic God mentioned above. The result of his attempt is "panentheism." In other words, everything exists in God; God includes everything in the universe, and yet God is greater than anything and is independent of the universe.

⁴ Robert C. Neville, *Creativity and God: A Challenge to Process Theology* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1980), 3.

⁵ Alfred North Whitehead, *Religion in the Making* (New York: The World Publishing Company, 1954), 66.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 68-69.

Whitehead's Metaphysics

In order to understand the concept of God of Whitehead, it is critical first to understand his process metaphysics and the cosmology he has articulated in his *magnum opus*, *Process and Reality*, which was published in 1929. Whitehead delineates his metaphysics by constructing eight categories of existence, namely, actual entities, prehension, nexus, subjective forms, eternal objects, propositions, multiplicities, and contrast. Actual entities and eternal objects are two major and fundamental terms and concepts that deserve one's attention, as they are the most basic ideas of his process cosmology, his unique idea that argues that the world is not an unchanging substance, but dynamically and creatively in the process of changing and becoming, which is also a worldview absolutely different from those widely held by traditional western philosophies.

In describing his philosophy of the organism of the world, he has written:

The universe is at once the multiplicity of *res verae* and the solidarity of *res verae*. The solidarity is itself the efficiency of the macroscopic *res vera*, embodying the principle of unbounded permanence acquiring novelty through flux. The multiplicity is composed of microscopic *res verae*, each embodying the principle of bounded flux acquiring "everlasting" permanence. On one side, the one becomes many, and on the other side, the many become one. But what becomes is always a *res vera*, and the concrescence of a *res vera* is the development of a subjective aim.⁷

As Whitehead argues, actual entities and eternal objects are the fundamental types of entities. According to him, actual entities, also described by him as actual occasions, are the most primitive and basic units of actuality. The whole universe is constituted of actual entities, which are always in the process of changing and becoming; even God is an actual entity. He writes:

⁷ Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality*; eds. David Ray Griffin and Donald W. Sherburne, corrected edition (New York: The Free Press, 1978), 167.

“Actual entities”--- also termed “actual occasions” --- are the final real things of which the world is made up. There is no going behind actual entities to find anything more real. They differ among themselves: God is actual entity, and so is the most trivial puff of existence in far-off empty space. But, though there are gradations of importance, and diversities of function, yet in the principles which actuality exemplifies all are on the same level. The final facts are, all alike, actual entities, and these actual entities are drops of experience, complex and interdependent.⁸

According to Whitehead, God is an actual entity, because he believes that apart from the actual entity there is no reason.⁹ Apart from actual entities, nothing can have influence or be effective. In order for God to be influential, God has to be an actual entity, albeit a different one from other actual entities. This is Whitehead’s ontological principle. He makes this explicitly clear when he states that “every condition to which the process of becoming conforms in any particular instance has its reason either in the character of some actual entity in the actual world of that concrescence, or in the character of the subject which is in process of concrescence... this ontological principle means that actual entities are the only reason.”¹⁰

Actual entities, or actual occasions, are the most fundamental units or realities constitute our world. The universe, according to Whitehead, is constituted by actual entities, which are changing and complex, and are also “drops of experience.” Every moment and experience, including every being or anything in any sense of existence, is an actual entity.¹¹ John B. Cobb has illustrated this point by saying that,

What must be assumed, in order that human experience (and the ultimate particles of

⁸ Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 18.

⁹ He asserts that “... the reasons for things are always to be found in the composite nature of definite actual entities.” See Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 19.

¹⁰ Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 24.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 73.

nature) can be understood, are successive “actual occasions of experience.” Rather than being a continuous flow, experience comes to be in discrete and indivisible units. These momentary occasions succeed each other with a rapidity beyond any clear grasp of conscious attention. The direct analysis of any single occasion of experience is impossible.¹²

Actual entities are the most concrete facts of experience. Whitehead also calls an actual entity as “subject-superject,” because actual entities are not only subjects to be experienced, but also constituted by their experiences. He has argued:

An actual entity is at once the subject experiencing and the superject of its experiences. It is subject-superject, and neither half of this description can for a moment be lost sight of. The term “subject” will be most employed when the actual entity is considered in respect to its own real internal constitution. But “subject” is always to be construed as an abbreviation of “subject-superject.”¹³

According to Whitehead, actual entities are always in the process of becoming as they involve emotion, purpose, valuation, and causation. Actual entities influence and affect one another, and thus are in the process of changing and becoming. They are not static or fixed. The characteristics of actual entities are reproduced in prehension. Prehension is an important concept in Whitehead’s philosophy. Whitehead states:

Actual entities involve each by reason of their prehensions of each other. There are thus real individual facts of the togetherness of actual entities, which are real, individual, and particular, in the same sense in which actual entities and the prehensions are real, and particular. Any such particular fact of togetherness among actual entities is called a “nexus” . . . The ultimate facts of immediate actual experience are actual entities, prehensions, and nexus. All else is, for our experience, derivative abstraction.”¹⁴

The word “prehension” employed by Whitehead in his metaphysical scheme, comes from

¹² John B. Cobb, *A Christian Natural Theology* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1965), 28-29.

¹³ Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 29.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 20.

the words “apprehension” and “comprehension.” He, tries to avoid these two words because they usually refer to experiences that have already occurred already in human consciousness. Thus, Whitehead coined the term “prehension” because of its general and neutral characteristics. He writes:

Leibniz can find no other connectedness between reals except that lying wholly within the individual experiences of the monads... He had employed the terms “perception” and “apperception” for lower and higher ways in which one monad can take account of another, namely for ways of awareness. But these terms are too closely allied to the notion of consciousness which in my doctrine is not a necessary accompaniment. Also they are all entangled in the notion of representative perception I reject. But there is the term “apprehension” with the meaning of “thorough understanding.” Accordingly, on the Leibnizian model, I use the term “prehension” for the general way in which the occasion of experience can include, as part of its own essence, any other entity, whether another occasion of experience or an entity of another type.¹⁵

Prehensions, according to Whitehead, are what the actual entity is composed of. Each prehension consists of three factors, “the subject which is in the process of prehending,” “the datum which is prehended,” and “the subject form which is how the subject prehends that datum.”¹⁶ According to Whitehead, prehension is also a “concrete fact of relatedness.”¹⁷ There are two types of prehensions. Whitehead writes:

There are two species of prehensions, the “positive species” and the “negative species.” An actual entity has a perfectly definite bond with each item in the universe. This determinate bond is its prehension of that item. A negative prehension is the definite exclusion of that item from positive contribution to the subject’s own real internal constitutions. This doctrine involves the position that a negative prehension expresses a bond. A positive prehension is the definite inclusion of that item into positive contribution to the subject’s own real internal constitution. This positive inclusion is

¹⁵ Alfred North Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas* (New York: The Free Press, 1967), 233-234.

¹⁶ Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 23.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 22.

called its “feeling” of that item.¹⁸

When Whitehead writes about “feeling,” he has something very different in his mind. He uses the word synonymously with prehension. He writes:

Each actual entity is conceived as an act of experience arising out of data. It is a process of “feeling” the many data, so as to absorb them into the unity of one individual “satisfaction.” Here “feeling” is the term used for the basic operation of passing from the objectivity of the data to the subjectivity of the actual entity in question. Feelings are variously specialized operations, effecting a transition into subjectivity.¹⁹

In Whitehead’s metaphysical scheme, an actual entity as a subject is created as a new being through those feelings. He writes:

A feeling-i.e., a positive prehension- is essentially a transition effecting a concrescence. Its complex constitution is analyzable into five factors which express what transition consists of, and effects. The factors are: (i) the “subject” which feels, (ii) the “initial data” which are to be felt, (iii) the “elimination” in virtue of negative prehensions, (iv) the “objective datum” which is left, (v) the “subjective form” which is how that subject feels that objective datum.²⁰

All actual entities are in the process of changing or becoming. Whitehead distinguishes two types of process, namely the macroscopic process and the microscopic process. He writes:

The macroscopic process is the transition from attained actuality to actuality in attainment; while the microscopic process is the conversion of conditions which are merely real into determine actuality. The former process effects the transition from the actual to the merely real; and the latter process effects the growth from the real to the actual. The former process is efficient; the latter process is teleological. The future is merely real, without being actual; whereas the past is a nexus of actualities. The actualities are constituted by their real genetic phase.²¹

¹⁸ Ibid., 41.

¹⁹ Ibid., 40-41.

²⁰ Ibid., 221.

²¹ Ibid., 214.

Actual entities are thus free and determined in the process of becoming. Cobb summarizes this point well. He argues that, “the determination of the past is real but not absolute. What I have been in the past, and what the world as a whole has been may narrowly limit what I can become in the next moment. But within those limits it is still my decision in that moment how I shall react to all these forces impinging upon me.”²²

Actual entity is not only an acting and experiencing entity, it is also a process of becoming. It receives, includes and transforms other actual entities. It transforms “many” into “one,” and “one” into “many” by the process of concrescence. Whitehead defined concrescence as the process “in which the universe of many things acquires an individual unity in a determinate relegation of each item of the ‘many’ to its subordination in the constitution of the novel one.”²³

In order to understand the philosophical concept of God of Whitehead, it is of critical importance to understand his ontological principle. Whitehead has written,

The notion of “substance” is transformed into that of “actual entity”; and the notion of “power” is transformed into the principle that the reasons for things are always to be found in the composite nature of definite actual entities—in the nature of God for reasons of the highest absoluteness, and in the nature of definite temporal actual entities for reasons which refer to a particular environment. The ontological principle can be summarized as: no actual entity, then no reason.²⁴

This principle is important because it states that every particular condition has its reason in some actual entity in the actual world or in the elements of the subject in the process of

²² John B. Cobb, *A Christian Natural Theology*, 39.

²³ Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 211.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 18-19.

concrecence. As Donald W. Sherburne succinctly points out, “this ontological principle means that actual entities are the only reasons; so that to search for a reason is to search for one or more actual entities.”²⁵

While actual entities are the final real things in nature, according to Whitehead, eternal object gives actual entities a particular mode of becoming. They are potentials for actual entities in the process of becoming. He writes:

That an eternal object can be described only in terms of its potentiality for ingression into the becoming of actual entities; and that its analysis only discloses other eternal objects. It is a pure potential. The term ingression refers to the particular mode in which the potentiality of an eternal object is realized in a particular actual entity, contributing to the definiteness of that actual entity.²⁶

They are called eternal objects because they are given as objects to the actualities and they are timeless and eternal in their nature. They are potentialities for actual entities. As Sherburne asserts, “any entity whose conceptual recognition does not involve a necessary reference to any definite actual entities of the temporal world is called an ‘eternal object.’”²⁷ Without an actual entity, the eternal object remains a potentiality; without the eternal object, the actual entity cannot be a concrete fact. As Whitehead writes, “the actualities constituting the process of the world are conceived as exemplifying the ingression (or participation) of other things which constitute the potentialities of definiteness for any actual existence. The things which are temporal arise by their participation in the things which are eternal.”²⁸

²⁵ Donald W. Sherburne, *A Key to Whitehead's Process and Reality* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1966), 17.

²⁶ Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 23.

²⁷ Donald W. Sherburne, *A Key to Whitehead's Process and Reality*, 21.

²⁸ Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 39-40.

Actual entities are events, eternal objects are not. Whitehead draws a very clear distinction between “event” and “object.” An event is actual and concrete; an object becomes real in events. He has noted:

You cannot recognize an event; because when it is gone, it is gone. You may observe another event of analogous character, but the actual chunk of this life of nature is inseparable from its unique occurrence. But a character of an event can be recognized. We all know that if we go to the embankment near Charing Cross we shall observe an event having the character which we recognize as Cleopatra’s Needle. Things which we thus recognize I call objects. An object is situated in those events or in that stream of which it expresses the character. There are many sorts of objects. For example, the colour green is an object according to the above definition.²⁹

Whitehead also argues that, to be actual, it must mean that “all actual things are alike objects, enjoying objective immortality in fashioning creative actions; and that all actual things are subjects, each prehending the universe from which it rises.”³⁰

Concrescence is another important concept of Whitehead in his process relational philosophy. He explains, “the word concrescence is a derivative from the familiar Latin verb, meaning “growing together”. It also has the advantage that the participle “concrete” is familiarly used for the notion of complete physical reality. Thus concrescence is useful to convey the notion of the individual character arising in the concrescence of the aboriginal data.”³¹

In Whitehead’s process relational philosophy, actual entities are always in the process of becoming by prehending other actual entities, and concrescence is the process through which many actual entities attain an objectified unity as many actual entities become subject to the

²⁹ Alfred North Whitehead, *The Concept of Nature* (Cambridge: The Cambridge University Press, 1964), 169.

³⁰ Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 56-57.

³¹ Alfred North Whitehead, *Adventures of ideas*, 236.

structure of new becomings. As Whitehead wrote, “concrecence is the name for the process in which the universe of many things acquires an individual unity in a determinate relegation of each item of the “many” to its subordination in the constitution of the novel ‘one’.”³²

While concrecence is the process by which an actual entity comes out of many and the unified one becomes the other many, there is another kind of fluency, which is called “transition.” Whitehead has written:

One kind is the fluency inherent in the constitution of the particular existent. This kind I have called “concrecence.” The other kind is the fluency whereby the perishing of the process, on the completion of the particular existent, constitutes that existent as an original element in the constitutions of other particular existents elicited by repetitions of process. This kind I have called “transition.” Concrecence moves towards its final cause, which is its subjective aim; transition is the vehicle of the efficient cause, which is the immortal past.³³

Obviously, concrecence and transition are two important concepts of Whitehead, which are articulated by him to explain how the world evolves in the process of becoming. In his book *Process and Reality*, Whitehead also mentions the characteristics of the actual entities in the process of becoming. He has written:

The four-stage constitutive of an actual entity... can be named, datum, process, satisfaction, decision. The two terminal stages have to do with “becoming” in the sense of the transition from the settled actual world to the new actual entities relatively to which that settlement is defined... The ‘settlement’ which an actual entity “finds” is its datum. It is to be conceived as a limited perspective of the “settled” world provided by the eternal objects concerned. The datum is “decided” by the settled world. It is “prehended” by the new superseding entity. The datum is the objective content of the experience. The decision, providing the datum, is a transference of self-limited appetite; the settled world provides the “real potentiality” that its many actualities be felt compatibly; and the new concrecence starts from this datum. The perspective is provided by the elimination of incompatibilities. The final stage, the decision, is how the actual entity, having attained its individual “satisfaction,” thereby adds a determinate condition to the settlement for the

³² Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Realities*, 211.

³³ *Ibid.*, 210.

future beyond itself. Thus the “datum” is the “decision received,” and the “decision” is the “decision transmitted.” Between these two decisions, received and transmitted, there lie the two stages, “process” and “satisfaction.” The datum is indeterminate as regards the final satisfaction. The “process” is the addition of those elements of feeling whereby these indeterminations are dissolved into determinate linkage attaining the actual unity of an individual actual entity.³⁴

Whitehead is not a theologian by training. His philosophy of relational process, however, cannot be adequately understood if one overlooks his religious thought or his concept of God. As Berthrong rightly observed, “it still remains the case that most Whiteheadians continue to be fascinated by the religious dimensions of his work.”³⁵ It is not without reason. The major reason, perhaps, is that the concept of God of Whitehead is critical and crucial to his metaphysical scheme in explicating the world and how everything is working within the universe.³⁶ The other reason is that Whitehead’s concept of God is revolutionary when compared with the traditional theism of the Western world.³⁷

³⁴ Ibid., 149-150.

³⁵ John Berthrong, *Concerning Creativity: A Comparison of Chu His, Whitehead, and Neville* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), 56.

³⁶ Many Whitehead scholars recognize the importance of the concept of God in Whitehead’s philosophy; Chung Soon Lee, among them, even said that “the concept of God is one of the large cornerstones on which Whitehead’s metaphysics is based..” See Chung Soon Lee, *Alfred North Whitehead and Yi Yulgok: Toward a Process-Confucian Spirituality in Korea* (New York: University Press of America, 2006), 33. Thomas Hosinski asserted that “God is a necessary element” in Whitehead’s philosophy; see his, *Stubborn Fact and Creative Advance* (Maryland: Rowman & Little Field Publisher, 1993), 25.

³⁷ Process theology, which has its roots in process philosophy of Whitehead, has forcefully challenged the traditional theism and almost all concepts of God prevalent in Christianity as the cosmic moralist, the unchanging and passionless Absolute, the omnipotent and omniscient Being. For a short introduction to process theology and process theologians, see Stanley J. Grenz and Roger E. Olson, *20th Century Theology: God and the World in a Transitinal Age* (Downs Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 137-144.

According to Whitehead, an actual entity is a final reality and the fundamental unit of all things in the universe. Actual entities are relational in their characteristics and thus are acting upon one another and are always in the process of affecting each other; therefore, they are in the process of becoming. In Whitehead's philosophy, God is also an actual entity. Just like all other actual entities, God is not absolute, but rather is always in the process of seeking His satisfaction with His feeling and subjective aim, God is relational, formative, and societal.³⁸ God, however, in Whitehead's metaphysical scheme, is the ultimate metaphysical reality. He says, "God is not to be treated as an exception to all metaphysical principles, invoked to save their collapse. He is their chief exemplification."³⁹ God is also the principle of concretion, Whitehead notes: "God is the principle of concretion, namely, he is that actual entity from which each temporal concrescence receives that initial aim from which its self-causation starts."⁴⁰ Whitehead made this point even more explicitly clear in his *Religion in the Making*:

[God] is the binding element in the world. The consciousness which is individual in us, is universal in him: the love which is partial in us is all-embracing in him. Apart from him there could be no world, because there could be no adjustment of individuality. His purpose in the world is quality of attainment. His purpose is always embodied in the particular ideals relevant to the actual state of the world. Thus all attainment is immortal in that it fashions the actual ideals which are God in the world as it is now. Every act leaves the world with a deeper or a fainter impress of God. He then passes into his next relation to the world with enlarged or diminished, presentation of ideal values.⁴¹

³⁸ Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 18.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 343.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 244.

⁴¹ Alfred North Whitehead, *Religion in the Making*, 152.

According to Whitehead, God is not generically different from other actual entities, except that God is primordial.⁴² He writes:

Thus, analogous to all actual entities, the nature of God is dipolar. He has a primordial nature and a consequent nature. The consequent nature of God is conscious; and it is the realization of the actual world in the unity of his nature, and through the transformation of his wisdom. The primordial nature is conceptual, the consequent nature is the weaving of God's physical feelings upon his primordial concepts.⁴³

Thus, one can say that Whitehead believes in dipolar theism. His philosophical constriction of dipolar theism is to explain that God is transcending the world and yet God is also immanent in the actual world.⁴⁴ The primordial nature of God indicates that God is "the unlimited conceptual realization, of the absolute wealth of potentiality,"⁴⁵ whereas the consequent nature of God means the ability of God to establish relationships with the world. The former is everlasting, nontemporal, and unchangeable, the latter is the relatedness and immanent nature of God. God prehends all actualities as they are, takes them into Him, and relates them to the reality of God, and thus, in this sense, God is temporal.

Regarding the primordial nature of God, Whitehead explains:

God is the primordially one, namely he is the primordial unity of relevance of the many potential forms; in the process he acquires a consequent multiplicity, which the primordial character absorbs into his own unity. The World is primordially many, namely, the many actual occasions with their physical finitude; in the process it acquires a consequent unity, which is a novel occasion and is absorbed into the multiplicity of the primordial character. Thus God is to be conceived as one and as many in the converse sense in which the World is to be conceived as many and as one.⁴⁶

⁴² Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 75.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 345.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 93-94.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 343.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 349.

Regarding the consequent nature of God, Whitehead writes:

But God, as well as being primordial, is also consequent. He is the beginning and the end. He is not the beginning in the sense of being in the past of all members. He is the presupposed actuality of conceptual operation, in unison of becoming with every other creative act. Thus, by reason of the relativity of all things, there is a reaction of the world on God. The completion of God's nature into a fullness of physical feeling is derived from the objectification of the world in God. He shares with every new creation its actual world; and the consequent creature is objectified in God as a novel element in God's objectification of that actual world. This prehension into God of each creature is directed with the subjective aim, and clothed with the subjective form, wholly derivative from his all-inclusive primordial valuation. God's conceptual nature is unchanged, by reason of its final completeness. But his derivative nature is consequent upon the creative advance of the world.⁴⁷

Because of God's consequent nature, God is related to all the actual entities in the world, affected by all of them. Therefore, Whitehead concludes, God "is the great companion—the fellow-sufferer who understands."⁴⁸ Because all actual entities are experienced, prehended, and memorized by God. Whitehead has articulated that "God is the infinite ground of all mentality, the unity of vision seeking physical multiplicity. The World is the multiplicity of finites, actualities seeking a perfect unity. Neither God, nor the World, reaches static completion. Both are in the grip of the ultimate metaphysical ground, like the creative advance into novelty."⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Ibid., 345.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 351.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 348-349

Process Philosophy and God

Like traditional theism, in Whitehead's metaphysics, God is a creator.⁵⁰ According to Whitehead, God is "the aboriginal instance of" creativity and the "aboriginal condition which qualifies" the action of creativity. He argued that "there is no meaning to 'creativity' and the 'temporal creatures,' no meaning to 'God' apart from the 'creativity' and the 'temporal creatures,' and no meaning to the 'temporal creatures' apart from 'creativity' and 'God.'"⁵¹

In Whitehead's metaphysics, without God, nothing is produced and nothing exists. It is because of God's primordial nature that God as creativity engages in all the processes of creation by giving all actual entities initial aims and enabling them a transition into novelty in the process of concrescence in terms of prehension. God, in Whitehead's mind, is meaningfully involved in the process of creation; God does not exist without regard to the world and His creatures; thus, he said that there is no meaning to temporal creatures apart from God. God affects and is being affected in the process of creation, changing, and becoming. It is why he has written:

It is as true to say that God is permanent and the world fluent, as that the World is permanent and God is fluent. It is as true to say that God is one and the World many, and 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 imminent 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 God creates the World, as the World creates God.⁵²

⁵⁰ It is, however, important to note that while classical theism believes in God *ex-nihilo*, Whitehead begs to differ. Whitehead conceives God as a determinate entity, instead of "ground of being" like Paul Tillich.

⁵¹ Ibid., 225.

⁵² Ibid., 348

Regarding the relation between God and the world, and how God and the world affect each other and work together, Whitehead has written:

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 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 primordial datum for God; and God's nature is a primordial and flux when it has reached its final term which is everlastingness—the Apotheosis of the World.⁵³

God's power does not compromise a human's freedom, because God establishes the subjective aim of each actual entity, but each entity as an actual entity is free to choose its own path of fulfillment. God does guide, but guides luring, or by appetition or the desire for fulfillment, which God has given to an actual entity.

For Whitehead, it is absolutely possible for human beings as actual entities to deviate from the will of God, as they are free to do so. When an actual entity negatively prehends God's lure for feeling, it deviates from the possibility of ideal fulfillment offered by God. And God does care and God does judge, but not with force. His judges with "the judgment of a tenderness which loses nothing that can be saved."⁵⁴ Whitehead described God as "the poet of the world," with tender patience leading the world by his vision of truth, beauty, and goodness. He has written:

The wisdom of subjective aim prehends every actual entity for what it can be in such a perfected system—its suffering, its sorrow, its failure, its triumphs, its immediacies of joy—woven by rightness of feeling into the harmony of the universal feeling, which is always immediate, always many, always one, always with novel advance, moving onward and never perishing. The revolts of destructive evil, purely self-regarding, are

⁵³ Ibid., 348

⁵⁴ Ibid., 346.

dismissed into their triviality of merely individual facts; and yet the good they did achieve in individual joy, in individual sorrow, in the introduction of needed contrast, is yet saved by its relation to the completed whole. The image and it is but an image under which this operative growth of God's nature is best conceived is that of a tender care that nothing be lost.⁵⁵

Whitehead is highly critical of the concept of God as the absolute powerful one. He also said that "this worship of glory arising from power" could only be based upon a "barbaric conception of God."⁵⁶ Regarding the doctrine of omnipotence, Whitehead even contended that "the deeper idolatry, the fashioning of God in the image of the Egyptian, Persian, and Roman imperial rulers was retained. They gave unto God the properties that belonged to Caesar."⁵⁷

In conclusion, according to Whitehead, God's power is persuasive, not controlling, nor dictating. This is one of the most important attributes of God in Whitehead's philosophy. Hartshorne summarizes that "God can rule the world and order it, setting optimal limits for our free action, by presenting himself as essential object, so characterized as to weight the possibilities of response in the desired respect. This divine method of world control is called "persuasion" by Whitehead and is one of the greatest of all metaphysical discoveries."⁵⁸

⁵⁵ Ibid., 346.

⁵⁶ Alfred North Whitehead, *Religion in the Making*, 55.

⁵⁷ Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 342.

⁵⁸ Charles Hartshorne, *The Divine Relativity: A Social Conception of God* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1948), 142.

CHAPTER FIVE

TONGZHI THEOLOGY --- QUEER THEOLOGY OF AND FOR THE NEW MILLENNIUM

Theology is reflection on ultimacy or ultimate matters, embracing things that are ultimate and the ultimate dimensions of things that are not.¹

----- Robert Cummings Neville

When the Nazis came for the Communist, I remained silent; I was not a Communist. When they locked up the Social Democrats, I remained silent; I was not a Social Democrat. When they came for the trade unionists, I did not speak out; I was not a trade unionist. When they came for the Jews, I remained silent; I wasn't a Jew. When they came for me, there was no one left to speak out.²

----- Martin Niemoller

All theology is concrete, situational and historical. Theology is nonetheless a social construction and is constructed by a specified faith community. While African Americans have Black Theology, women have Feminist Theology, African American women have Womanist Theology, Latin Americans have Liberation Theology, Latin American women have *Mujerista* Theology, one has to ask what the theology of and for LGBTI who are Asians is?

Queer theology for LGBTI people was constructed in the West by mostly White males in the twentieth century. In the twenty-first century, which is characterized by a pluralistic worldviews, LGBTI people of Asian descent need to rethink and review the traditional theology or even the queer theology passed on to us, so that not only LGBTI Asians can describe their distinctive and particular religious and social experiences, but can also contribute to the discourse of Christian theology in general.

¹ Robert Cummings Neville, *On the Scope and Truth of Theology: Theology as Symbolic Engagement* (New York: T & T Clark, 2006), 1.

² The origin of this poem is first traced to a speech given by Martin Niemoller to the representatives of the Confessing Church in Frankfurt on January 6, 1946.

The Queer theology that emerged in the last decade of the twentieth century had a widespread impact on LGBTI people around the globe and has challenged the traditional Christian churches in terms of their understanding of human sexuality. Queer theology is meant to be inclusive and especially to justify the inclusion of LGBTI people in Christian communities. This chapter will articulate the significance of *Tongzhi* (Comrade) Theology as a form of queer theology as the result of the integration of Confucianism and Whitehead's process philosophy. In this chapter, I will argue what the contributions of *Tongzhi* Theology to the content of theology in general are, and to queer theology in particular, especially with regards to what it says about God.

Why *Tongzhi* Theology?

All theologies need to articulate their conception of God, as theology is about *Theos*, namely, God. Theology, as Gordon D. Kaufman, poignantly asserted, is to analyze, criticize, and reconstruct the image or the concept of God; and it is “the continuing activity of the human imagination seeking to create a framework of interpretation which can provide overall orientation for human life.”³

It is, therefore, simply inadequate for queer theology to only justify LGBTI people and stifle homophobia. Queer theology needs to go beyond apologetic theology for LGBTI. It needs to construct a theology of God, which can dismantle the entire oppressive and exploitative imperial edifice of Christianity. For so long, many Christians have used the single saying of “because the Bible tells me so” or “because God says so” to justify all kinds of oppression and exploitation; should they not change their highly problematic theology of God, they will continue

³ Gordon D. Kaufman, *Theology for a Nuclear Age* (Philadelphia: Manchester University Press, 1985), 26.

to repeat the same historical blunders; with the only difference perhaps being the subject of discrimination and oppression. Christians have changed their attitudes toward slavery, racism, sexism, but their oppressive structures remain intact and they continue to discriminate against LGBTI people with the same saying because they never critically review their theology of God, which is the core of all problems.

Queer theology, therefore, cannot just merely defend LGBTI people by simply reinterpreting the Bible, or the Scriptures that traditional churches have employed to attack LGBTI people. One needs to articulate the concept of God in queer theology, whether one agrees with the concept of God in traditional theology, which condemns LGBTI people, or to reconstruct a new concept of God. The God of homophobia cannot be the same as the God who is with and for LGBTI people. Traditional theology has ignored the experience of LGBTI people and has been extremely biased against them. The problem of evil, especially events of horrific magnitude occur to LGBTI people, cannot be resolved and explained if the idea of God's omnipotence continues to be embraced by Christians. One needs to examine why gay people, or LGBTI people, are so ferociously attacked and persecuted by traditional churches or Christians. What kind of God has begotten such hatred toward LGBTI people? I will argue in this chapter that a new concept of God is desperately needed in our time, especially when one attempts to fully include LGBTI people in the Christian community.

Tongzhi Theology is not only a queer theology, which attempts to justify the inclusion of LGBTI people, it also seeks to formulate the doctrine of God in queer theology. Confucianism and Whitehead's philosophy are used to develop the trajectory to reformulate the doctrine of God in *Tongzhi* Theology and argue that all people, including God, should be comrades to each other, promote the well-being of LGBTI people in particular, and that of all human beings in general.

The Chinese Elements of *Tongzhi* Theology

The term “*tongzhi*” in the Chinese language literally means “Comrades.” It has strong political connotation. As Carol Myers Scotton and Zhu Wanjin point out, “*Tongzhi*” is promoted by the Communist Party of China “as a symbol of the people as ‘workers having a common goal’.”⁴ They write:

Tongzhi originally meant “having the same will or interest” according to dictionaries from the pre-1949 period (i.e., before the [Communist Party of China] assumed power). That meaning remains in effect today, but more specifically, *tongzhi* was spread by the [Communist Party of China] for two main purposes: (1) to replace titles for owners and employers, such as *laoban* “proprietor”, and to replace all honorific titles, such as *xian sheng* “mister”, *tai-tai* “madam”, and *xiao jie* “miss”; and (2) to give all members of “the people” equal footing with the same general title of address –one which implies no social or economic distinctions but which unites all as sharing the same political goals.⁵

As Andrew D. Wong points out, the term “*tongzhi*” during the Communist Revolution (1921-1949) was reserved to the members of the Communist Party of China and other revolutionaries who shared the same belief and effort to overthrow the old social system; however, after the founding of the People’s Republic of China in 1949, the government has made great efforts “to promote the use of *tongzhi* as a new address term among the masses.” According to Wong, “the extension of the use of *tongzhi* from members of the Revolutionary Army to the general public was a strategy of the Communist Party to establish an ideology of egalitarianism.

⁴ Carol Myers Scotton and Zhu Wanjin, “Tongzhi in China: Language Change and Its Conversational Consequences,” *Language in Society* Vol. 12, No.4 (December 1983): 479.

⁵ Ibid.

Tongzhi emphasized equality among society members and mutual engagement in the new revolutionist course of building a socialist China.”⁶

Tongzhi was a code-name for gay people in the late 1970s in Hong Kong, but now has become a term widely used by Chinese speaking gay people to self-identified themselves. In Chinese communities in mainland China and Taiwan, “*nantong*” (male comrade) means gay men, and “*yutong*” (female comrade) means lesbians. Regarding the term “*Tongzhi*,” Chou Wah-Shan⁷ writes:

Tong literally means “same/homo,” which is the Chinese word for “homo(sexual),” and *zhi* means goal, spirit, or orientation... After 1949, *tongzhi* (comrade) became a friendly and politically correct term by which to address everyone in China, as it refers to the most sacred ideal of a classless society where sisters and brothers share a selfless vision of fighting for the socialist collective interest...⁸

“*Tongzhi*” became synonymous with “homosexual” in 1989, when a Hong Kong gay activist used the term to refer to “homosexual” for the first Lesbian and Gay Film Festival in Hong Kong. Homosexuality in Chinese is *tongxinglian*, but gay people seldom use this word to

⁶ Andrew D. Wong, “On the Actuation of Semantic Change: The Case of *Tongzhi*,” *Languages Sciences* 30 (2008): 428.

⁷ Chou is one of the most important sociologists who wrote extensively about Chinese gays and lesbians in the 1990s; his contributions to contemporary Chinese gay and lesbian studies is beyond question. His critique of post-colonialism in gay communities in Asia is timely. He is against the universalization of the Anglo-American experience and its imposition upon other cultures, which is a concern I share with him. We, specifically, differ in our understanding of how to develop the LGBTI movement in Asia, and in Chinese communities. Chou does not believe in coming out. He deems coming out as a Western phenomenon. He explicitly writes “asking all people to come out and identify themselves as lesbian and gay because they love people of the same sex is to prioritize and absolutize sexuality at the expense of all other identities and differences. It can be an act of racism, classism, sexism, and cultural imperialism.” See Wah-shan Chou, *Tongzhi: Politics of Same-Sex Eroticism in Chinese Societies* (New York: The Haworth Press, 2000), 5.

⁸ Wah-shan Chou, *Tongzhi: Politics of Same-Sex Eroticism in Chinese Societies*, 1-2.

self-identify as *tongxinglian*, just like the English word “homosexual,” was a medical term denoting sickness and pathology. *Tongzhi* has become popular because of its gender neutrality, positive cultural references and desexualization of the stigma of homosexuality.⁹ These days, as Zhou has pointed out, *tongzhi* refers not only to gay men or lesbians, but to everyone who have been marginalized due to his or her sexuality by hegemonic heterosexism. Thus, it is an inclusive and an umbrella term, just like the word “queer” in the English language.

To use the term *Tongzhi* to describe queer people also indicates that our sexuality is not only a personal and private matter, but also a social matter and that it is political. Our personal sexualities are political. Government and religious leaders have never ceased to regulate the sexual behaviors of their citizens and followers. Many countries in this twenty-first century still have sodomy laws. Sodomy laws are one of the most powerful tools of social control to condemn minorities deemed undesirable and to categorize people into different classes of citizens.

Chinese has a long history of homoeroticism, even though homosexuality or *tongxinglian* is a contemporary social construction. As Bret Hinsch has pointed out, the historical documentation about same-sex love or homoeroticism can be traced to as early as the Zhou dynasty (1122-256 B.C.)¹⁰ According to David Greenberg, the social expression of male homoeroticism can be divided into four major categories outside of the modern West before the social construction of the modern understanding of homosexuality: namely transgenerational homosexuality, trans-gendered homosexuality, class-structured homosexuality, and egalitarian

⁹ Ibid., 2.

¹⁰ Bret Hinsch, *Passions of the Cut Sleeve: The Male Homosexual Tradition in China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 15.

homosexuality.¹¹ This social phenomenon is also demonstrated in Chinese culture in varying degrees without social condemnation, with some of them even being engaged in by kings and being well recorded, even in the official historical documents of China, without negative judgment.¹²

Unlike Western culture, which has been highly influenced by Christianity, sex in Chinese traditional culture is not something to be ashamed of, is not unnatural, and is not a sin.¹³ Sex is always a taboo subject in most Christian churches.¹⁴ It is admittedly difficult for most Christians to talk about sex in a positive light in the church. It is extremely true in early Christianity. Most church fathers had very negative views on sex. One of the best examples is Jerome, who believed that Adam and Eve were virgins in paradise and that there was no sex before the fall. According to him, Adam and Eve only had sexual relations after they had sinned and were expelled from

¹¹ David Greenberg, *The Construction of Homosexuality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 25.

¹² Trans-generational homosexuality involves an older partner and a younger partner while the former plays the active role and the latter the passive role. It is a sexual relationship between men and boys. Trans-gendered homosexuality involves a crossdressing, one of the partners acts and dresses as a woman. Class -structured homosexuality is similar to same-sex prostitution, a wealthy person is allowed to “take care” of a lower class person and in return the latter provides sexual pleasure or sexual affection to the former. Egalitarian homosexuality is same-sex love between two adults which is not based on social status or age, it is a sexual relationship between “friends.”

¹³ Robert Van Gulik, a highly respected orientalist and diplomat of the Netherlands, published a comprehensive overview of the Chinese historical view on sex in 1961, which soon became a classic authority on Chinese sexuality in the English world. It is a well documented survey and record of Chinese sexual life from 1500 B.C to 1644 A.D. See Robert H. Van Gulik, *Sexual Life in Ancient China* (New York: Barnes and Noble Books, 1996).

¹⁴ Beth Ann Gaede, ed. *Congregations Talking about Homosexuality* (An Alban Institute Publication, 1998), 12.

the garden. To him, virginity was good and sex was simply bad.¹⁵ This is very different from Chinese traditional culture. As Chou has argued, there is no parallel religious guilt or obsession with sex and sexuality in Chinese culture, such as there is in the Judeo-Christian tradition. He asserts, “The traditional Chinese concern is not sexuality per se but the social relations in which sex occurs.”¹⁶

According to the Chinese, sex (*xing*) is natural, and the Chinese word for sex, namely *Xing*, also means nature. Chinese traditional culture never makes negative or moral judgment on the intrinsic value of sex. Sex, according to the Chinese, is for procreation and pleasure; it is part of human nature; as Mencius famously said, “*Shi se xing ye*”, which means “eating and sex are human nature.”

Chou has rightly pointed out that in order to understand what sex or sexuality means to the Chinese, one needs to understand Chinese philosophy, especially Taoism and the concept of *Dao*. He writes:

According to Taoism, Tao is the central ordering principle of the cosmos, the organic totality of the eternal order and the course of nature that has produced two fundamental principles or forces, yin and yang, which constitute all aspects of life. A key principles of Tao is the holistic and interactive conception of reality, which denies any essentialist conception of things. All particularities, human or otherwise, instead of being independent and discontinuous, are mutually constitutive of each other.¹⁷

Taiji, which is translated as “the Great Ultimate” is an important concept in Chinese philosophy and neo-Confucianism. It is the Ultimate Reality, and Neo-Confucianism has used it

¹⁵ For more on early Christians’ views on sex and sexuality see Teresa M. Shaw, *The Burden of the Flesh: Eating and Sexuality in Early Christianity* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998).

¹⁶ Wah-shan Chou, *Tongzhi: Politics of Same-Sex Eroticism in Chinese Societies*, 19.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 22.

to symbolize the ultimate structure or “logic” of everything that has existed.¹⁸ As Chan has pointed out, *Taiji* (the Great Ultimate) generates *yin* and *yang*, which is then generates the “Four Forms,” and the Four Forms generate the “Eight Trigrams.”¹⁹

According to Zhu Xi, *Taiji* (the Great Ultimate) is the principle of the whole cosmos. He writes:

The Great Ultimate is merely the principle of Heaven and earth and the myriad things. With respect to heaven and earth, there is the Great Ultimate in them. With respect to the myriad things, there is the Great Ultimate in each and every one of them. Before heaven and earth existed, there was assuredly this principle. It is the principle that through tranquility generates the *yin*.²⁰

Yin and *Yang* are not static, mutually exclusive. Even though they are opposite to each other, they are not an ontological binary; as a matter of fact, they are interdependent and complementary. In Chinese philosophy, women are seen as *yin*, and men are *yang*; however, neither *yin* nor *yang* has ever existed in its pure form. They are highly interactive. As Charlotte pointed out, *yin* and *yang* are relativistic; the well being of a human being depends on the momentary balance of the dynamics between the forces of *yin* and *yang*.²¹ Such a philosophy of life has inevitably begotten a tolerant and more positive attitude toward a variety of sexual behavior.

¹⁸ Julia Ching, *Religious Thought of Chu Hsi* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 32-37.

¹⁹ Wing-tsit Chan, *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963), 267.

²⁰ Wm. Theodore de Bary, ed., *Sources of Chinese Tradition* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1960), vol. 1, 484.

²¹ Charlotte Furth, *A Flourishing Yin: Gender in China's Medical History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

The Great Ultimate, according to Zhu Xi and neo-Confucianism, is the source of all things; everything has come into being because of the Great Ultimate. As Ching asserts,

The Great Ultimate is full of li (principle), that which constitutes the myriad things, that which also determines good and evil. It is prior to things and yet also after the creation of things; it is outside yin and yang and yet operates in the midst of yin and yang; it penetrates all things. Is absent nowhere, and yet originally was without sound, smell, shadow, or echo.²²

Thus, one can conclude that *Taiji* (the Great Ultimate) is comparable to God, or the Ultimate Concern, in Christianity. Ching explicitly argues for the similarity between the Great Ultimate and the concept of God in Christianity. She writes:

The notion of the Great Ultimate approximates most of the notion of God in Western theistic philosophy, and it serves as foundation and center of Chu's entire metaphysical system, the explanation of the organic interrelatedness of all things. I see Chu Hsi's philosophy of the Great Ultimate as an effort to present the notion of God as the chief exemplification of his metaphysical principles, an effort similar to Whitehead.²³

The Great Ultimate or *taiji* depicts *yin* and *yang* as the two primordial forces of the universe, which are relational and always in the process of moving dynamically to complement each other so as to promote a balanced and harmonious reality. *Yin* and *yang* are mutually differentiating and creatively coalescing. In other words, the metaphysical worldview of Neo-Confucianism argues that everything in the world is interdependent and relational in a world of multiplicity. Our universe is a constantly dynamic union of differentiated binaries.

Confucianism, be it classical Confucianism or neo-Confucianism, not only stresses the interconnectedness of all human beings, but also that which exists between human beings and all other living things. Chang Tsai (1020-1073) explicitly writes,

²² Julia Ching, *Religious Thought of Chu Hsi* (London: Oxford University Press, 2000), 45.

²³ *Ibid.*, 252.

Heaven is my father and earth is my mother, and even such small creature as I find an intimate place in their midst. Therefore that which extends throughout the universe I regard as my body and that which directs the universe I consider as my nature. All people are my brothers and sisters, and all things are my companions.²⁴

Wang Yang-Ming, perhaps the most important scholar of Neo-Confucianism, has also emphasized interrelatedness and interdependency, not only between human beings, but also between humans and all living things. This relational philosophy is very much different from the attitude of Western culture, which promotes domination or even manipulation of nature.

According to Wang:

Everything from ruler, minister, husband, wife, and friends to mountains, rivers, spiritual beings, birds, animals, and plants should be truly loved in order to realize my humanity that forms one body with them, and then my clear character will be completely manifested, and I will really form one body with Heaven, Earth, and the myriad things.²⁵

Wang Yang-ming also has written vividly how every living thing is highly interrelated and that all things are united into one body, and that human beings have the moral obligation to at least not to harm them. He has written:

Therefore when he sees a child about to fall into a well, he cannot help a feeling of alarm and commiseration. This shows that his humanity forms one body with the child. It may be objected that the child belongs to the same species. Again, when he observes the pitiful cries and frightened appearance of birds and animals about to be slaughtered, he cannot help feeling an “inability to bear” their suffering. This shows that his humanity forms one body with birds and animals. It may be objected that birds and animals are sentient beings as he is. But when he sees plants broken and destroyed, he cannot help...feeling...pity. This shows that his humanity forms one body with plants.²⁶

²⁴ Wm. Theodore de Bary, Wing-tsit Chan, and Burton Watson, eds. *Sources of Chinese Tradition* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1960), 524.

²⁵ Wang Yang-ming, *Instructions for Practical Living and Other Neo-Confucian Writings*, trans. Wing-tsit Chan (New York: Columbia University Press, 1963), 273.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 272.

Neo-Confucianism offers us a relational vision of reality. In order to achieve harmony, everything creatively complements each other, without domination or manipulation. Unity and harmony are the manifestation of deeply mutual relationships. As Hyo-Dong Lee has pointed out, the Neo-Confucian conception of ultimate reality, namely *taiji*, “offers a thought-provoking relational and gynamic vision of Spirit that is both one and many, and that in so doing can serve as a transformative critic of the bias toward oneness prominent in classical Western theism ...”²⁷

God of Process Relational

As radical and rigorous as the Neo-Confucian notion of ultimate reality is, when we compare it with the Western understanding of the Ultimate Reality or God, we find a remarkable parallel with ideas of God in Whitehead’s philosophy, which was constructed in the twentieth century. I have, therefore, chosen to utilize the metaphysical scheme of Whitehead to construct *Tongzhi* Theology.

Whitehead’s cosmology and his concept of God, arguably, have revolutionized Western classical theism. As Lewis Ford writes,

Process theism revises our understanding of divine power. Classically, God’s power is seen in terms of omnipotence, and God is creator as the sole primary efficient cause of the world. In process theism, God is primarily persuasive, creating more indirectly by providing the lure for each occasion whereby it can create itself.²⁸

²⁷ Catherine Keller, and Laurel c. Schneider, eds, *Polydoxy: Theology of Multiplicity and Relation* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 127.

²⁸ Lewis S. Ford, *The Lure of God: A Biblical Background for Process Theism* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978), 12.

According to Whitehead's metaphysical scheme²⁹ and his concept of God, God is immanent, as he explicitly says that God is not an exception to the metaphysical categories. As he asserted, God "is not to be treated as an exception to the metaphysical principles, invoked to save their collapse. He is their chief exemplification."³⁰

As Victor Lowe, Whitehead's primary biographer, has pointed out, Whitehead's vision of God, is "the supreme monad, not as omnipotent Creator but as eternally with it in two ways...the source of all possible values...[who] receives, transforms, and keeps forever the monads that have perished in the temporal world; thus God grows with the world, always in process."³¹

The traditional theology of God, which emphasizes God as the Father, the Supreme Being, the Omnipotent One is highly problematic for at least two reasons. First, it perpetuates and justifies oppressions, not to mention extreme violence; and second, it fails to include and explain the experience of all LGBTI people.

The earliest Christian community was an inclusive community, which welcomed everyone, especially those who were marginalized and outcasts. Everyone in the community was considered a child of God.³² As Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza has pointed out, in this new

²⁹ It is of paramount importance to remember that Whitehead himself has stated that "metaphysical categories are not dogmatic statements of the obvious; they are tentative formulations of ultimate generalities" and that metaphysics is "an endeavor to frame a coherent, logical, necessary system of general ideas in terms of which every element of our experience can be interpreted." See Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 3.

³⁰ Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 343.

³¹ Victor Lowe, *Alfred North Whitehead: The Man and His Work*, volume I: 1861-1910 (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1985), 5.

³² Robert L. Wilken, *The Christians as the Romans Saw Them* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), 36.

community of faith, Jesus' followers shared their faith in an egalitarian rather in a hierarchical relationship. She writes:

If the vision of the *ekklesia* of wo/men – understood as *the congress of full decision-making citizens* – is to articulate a sociopolitical religious horizon for biblical interpretation, it must be spelled out both in sociopolitical and cultural-religious terms. *Ekklesia* is not just a Christian religious notion; rather it expresses a sociopolitical radical democratic vision. The expression does not refer primarily to “church” but seeks to convey the notion of radical democracy. This egalitarian vision has never been fully realized in history since Western traditions wo/men have not been accorded full citizenship and self-determination.³³

Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza argues that as the patriarchal colonization power of the Roman Empire took power, it politically and religiously impacted the social structure of its empire and the community of Jesus' followers by subduing and subjugating everyone in the empire.³⁴ Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza further argues that this historical development has somehow affected the social structure of the community of Christians, which privileges the patriarchal/hierarchical form of church.³⁵ In the imperialistic and patriarchal social structure of the Roman Empire, “male” has become the institutional gender. And this “male” finds its source in God, who is called “He.” The Church may be termed “*kyriachy*,” which is a master-centered ideology, and which not only defines sexism and gender oppression, but is also a system of domination which promotes and perpetuates the marginalization of women, and the

³³ Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Sharing Her Word: Feminist Biblical Interpretation in Context* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1999), 112.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 39.

³⁵ Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, “A Discipleship of Equals: Ekklesial Democracy and Patriarchy in Biblical Perspective,” in Eugene C. Bianchi & Rosemary Radford Ruether, eds., *A Democratic Catholic Church: The Reconstruction of Roman Catholicism* (New York: Crossroad, 1992), 19.

oppression of the master over certain subjugated men and slaves.³⁶ Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza notes that "...the Greek word *ekklesia* is translated as 'church,' although the English word 'church' derives from the Greek word *kyriake*, i.e., 'belonging to the Lord/Master.'"³⁷

Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza also affirms that "The early Christian texts advocating adaptation to the Greco-Roman patriarchal structures of household," are the bedrock of an oppressive church.³⁸ As Dunn has pointed out, the concept of "household" in the Roman Empire is highly patriarchal, as it puts man at the center of power, a man is the husband, the father, and the master.³⁹ Since early Christians were under the colonization of the Roman empire, they had chosen to adopt the "*kyriarchal*" format of society and applied this way of living to their household, as well as to their community of faith so that they would not be seen as rebellious to the empire.⁴⁰ The Church, thus, became a household and adopted the structures of kyriarchy and patriarchy. While the Roman empire is long gone, the Christian churches, especially the Roman Catholic Church, have continued to retain its household model, the hierarchical structure, and the

³⁶ Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Rhetoric and Ethic: The Politics of Biblical Studies* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999), 140-141.

³⁷ Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, "A Discipleship of Equals: Ekklesial Democracy and Patriarchy in Biblica Perspective," in Eugene C. Bianchi & Rosemary Radford Ruether, eds., *A Democratic Catholic Church: The Reconstruction of Roman Catholicism* (New York: Crossroad, 1992), 19 .

³⁸ Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, "A Discipleship of Equals: Ekklesial Democracy and Patriarchy in Biblica Perspective," in Eugene C. Bianchi & Rosemary Radford Ruether, eds., *A Democratic Catholic Church: The Reconstruction of Roman Catholicism* (New York: Crossroad, 1992), 21.

³⁹ James D.G. Dunn, "The Household Rules in the New Testament," in Stephen C. Barton, ed. *The Family in Theological Perspective* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1996), 43.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 57.

spirit of patriarchy and imperialism, and have become a religious empire. God is the Lord and the Master who has the sovereign and absolute power over “His” people.

The household model of the Christian church is highly problematic, not only because it is oppressive and patriarchal, but also because it goes against the teaching of Jesus in the Bible. Jesus explicitly challenged the idea of family in his time. He had unequivocally demanded that his disciples disparage traditional family ties.⁴¹ Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza has pointed out that the community of faith proposed by Jesus is an egalitarian community, not a traditional household model; and that the “egalitarian community, the ‘new family’ of Jesus, recognizes sisters, brothers, and mothers, but no fathers in the community of disciples, since God alone is their father.”⁴²

“God is father” needs to be understood as a theological metaphor. It is a theological truth, not a literal fact. It is a symbolic engagement to say “God is our father.” God as father is a theological symbol or sign, at best. A symbol or a sign can be neither true nor false. A symbol or a sign is important nonetheless, as Neville writes, “signs engage us with reality; without signs, we are causally implicated in reality but cannot engage it. Religious signs, or symbols, are necessary for engaging religious realities; and the existence of religious signs makes engaging religious realities possible.”⁴³

⁴¹ See Mark 3:31-35; Matt 8:21-22, 10:37; Luke 9:59-60, 14:26.

⁴² Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, “A Discipleship of Equals: Ekklesial Democracy and Patriarchy in Biblical Perspective,” in Eugene C. Bianchi & Rosemary Radford Ruether, eds., *A Democratic Catholic Church: The Reconstruction of Roman Catholicism* (New York: Crossroad, 1992), 27.

⁴³ Robert Cummings Neville, *On the Scope and Truth of Theology: Theology as Symbolic Engagement* (New York: T& T Clark, 2006), 29.

Even though a symbol or a sign can be neither true nor false, it certainly can be a better or worse symbol if compared with other symbols in its ability to convey its theological truth. God as father has become increasingly problematic, as God is gendered as a man. When males find their source in God, who is gendered as a man, men are like God, but women have been historically and systematically marginalized as objects of subjugation and domination. The symbol of God as a man, thus, has been one of the major criticisms of feminist theology.⁴⁴

Obviously, in this twenty-first century, the theology of God as father is not only inadequate, but has perpetuated sexism and oppression. We, thus, need to reconstruct our theology of God and the kyriarchal structure of the community of faith, so that God can no longer extend “His” “imperialistic” authority and power over all the boundaries in “His” “empire.”

Monotheism has corresponded well with the imperialism of empires. Many acts of violence have been committed in the name of religion, especially of monotheistic religion. It is no coincidence that so much religious terrorism and extreme violence is committed by believers of monotheistic religions, who believe in the Sovereign God of absolute power. These religious believers are simply imitating their God is exercising the power to condemn their enemies. To put it bluntly, it is simply because they have found their prime model in their God.

In this twenty-first century, we must outgrow the need for such a Father or Lord/ Master theology of God, so that we can truly attain spiritual and political freedom. *Tongzhi* theology

⁴⁴ See Mary Daly, *The Church and the Second Sex* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1986). This book was first published in 1968 by Mary Daly, a leading feminist theologian in the twentieth century. It is considered as one of the earliest and most important critiques of sexism and its roots in the Christian tradition. She has famously said in the book that “if God is male, then the male is God.” Kathy Rudy has also argued forcefully that sexism and homophobia are inextricably intertwined. See Kathy Rudy, *Sex and the Church: Gender, Homosexual and the Transformation of Christian Ethics* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1998).

thus aims to challenge the classical and traditional theology of God so that one can engage oneself with the Ultimate Concern or God with a better symbol and theology of God.

God is our comrade; as Whitehead explicitly says, God is our great companion and “fellow sufferer who understands.”⁴⁵ But how should this statement be understood? To put it differently, how is God personalistic enough for the metaphor of comrade to be applicable in *Tongzhi* Theology? My answer to this question is that Jesus, as the incarnation of God, who is a historical being, is our comrade; and thus God is our comrade.

As Roger Haight has rightly pointed out, “Christianity has its foundation in the encounter of God in and through Jesus.”⁴⁶ The theology of incarnation⁴⁷ is one of the most important doctrines in Christianity. Although theologians may have different interpretations of the theology of incarnation, it is a doctrine embraced by every Christian theologian⁴⁸. Neville has summarized the doctrine of incarnation concisely, as he writes, “Jesus Christ is wholly God in being the incarnation of the Logos, combining in his wholly human identity the particular synthesis of

⁴⁵ Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 351.

⁴⁶ Roger Haight, *Jesus: Symbol of God* (New York: Orbis Books, 1999), 15.

⁴⁷ According to John 1:14, Jesus is the *logos* become “*carnis*” (Latin for “flesh”). The word “incarnation” derives from it; and *logos/carnis* is also the scriptural foundation of the theology of incarnation.

⁴⁸ Even though Christian theologians may have different concepts of God, whether they believe that God is a determinate entity following Whitehead’s concept of God, or that God is the ground of being articulated by Paul Tillich, or the Creator *ex Nihilo* advocated by Robert Neville, who is highly critical of Whitehead’s concept of God as an actual entity, no one would simply deny the doctrine of the incarnation.

form, components, actuality, and value that restores the covenant and recompletes the creation.”⁴⁹

The idea of Jesus as the incarnation of God who is our fellow sufferer, and thus our comrade, is best illustrated by Hartshorne. He writes, “The devotion of Jesus to his followers was not mere benevolence, a wishing them well, or an eagerness to do things for them. It was a feeling of sympathetic identity with them in their troubles and sufferings, as well as in their joys, so that their cause and their tragedy became his.”⁵⁰

Insofar as the scripture affirms that “God was in Christ reconciling the world” (2 Corinthians 5:19), Whitehead also argues in his *magnum opus*, *Process and Reality*, that one needs to find the image of God as human companion in “the Galilean origin of Christianity.”⁵¹ He believes that Jesus is the revelation of God. He writes:

The essence of Christianity is the appeal to the life of Christ as a revelation of the nature of God and his agency in the world... The Mother, the Child, and the bare manger; the lowly man, homeless and self-forgetful, with his message of peace, love, and sympathy; the suffering, the agony, the tender words as life ebbed, the final despair; and the whole with the authority of supreme victory.⁵²

According to Whitehead, God’s power is relational, not unilateral. Divine love is creative and responsive, and the life of Jesus manifests the power of God. He asserts, “The life of Christ is not an exhibition of over ruling power. Its glory is for those who can discern it, and not

⁴⁹ Robert Neville, *A Theology Primer* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), 145.

⁵⁰ Charles Hartshorne, *Reality as Social Process* (Glencoe: The Free Press, 1953), 147.

⁵¹ Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 343.

⁵² Alfred North Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas*, 167.

for the world. Its power lies in its absence of force. It has the decisiveness of a supreme ideal, and that is why the history of the world divides at this point of time.”⁵³

To say that Jesus is the incarnation of God, in Whiteheadian language, is to argue that God is fully prehended by Jesus, and that Jesus does not experience God as other. Jesus fully embraces and achieves God’s vision. God’s initial aim is wholly manifested in the life of Jesus. In each moment of his life, Jesus reflects and actualizes God’s aim to its fullest. In other words, Jesus’ life and mission is in the greatest alignment with God’s vision. Because of that, Jesus and God are one; and through Jesus the Christ, we see God. As Marhorie Schocki observes, “through the cross we see not only that God is stronger than death, but that God’s love endures the pain of death, and that God’s love is unconquered by death.”⁵⁴

Regarding the relationship between Jesus and God from the perspective of process theology, Bruce G. Epperly writes:

Process theology sees God’s activity in Christ as the fullest exemplification of God’s aim at creative transformation, revealed in all things and not just the Christian world. God does not operate from the outside of the universe, violating its rules and suspending its laws to achieve God’s purpose; rather, God works within all things, joining order, and novelty in achieving God’s vision for the universe and humankind.⁵⁵

Jesus, the “*logos* became flesh and lived among us,” as is asserted by the Scripture;⁵⁶ this is the key idea of the theology of incarnation. Jesus reveals God’s initial aim and God’s vision.

⁵³ Alfred Whitehead, *Religion in the Making*, 57.

⁵⁴ Marjori Suchocki, *God, Christ, Church: A Practical Guide to Process Theology* (New York: Crossroad, 1982), 106.

⁵⁵ Bruce G. Epperly, *Process Theology: A Guide for the Perplexed* (New York: t & t Clark, 2011), 63.

⁵⁶ John 1:14. Interestingly enough, the *logos* is translated as *Dao* in the Chinese Bible.

In each moment of his life, Jesus embraces the life-transforming energy of God and embodies the divine vision of God. Jesus' radical hospitality and his inclusive love towards those who are marginalized in society reveals God's love and reflects God's commitment to offering abundant life for all creation. Marjorie Suchocki writes:

The past and the future unite in the initial aim, leading to the creation of the present. Through these dynamics, it would be possible for one person so to reveal both the nature of God and the nature of what we are called to be as human beings that we could call this person "Immanuel, God with us." Incarnation is coherent in process thought, given the following historical conditions. First, the past must be such that there is a readiness for this revelation. "The fullness of time" is absolutely essential. Second, the content of the initial aim toward incarnation must be a full communication of the nature of God. Third, the initial aim would have to be adapted fully by the recipient...the finite occasion would be "co-constituted" by the divine and human aim.⁵⁷

Bruce Epperly summarizes the significance of Jesus as the incarnation of God as he argues:

[Jesus]' incarnation is the superlative manifestation of God's "natural" revelation among us. Here, I contend that the word "natural" embraces unheard of possibilities for personal transformation, including mystical experiences and releases of healing energy, in the context of the causal interdependence of life. In a God-inspired world, the "natural" process of causation and interdependence call us to achieve "greater things" (John 14:12) than we thought possible. If God is active as the source of energy and possibility in every moment of experience, then it is possible to affirm that there are deeper laws and powers in nature than we can imagine and may ever discover, and these laws were embodied in Jesus' first century healing ministry as well as his transformation of human lives in our time.⁵⁸

Tongzhi Theology for LGBTI

As Patrick Cheng has argued, queer theology is a theology, which can be understood "as a way of doing theology that is rooted in queer theory and that critiques the binary categories of

⁵⁷ Marjorie Suchocki, *God, Christ, Church*, 95-96.

⁵⁸ Bruce G. Epperly, *Process Theology: A Guide for the Perplexed* (New York: t & t Clark, 2011), 69.

sexuality (that is, homosexual vs. heterosexual) and gender identity (that is, female vs. male) as socially constructed.”⁵⁹ Queer theology, therefore, must address not only lesbians and gay men, but also transgendered and intersex people. But interestingly enough, Cheng is fully aware of the definition of the term “queer” as he carefully explains in the very beginning of his book *Radical Love*, where he has included and defined intersex; but from page 5 to the end, he only mentions LGBT without the “I,” the “intersex” element in it.

If queer theology seeks to go beyond lesbian and gay theology to include all LGBTI people, like queer theory, which “demarcates not a positivity but a positionality vis-à-vis the normative—a positionality that is not restricted to lesbians and gay men but is in fact available to anyone who is or who feels marginalized because of his or her sexual practices,”⁶⁰ then queer theology must be a theology which can include and explain the experiences of all LGBTI people. In Whitehead’s language, queer theology needs to construct a theological framework, which is a coherent, logical, necessary system of general ideas in terms of which every element of LGBTI experience can be understood and interpreted. Queer theology today is obviously inadequate; Susannah Cornwall has pointed out that in-depth theological reflections and explorations of the intersex have seldom occurred and that “[w]here theological engagement with intersex does exist, it has very often been done as an adjunct to reflection on transsexualism or homosexuality rather than in its own light.”⁶¹

⁵⁹ Patrick S. Cheng, *Radical Love: An Introduction to Queer Theology* (New York: Seabury Books, 2011), 10.

⁶⁰ David Halperin, *Saint Foucault: Towards a Gay Hagiography* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 62.

⁶¹ Susannah Cornwall, *Sex and Uncertainty in the Body of Christ: Intersex Conditions and Christian Theology* (Oakville: Equinoc, 2010), 4. Viviane Namaste even criticizes queer

While gay Christians who have come out to embrace their sexuality and have argued that “God never makes mistakes” and that “God made me gay”, so being gay is good, not every transgender and intersex person embraces this logic of argument to defend themselves. Most transgendered people would argue that it was a mistake to be born in a particularly sexed body, which is not consistent with their gender identity, and thus they wanted to change. Many intersex people are also perfectly comfortable with “fixing” their genitalia to conform to a particularly sexed body or to adopt a certain gender identity; they embrace changes and see what they were born with as a mistake, if not something that needs to be modified.⁶²

Under the theology of a God, who has the absolute power and who determines everything, many gay Christians believe that being gay is God’s will, and thus no one should try to change them condemn their sexuality. On the other hand, many transgender people and intersex people believe that it was a mistake to be born in their biological bodies, which were not congruent with their gender identities. In other words, to the latter, it was not God’s will, but a mistake. The question, thus, is what kind of theology of God can include and interpret the experiences of LGBTI people as they are, in their individual conditions. Is it God’s will or is it not? Is it a perfect condition made by God, or it is a mistake, for whatever reason?

Lebacqz has tried to answer this question for intersex people. She asserts:

We need not to see all differences as God’s mistakes, but we also need not to see them all as God’s will. The fact that children are born with ambiguous genitals may be

theory for not adequately dealing with issues related to transgender people. See Viviane Namaste, *Invisible Lives: The Erasure of Transsexual and Transgendered People* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000).

⁶² Sherry Wolf, *Sexuality and Socialism: History, Politics, and Theory of LGBT Liberation* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2009), 230.

incontrovertible evidence that there are not only two ways of being born, but that fact does not, alone, mean that we should allow every way of living that happens in nature.⁶³

In other words, she does not believe that since intersex people are “born this way” it is good and they should not perform corrective surgery.

In addition to that, even within the intersex community, not everyone shares the same view about their identity as intersex. Some people believe that they should grow up intersex, while others have wanted to have corrective surgery to be either male or female. For instance, Looy and Bouma have argued that “a person who is intersex, whose brain has been organized to produce predispositions and preferences that do not nicely fit either of the available gender categories, is forced to fit a Procrustean bed that is either too big or too short; neither produces a good fit, but there is no bed of the right size available.”⁶⁴

One of the earliest theological reflections on the intersex is Mollenkott’s *Omnigender: A Trans- Religious Approach*. According to her, “God made no mistake by creating intersexuals. Therefore, their condition represents God’s perfect will for them and for our culture”⁶⁵ and that “intersexuals are not only of God’s original plan, they are primarily so!”⁶⁶ In other words, it is not a medical condition, and intersex people should not be subject to corrective surgery because it has nothing to be corrected, as it was God’s original plan.

⁶³ Karen Lebacqz, “Difference or Defect? Intersexuality and the Politics of Difference,” in *Annual of the Society of Christian Ethics* 17 (1997), 224.

⁶⁴ Heather Looy and Hessel Bouma III, “The Nature of Gender: Gender Identity in Persons who are intersex or transgendered,” *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 33.3 (2005), 174.

⁶⁵ Virginia R. Mollenkott, *Omnigender: A Trans- Religious Approach* (Chicago: The Pilgrim Press, 2007), 7.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 98.

But in reality, not every intersex person would agree with Looy, Bouma and Mallenkott. Some really feel that they are unequivocally male or female even though they have ambiguous genitalia or their genitals appear unusual. Not only they prefer to have corrective surgery, they are also comfortable with their “new” sexual identity after the corrective surgery.⁶⁷ The problem of Mallenkott is obvious. It is highly presumptuous for her to speak on behalf of all intersex people by affirming that their condition is God’s perfect will for them, and that for the reason they should not seek corrective surgery to conform to either one of the sexes.

Mallenkott’s problem is a problem of classical theism. If one believes that God determines everything and that God is absolutely powerful, then the inevitable conclusion is that it is God’s perfect will to be born gay and it is God’s perfect will to be born as a transgendered or an intersex person. This argument is only good for gay people as they can embrace their sexuality without seeking changes, but it does not work on many transgendered and intersex people who want to seek corrective surgeries to have different bodies. An omnipotent God does not fit well in the experience of all LGBTI people.

Tongzhi Theology believes that to say that we are “born this way” does not necessarily mean that everything is good and it is of God’s will. God is not responsible for everything that happens to us. It is a presupposition that God is all-powerful. In this process-relational world, everything is highly interrelated and influences everything else, including God. God’s power is merely one of the forces that construct our lives, it is not all-powerful.

⁶⁷ See Lih-Mei Liao, “Toward a Clinical- Psychological Approach to Address the Heterosexual Concerns of Intersexed Women”, in Victoria Clarke and Elizabeth Peel, eds., *Out in Psychology: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Queer Perspectives* (Chichester: John Wiley & Sons Ltd., 2007), 391-408.

God, LGBTI, and Tongzhi

We are co-creators with God. While God calls us to realize all the emerging possibilities and potentials in life, we have the capacity to respond and can affect changes or embrace the status-quo. God does not control what happens.

In *Tongzhi* Theology, God and the world are highly intertwined. God, human beings, and the world are inter-related; we are organically interdependent, and dynamically interconnected. God does not and cannot control everything. All existence is relational. All things and events come into being from experience, or, in Whitehead's language, feelings, received from the past.

John Henderson argues that correlative thinking is the most basic ingredient of Chinese cosmology. He argues "correlative thinking in general draws systematic correspondences among aspects of various orders of reality or realms of the cosmos, such as the human body, the body politic, and the heavenly bodies. It assumes that these related orders as a whole are homologous, that they correspond with one another in some basic aspect."⁶⁸

Many theologians and biblical scholars who are pro-gay have persistently defended the classical view of God as all-powerful, all-good, absolute, perfect, infinite, and immutable being, dictates what is good and bad, moral and immoral. The defining essence of this traditional understanding or concept of God is that God is the actual or potential controller of all events. Their theology of God poses a serious problem in theodicy. And they have failed miserably in addressing the question that if God is all-powerful and all-good, why have queer people suffered so much for so long, and are not yet liberated by God? While gay Christians have argued forcefully that their gayness was made by God, and that God created them gay, and that God

⁶⁸ John Henderson, *Development and Decline of Chinese Cosmology* (London: RKP, 1984), 1.

makes no mistakes, transgender people believe that their body is a mistake and they seek to change the body, which is given by God. How do we reconcile these beliefs about God and who they are in terms of their genders and sexuality? Queer theology has failed to answer this question with a consistent theology of God. Hence, it is important to reconstruct the understanding of God as all-good and all-powerful by introducing process theology to the scene.

Process theologian Hartshorne argues forcefully in *The Divine Relativity* that he wants “to formulate the idea of deity so as to preserve, perhaps even increase, its religious value, while yet avoiding the contradictions which seem inseparable from the idea as customarily defined.”⁶⁹ One of the implications of God of all-powerful is that God as such is always deemed as a tyrant. Throughout history, many have killed in the name of God and God’s name has been employed to discriminate against others simply because the aggressors claim that “it is just and right, for God tells so” or “for the Bible tell me so.” Slavery is right because “the Bible tells us so.” Masturbation is a sin because “the Bible tells us so.” Women should not lead and should not be ordained because “the Bible tells us so.” All of this might have been part of history, but today many still believe homosexuality is wrong simply because “the Bible tells us so.” No reason should be provided to explain why the Bible tells us so. If the Bible is the word of God and God is viewed as the greatest tyrant, it is sufficient to justify anything by merely saying “because the Bible tells us so.”

The traditional view of God as a powerful being who is the all-determining Cause, who is influenced by nothing would inevitably give birth to the tyrannical conception of a God whose function is to command while all the creatures merely obey and follow orders. Since God is

⁶⁹ Charles Hartshorne, *The Divine Relativity: A Social Conception of God* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1948), 1.

omnipotent and all knowing, our obligation as creatures is to take orders and be the subject of domination. One can clearly see that the traditional concept of God not only fails to answer the question of evil, it also perpetuates theocracy, which is tyrannical in nature. As Penelhum summarizes,

From time to time thinkers suggest that there is a God who is all-good but not all-power, or who is all-powerful but not all-good. Such suggestions clearly avoid the problem of evil; but we are merely bored by them. The alternatives are always tacitly restricted to two—either there is a God who is all-powerful and all-good, or there is no God at all. Christianity may not have convinced everybody, but it has certainly made us all very finicky. For...the only God in whose existence we can evince interest is one whom it would be proper to worship. And worship in the Western world does not mean the appeasing of an angry God or the encouragement of a weak one. It necessarily includes submission and moral reverence.⁷⁰

Whitehead is highly critical of the traditional view of God. He asserts “the churches...have put forward aspects of religion which are expressed in terms...suited to the emotional reactions of bygone times... What I mean...is that religious appeal is directed partly to excite that instinctive fear of the wrath of...an all powerful arbitrary tyrant behind the unknown forces of nature.” And he believes that “this appeal to the ready instinct of brute fear is losing its force.”⁷¹ While I agree with his analysis of a religion that is based on fear, I am not sure if I can agree with his belief that “the appeal to the ready instinct of brute fear” has lost its force.

As Jessica Stern has pointed out, “terrorist leaders encourage operatives to participate in terrorist violence by holding out the promise of heavenly rewards or the threat of heavenly

⁷⁰ Terence Penelhum, “Divine Goodness and the Problem of Evil,” in *Religious Studies*, Vol.II (1966), 99.

⁷¹ Alfred North Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World* (The Macmillan Company, 1926), 273.

retribution.”⁷² According to her, religious terrorists always employ the name of God to kill; their killings are justified because they were told to do so and they just followed the order. One of the terrorists interviewed by Stern told her that his following in “believing and obeying God when He tells you to do something...” and that he did follow the order by bombing a pornographic bookstore and blowing up a church frequented by homosexuals.⁷³

One should not be surprised that religion and God have become a very popular motivation for terrorism. Bruce Hoffman has written, “the salience of religion as the major driving force behind international terrorism in the years preceding 9/11 is further evidenced by the fact that the most serious terrorist acts of the decade—whether reckoned in terms of political implications and consequences or numbers of fatalities caused—all had a significant religious dimension and/or motivation.”⁷⁴ Osama bin Laden, the terrorist most sought by the U.S government, explicitly says,

In compliance with God’s order, we issue the following fatwa to all Muslims: The ruling to kill the Americans and their allies---civilians and military—is an individual duty for every Muslim who can do it in any country in which it is possible to do it, in order to liberate the al-Aqsa Mosque and the whole temple from their grip...This is in accordance with the words of Almighty God, “and fight the pagans all together as they fight you all together.”⁷⁵

It would be a mistake to think that only religious terrorists who believe in the Islamic religion kill in the name of God. A militia recruit, who recalled in an interview his initiation into movement in a rural Missouri church said: “it was odd. It was extremely religious. There were

⁷² Jessica Stern, *Terror in the Name of God* (New York: HarperCollins Books, 2003), 4.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 12.

⁷⁴ Bruce Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 86.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 95.

people standing along the aisles carrying weapons, rifles, a few with pistols. We all stood up and walked to the front of the church in this strange procession. We were told that it was part of the ritual of becoming ‘God’s soldiers’ in this ‘holy war.’ One of the organizers of the event then mounted the pulpit declaring, ‘Soon we will be asked to kill, but we will kill with love in our hearts because God is with us.’”⁷⁶ Paul Hill, a Christian fundamentalist, shot to death a clinic doctor and his escort in 1994. He believes that to kill all who disobey God’s law on abortion and homosexuality is the right thing to do. He killed because it was God’s will.⁷⁷

Thus, it is of paramount importance to reconstruct the traditional concept of God. According to Hartshorne, God’s power is perfect, but the perfection of power is shown, not by taking away or preventing the freedom of others, but by fostering and inspiring that freedom. As he writes “God is the unsurpassable inspiring genius of all freedom, not the self-determining coercive tyrant, or (if possible) even worse, the irresistible hypnotist who dictates specific actions while hiding his operations from the hypnotized.”⁷⁸ Hartshorne sees God’s power as power which is absolutely maximal or the greatest possible. However, he also asserts that even such a power is still one power among others. Differently put, Hartshorne sees God as the absolute case of social influence, but even the absolute case of such an influence is still social. In other words, Hartshorne means that God recognizes the freedom of others, determining events

⁷⁶ Ibid.,109.

⁷⁷ Ibid.,116.

⁷⁸ Charles Hartshorne, *Divine Absoluteness and Divine Reality, Transcendence*, eds. Herbert W.Richardson and Donald R.Cutler. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), 169.

only by putting appropriate limits to the self-determination of others.⁷⁹ Thus, God's power is persuasive, not controlling. All direct power is persuasion, and this is the form of power God has. However, this does not mean that God's power is limited and thus makes God a finite being that does not fit to be the subject of worship. Hartshorne has spoken very clear about this. According to him,

It has become customary to say that we must limit divine power to save human freedom and to avoid making deity responsible for evil. But to speak of limiting a concept seems to imply that the concept, without the limitation, makes sense. The notion of a cosmic power that determines all decisions fails to make sense. For its decisions could refer to nothing except themselves. They could result in no world; for a world must consist of local agents making their own decisions. Instead of saying that God's power is limited, suggesting that it is less than some conceivable power, we should rather say: his power is absolutely maximal, the greatest possible, but even the greatest possible power is still one power among others, is not the only power. God can do everything that a God can do, everything that could be done by 'a being with no possible superior.'⁸⁰

In other words, God is still the greatest God, the being than which nothing greater can be conceived, even though God cannot unilaterally prevent evil in the world. The reason is because it is impossible in principle for one being to completely determine the dispositions of other actual beings. Since this cannot be done, it is no limitation on divine perfection that God cannot do it. God is still the perfect reality that deserves to be worshipped; God's perfection and worshipfulness are fully intact. If we believe in such a God, we would not say that we would do anything as we deem necessary to stop evil or believe that every means is justified simply because we have good intention or simply because we are the victims of oppression, as most religious terrorists have claimed. Religious terrorists believe that they are right even though they

⁷⁹ Charles Hartshorne, *The Divine Relativity: A Social Conception of God*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1948), 1.

⁸⁰ Charles Hartshorne, *The Divine Relativity: A Social Conception of God*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1948), 138.

kill; they believe that they are called to do justice in the name of God, even though what they do is not a good thing per se. But because they uphold a traditional view and concept of God as all powerful and omnipotent, who can do whatever God intends to do, they follow what they believe they are called to do by God without evaluating whether these are right things to do or not. From the social implications of such a belief, we can clearly see that this concept of God is highly problematic sociologically, not to mention philosophically and theologically.

We live in a distinctively anti-metaphysical world, especially as the result of the influence of logical positivism, which argues that metaphysical language is meaningless at best, as it can neither be falsified nor vilified. Hence, it is fashionable not to talk about the nature of God. Since God's way is higher than ours, and God might is greater than our power, there is no continuum between God's knowledge and ours. In other words, there is a fundamental distinction between everything divine and everything creaturely. While everything in God is perfectly divine and not creaturely, nothing in the world is divine and everything is creaturely. God is thus transcendent to us.

The transcendence of God means that human beings cannot reduce God to the world. God is above and beyond the world. God is inutterably exalted above everything outside of God; and not only that, God is also above everything that could be thought about God.

In his famous essay "Two Types of Philosophy of Religion," Paul Tillich argues that there are two possible types of philosophy of religion, the ontological type and the cosmological type. According to Tillich, these represent two ways of approaching God. The former approaches God by discovering the subject who is approaching God: "he discovers something that is identical with himself although it transcends him infinitely, something from which he is

estranged, but from which he never has been and never can be separated.”⁸¹ The latter approaches God as a stranger; God is absolutely the Other, a total stranger. God is transcendent.

The ontological type suggests that God is someone from whom one is estranged. God is within someone from whom God cannot be separated. Thus, one can know God, and be known by God, with great immediacy. In this sense, God is closer to us than we are to ourselves; God is the very ground of our being and a reality more basic than our own being. God can be known through personally immediate divine illumination or by the immediate awareness of the Unconditioned. In contrast, the cosmological type of philosophy of God implies that God and human beings are autonomous beings or entities. One can only know God indirectly through the human mind. God is immanent.

The immanence of God suggests that God participates in the human world. God participates in all the pleasures, sorrows and failures of finite creatures. And thus, God understands what human beings have gone through, for God is not only with us, but within us.

The God of transcendence is the God of eternal silence. God is the very other, the Other that never speaks. God never has to. The immanence of God tries to break through the speechlessness of God. The transcendence of God implies the trembling in the presence of God. God is the ultimately impenetrable Other and the absolute Other that deserves to be worshiped. God is more than a terrifying silence; God transcends the world, and also is transcended by the world. To say that God is transcendent is to say that God is unlike every being. God is an impersonal Being. The reality of God is God’s reality as a subject who stands over against us.

⁸¹ Paul Tillich, *Theology of Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1959), 10.

Tillich affirms the transcendence of God; however, he also believes that God and the world participate in one another. God includes everything finite within himself in a dynamic and living process; God is the ground of beings. In other words, God is immanent in the world.

Even though Tillich wrote in the twentieth century, his theology of God has its roots in classical theism. Augustine and Aquinas both expressed almost the same idea about the transcendence and immanence of God. To them, God is in some sense exterior and related to us and in some sense interior, as the internal ground of our being.

Process theologians' descriptions of God as becoming instead of being, obviously differ greatly from Aquinas's, who viewed God as the unchanging God. Whereas for process theology, becoming, and change, are the ultimate realities. Process theology, as John Cobb and David Griffin articulate, "sees the divine creative activity as based upon responsiveness to the world. Since the very meaning of actuality involves internal relatedness, God as an actuality is essentially related to the world. Since actuality as such is partially self-created, future events are not yet determinate, so that even perfect knowledge cannot know the future, and God does not wholly control the world." They thus conclude, "any divine creative influence must be persuasive, not coercive."⁸²

God would not be worthy of worship, if God were to be like one of God's creatures. However, to argue that God is transcendent one must not negate that God is immanent. Even though both Augustine and Aquinas believe in the immanence of God, I suspect that both them do not do enough to combine the transcendence and immanence of God by looking at the theology of the Trinity and the Incarnation. For one thing, they do not really explain how God is

⁸² John Cobb and David Ray Griffin, *Process Theology: An Introductory Exposition* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1976), 52-53.

immanent, nor do they elaborate on why God finds human beings to be worthy of God's love. I suspect that if one really needs to dilute the concept of transcendence in order to give way to immanence, one would be able to see the immanence of God in light of God's transcendence. If God is really the God as the creator, God is not only over all in his creation but also is all in all. In other words, transcendence and immanence are not opposed to each other.

If God were to be merely transcendent, God would be rendered irrelevant and ineffective, as God would be absent from the world and human earthly lives. If one believes in incarnation, the *logos* became flesh who lived among us, it means that God sought to empty himself in Christ for each human being. Because of love, a powerful God had become powerless by using his all power to humble himself. Thus, one could see that God's immanence suggests God's transcendence, and God transcendence includes His immanence. According to Joseph A.

Bracken:

God's role in the cosmic process is to note in virtue of the divine primordial nature the best way in which these transcendent ideals can be realized at any given moment within the cosmic process and then via a series of divine initial aims to prompt concreting creaturely actual occasions to move in that direction within their individual processes of self-constitution. The individual actual occasion, however, always remains free to modify that divine initial aim as it wishes. Thus evil remains an ever-present possibility within a cosmic process which aims at the overall achievement of transcendent good.⁸³

Tongzhi Theology or Comrade theology transforms the classical view of God as omnipotence to divine omnipresence. While classical theism has constructed God of omnipotent by defining God's power as monopolistic and in terms of active/causative determination of all reality, *Tongzhi* Theology with the input of Whiteheadian conception of God emphasizes God's power as shared power, which has its passive/receptive dimensions.

⁸³ Joseph, A. Bracken, *World Without End: Christian Eschatology from a Process Perspective* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2005), 12.

As long as the traditional theism, which emphasizes the omnipotence of God remains intact, we cannot resolve the problem of evil. If God possess monopolistic power, one has to ask why does not God intervene. Why does God refuse to act by intervening to prevent evil, especially extreme forms of evil from happening to LGBTI people? Anti LGBTI violence and discrimination continue to be the problem in the World, even in the United States. Researchers have found that gay youths attempt suicide more frequently than their heterosexual peers, and that high school students and students who are unsure of their sexual orientation were 3.4 times more likely to have attempted suicide than their straight peers, and that high school students who are gay are more than twice as likely as their straight peers to have attempted suicide.⁸⁴

Regarding transgender people, the statistic is even more startling and horrifying. Researchers have shown that 49 per cent of transgender people attempt suicide, and that transgender youth account for 18 per cent of homeless people in cities such as Chicago, even fewer than 1 in 1,000 people is transgender in that city. Researchers also have demonstrated that 1 in 12 transgender people in the United States is murdered.⁸⁵

The theology of God in *Tongzhi* Theology has transformed the question most people ask, namely, “why God does not prevent all these evils?” to “what is our responsibility to stop all these evils from happening?” Hartshorne has illustrated this transformation vividly. He writes:

In its appeal to the imagination [the theodicy problem]...will no doubt always be the most

⁸⁴ “Suicidal Behavior Among Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Youth Fact Sheet” http://www.suicidology.org/c/document_library/get_file?folderId=232&name=DLFE-334.pdf (accessed March 1, 2013).

⁸⁵ “Murder Statistics of Transgender People” <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/wwjtd/2012/05/murder-statistics-of-transgender-people/> (accessed March 1, 2013).

troublesome one in theology. But in pure logic it is not true that there is a sheer contradiction between the joint admission of divine perfection of goodness and divine perfection of power on the one hand and the fact of the reality of evil on the other, for the simple reason that the greatest possible power (which by definition is “perfect power”) may not be the same as “all the power that exists united into one individual power,” for much union of “all” power may be impossible. Had God “all the power there is,” he must be responsible for all that happens... The minimal solution of the problem of evil is to affirm the necessity of a division of powers, hence of responsibilities, as binding even upon a maximal power.⁸⁶

In other words, if God is not omnipotent, the problem of evil would be a pseudo problem.

Evil springs from freedom; everyone thus has to scrutinize oneself and asks what is my responsibility in all human sufferings. The notion of *tianren heyi* in Confucianism affirms the relational character of the Divine and our power in participating in the experiences of the world. While Whitehead has called us to see God as struggling to move us toward a better world, Confucianism reminds us we all have to strive to work with God and to be receptive to God’s initial aims for us, to be in unity with *tian* or Heaven.

According to *Tongzhi* Theology, God does not possess monopolistic power. All actual entities in reality, God being no exception, influence and are influenced by one another. In other words, nothing is really immutable and independent from other things. To say that God has the absolute active and determining power as the traditional doctrine of omnipotence has proposed, is to say that God is no better than a tyrant.

Everyone has the power of self-determination which will lead us to make certain choices in our lives that could land us in very precarious circumstances. In all choices we make through our power of self-determination, God, however, is present and offering us the best possibility for the moment, calling us to make the best decision with God’s luring and persuasive

⁸⁶ Charles Hartshorne, *Man’s Vision of God, and the Logic of Theism* (Chicago: Willett, Clark & Co., 1941), 207.

power. God, does not control everything. God's role is to introduce new possibilities and surpassing the deterministic outcomes of the past. God calls us moment by moment to be what is the best for us in the moment, but God does not make decisions for us. We have all the freedom we need to be self-determined. This understanding of God's power does not mean that God has no causal efficacy in the World, but God's power is just one cause among many others. Our destiny is not determined by an arbitrary divine decision. As Bruce Gordon Epperly writes:

The world emerges from the dynamic and creative interplay of flux and permanence, in which the eternal and unchanging finds its relevance through its relationship to the temporal and changing world, and the temporal and changing finds completion in its role as contributing to the ongoing universe, embraced by god's everlasting and ever-expanding experience of the universe.⁸⁷

Instead of controlling and determining the outcome of our lives, God calls and lures us toward the best that is possible in every circumstance. We, however, are the ones who make the final decisions about what we intend to do with our freedom and power of self-determination. Thus, we can and should be responsible for what we do. Cobb has argued forcefully that "the inordinate increase of human population and the extraordinary power that humans have attained to manipulate other parts of nature and even themselves pose unprecedented threats to the whole of the biosphere" and that we should make better decisions for ourselves and our planet.⁸⁸ The future is not predetermined by God. Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki writes:

Insofar as a redemptive community itself models the openness of God's peace, it becomes a concrete lure for the good. It is itself a change in the environment which affects all other finite reality, becoming a force which must be accounted for throughout the larger society. Further, insofar as God is faithful in providing all societies with aims

⁸⁷ Bruce G. Epperly, *Process Theology: A Guide for the Perplexed* (New York: T&T Clark, 2011), 21.

⁸⁸ John Cobb, *The Process Perspective II* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2010), 90.

which are as consonant as possible with the divine nature, the redemptive society labors with God, increasing the possibilities for redemption in the world.⁸⁹

Whitehead's process-relational philosophy, as John Cobb has pointed out, overcomes "the dualism of nature and humanity and of object and subject that Western modernism has forced upon" us.⁹⁰ Our lives are highly intertwined. The well-being of others and of ourselves is intimately interconnected in the moment by moment of our every experience.

Whitehead summarized his concept of God with his first biographer Lucien Price in 1947, when he said:

God is in the world, or nowhere, creating continually in us and around us. The creative principles are everywhere, in animate and so-called inanimate matter, in the ether, water, earth, human hearts. But this creation is a creative process, and "the process is itself the actuality," since no sooner than you arrive you start on a fresh journey. Insofar as man partakes of this creative process does he partake of the divine, of God, and that participation is his immortality, reducing the question of whether his individuality survives the death of his body to the estate of an irrelevancy. His true destiny as a co-creator of the universe is his dignity and his grandeur.⁹¹

According to Whitehead, interdependence is the primary reality of our relationship with God and God with the World. Our lives emerge from a dynamic and creative web of relationships. Our every experience arises from a creative synthesis of experiences of the world and contributes to our future experiences and reality.

God experiences what we experience and suffers what we suffer. God understands just as the best companion can. God is, thus, our comrade. We co-create the world with God. We are artists of our lives and experiences. We bring together the many influences of the past into one

⁸⁹ Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki, *The End of Evil* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988), 130-131.

⁹⁰ John Cobb, *The Process Perspective II* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2010), 71.

⁹¹ Lucien Price, *The Dialogues of Whitehead* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1954), 370-371.

cohesive whole guided by our responses to the callings of God. God works with us by calling us to do the best thing in every possible moment by projecting God's intimate vision for each moment of experience. God does not and cannot control the future, or our behaviors, but rather calls us to integrate God's vision of possibility. To work with God is to open ourselves up to divine possibilities and let God's vision transform our experience. In the end, we are to take responsibility for our moment-to-moment decisions.

In *Tongzhi* Theology, God is our Tongzhi (comrade). Carter Heyward has beautifully summarized our relationship with God. She writes:

God's power enters our lives through human acts of love, kindness, courage and solidarity. I suggested that God is our power in the struggle for mutuality—right, mutual relation—in the smallest and largest arenas of our life together. God is not “over” the struggle, nor even “leading” the struggle. God is in the struggle as the power of the struggle itself, so fully that God is the struggle for right, mutual relation and God is the power in and of mutuality.⁹²

In short, the insights of Confucianism and the metaphysics of Whitehead have provided a conceptual framework, --- a way of viewing God and the world, for *Tongzhi* Theology in order to redress the limitations of contemporary queer theology.

Conclusion: We are Comrades, Unite and Fight!

Tongzhi (Comrade) Theology, with the injection of Whitehead's speculative philosophy as its metaphysical framework, which seeks to describe how all of reality works into a system that is coherent and logical, is the integration of Chinese Confucianism and queer theology.

⁹² Lisa Isherwood and Elaine Bellchambers, *Through Us, With Us, In Us: Relational Theologies in the Twenty-First Century* (London: SCM Press, 2010), 18.

Chinese Confucianism and Whitehead's metaphysical scheme provide primary structural sources in the theological construction of queer theology, which is called *Tongzhi* Theology.

Even though it is a Christian theology, *Tongzhi* Theology has integrated the historical richness of Confucianism to reconstruct the theology of God and to reconceptualize the relations between our fellow human beings.

In Confucianism, *Tian* (Heaven) or *Dao* (the Way) is omnipresent, but it is not omnipotent. *Tian* or *Dao* does not possess unilateral power, and thus, it does not control nor dominate. This understanding of the Ultimate Reality is very close to Whitehead's concept of God.

The concept of God or the theology of God in *Tongzhi* Theology is much more plausible compared with the traditional or classical theism. *Tongzhi* Theology affirms that God is powerful in the sense that it embraces, feels and responds to all aspects of the world fully, and yet, God is not omnipotent.

The significance of *Tongzhi* Theology is twofold. First, its theology of God; second, it is relational philosophy of reality. According to *Tongzhi* Theology, God does not possess absolute power. God's power is not authoritative or coercive, but it is persuasive. God calls us to do what is possible and what is the best in God's vision in our moment-to-moment activities. God does not and cannot make us do anything we do not want to do. God does not determine our future. God can only call, lure, persuade, and influence us to embrace God's "initial aim" or God's will in every context in our moment-to-moment activities.

We, as human beings, are free in *Tongzhi* Theology. We freely make our decisions in every context and God is always working with us by providing guidance for what is the best in every circumstance, but God does not impose God's will on us nor does God determine our paths

or decisions. God does have “primordial vision” for us, that is God sees all the possibilities that promote beauty and truth. But God does not make decisions on behalf of us. We are responsible for our lives and for every decision we make in every circumstance.

Everything is historical. To put it differently, everything is the product of the past, of what is possible, and of what we do with what is possible. Everything in reality—including God-- is in the process of becoming. We apprehend our pasts and interact with others, are influenced by others and then influence those around us. All of these events happen simultaneously in our moment –to-moment activities. Our experiences are the result of how others have affected us, as well as how are we to act and react, which influences who we are and what we do in the present.

Just like Chinese Confucianism, Whitehead’s metaphysics is radically relational. Strictly speaking, according to Whitehead, we do not have relationships, we *are* relationships. We are not only highly related to everyone and everything around us, but we are also related to our past, our potentials, and our God.

As Nancy R. Howell has rightly pointed out, “[a] modernist worldview focuses on substances in interpreting reality, and consequently tends to understand substances as atomistic and static. Relationships are limited to external interactions, which have little impact on the nature of individuals.”⁹³ *Tongzhi* Theology, which is informed by Whitehead’s process cosmology and Chinese Confucianism, stresses relationality. It highlights and prioritizes the interdependency and interconnections not only between human beings, but also between God and God’s creatures.

⁹³ Monica A. Coleman, Nancy R. Howell, and Helene Tallon Russel, ed. *Creating Women Theology: A Movement Engaging Process Thought* (Oregon: Pickwick Publications, 2011).

According to the *Tongzhi* Theology, our experiences in the world are not predetermined by God. They are the result of interactions between and from vast networks and communities. We are affected by our experiences and we are also to affect the outcome of our experiences by freely determining what we are and are not to do in every context of life. Our lives are highly intertwined; we influence and affect each other and are influenced and affected by others.

This dynamic character of our existence is of paramount importance in *Tongzhi* Theology. Our lives, including our identities, are always in the process of becoming as we are affected by our past, influenced by our new encounters in the present, and called by our hopes and aspirations in the future. Therefore, everything in the world is transformative and is open to transformation by the creative and dynamic relationships between everything in the world.

Since everything is in the process of becoming, and process is the only reality, *Tongzhi* Theology challenges all forms of dualism and erases every kind of hierarchical boundary, especially the problematic dichotomies of masculine and feminine, of body and mind, of reason and emotion, and of male and female. It not only seeks to deconstruct the boundaries, but also to reconstruct the subject/ object relationships between everything in the world, including the relationship between God and God's creatures. *Tongzhi* Theology, which emphasizes the process of becoming, is more accurate than classical theology reflecting reality and the fact that human sexuality is fluid, instead of being static and fixed. Thus, it is a theology, which is more comprehensive and which adequately embraces and includes the experiences of bisexuals in particular and women in general.⁹⁴ It is also much more efficient as a theory in capturing the

⁹⁴ Generally speaking, unlike women, men sexual orientation is notoriously fixed and rigid. Women sexuality is much more fluid if compared with that of many men. The flexibility of women's sexuality allows them to experience sexual desires for either men or women regardless of their sexual orientation. Women are more capable of experiencing sexual variation in their

experiences of transgender people as they experience the creative transformation and change of their gender, or their sexual orientations, in some cases.

In *Tongzhi* Theology, we will have a new understanding of relationship between everything in the world; namely, that everything in the world is interrelated. Human beings are not only connected to the world, but we are part of the world. We have a shared subjectivity. We are who we are because of our relationships with others. We are not only the passive receivers of culture but also the active participants and creators of culture.

According to the Whitehead's metaphysical scheme, which has been utilized by *Tongzhi* Theology, God initiates relationships with everything in the world with God's initial aims, and the world in return also affects and influences God by reacting to God's initial aims. God experiences everything in the world, both its joys and its sorrows; on realizing the truth, beauty, and social justice in the world, God is fighting the fight for us and with us. Thus, in *Tongzhi* Theology, not only we can call our fellow human beings as "*tongzhi*" (comrades), we also can name God as "*Tongzhi*" (comrade).

To call God our comrade is a radical idea and revolutionary understanding of the divine power. It is because *Tongzhi* theology, unlike classical and traditional theism, does not believe in the divine omnipotence. To say that God does not have omnipotent power is not to deny that God is powerful. God is the most powerful existent being, but other creatures also have power, such that power is not confined to the Godhead.

The significance of this radical concept of God is twofold. First, to say that God has the absolute power to determine everything is to contradict the belief that God is merciful and is

erotic and affectional feelings. For more on the sexual fluidity of women, see Lisa M. Diamond, *Sexual Fluidity: Understanding Women's Love and Desire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008).

love, while also recognizing the fact and reality that the world is full of evil and suffering. This is a question of theodicy, which not only cannot be resolved, but also has been accentuated by the divine omnipotence. Second, to argue that God is all-powerful in determining everything such that whatever happens is divinely determined to happen, and that God knows everything about the future, even things which have not yet happened, is to deny the freedom of human beings and thus is in the conflict with the idea and belief that we are responsible for our own actions and behavior. If we are without free will, we should not and cannot be held responsible for our behavior and actions. Even though our present and future is affected by our past, we are not bound by the past. Because of our freedom, we can make certain decisions to become something different and new from the past. Hartshorne has argued forcefully and convincingly against the omnipotence of God's power in his *Omnipotence and Other Theological Mistakes*, in great detail. This particular mistake of omnipotence in classical theology, according to Hartshorne, is "a compromise between a not-very-well-understood Greek philosophy and a not-very-scholarly interpretation of sacred writings."⁹⁵

Because of our free will, God is not omnipotent and does not act unilaterally. We have the power to act even contrary to God's aspirations, which is how evil occurs. If God is omnipotent and love, God would have used his unilateral power to prevent evil, otherwise God could not be loving and merciful. However, if God acts unilaterally and determines everything, then we do not have freedom and should not be responsible for any kind of evil that occurs in the world. All of these ideas are contradictory to our experiences in the world; they do not reflect

⁹⁵ Charles Hartshorne, *Omnipotence and Other Theological Mistakes* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1984), 43.

reality, and thus the concept of an omnipotent God is highly problematic and cannot be true.

Hans Jonas has poignantly summed up the problem of the notion of omnipotence, he writes:

From the very concept of power, it follows that omnipotence is a self-contradictory, self-destructive, indeed, senseless concept... Absolute, total power means power not limited by anything, not even by the mere existence of something other than the possessor of that power... Absolute power then in its solitude, has no object on which to act. But as objectless power it is a powerless power, cancelling itself out: "all" equals "zero" here. In order for it to act, there must be something else, and as soon as there is, the one is not all-powerful anymore, even though in any comparison its power may be superior by any degree you please to imagine. The existence of another object limits the power of the most powerful agent at the same time that it allows it to be an agent. In brief, power as such is a relational concept and requires relation...in short, it cannot be that all power is on the side of one agent only. Power must be divided so that there be any power at all.⁹⁶

Second, to say that God is our comrade is to reject the hierarchical and patriarchal God who is nothing less than a tyrant. If God is love, then God is for us, God cannot be oppressive and rule unilaterally as a tyrant because unilateral power is controlling, dominating and even manipulating.

Tienren heyi, the unity of Heaven and humanity, is the highest ideal of Confucianism.

As Tu Weiming has pointed out, the unity of Heaven and humanity "transcends secular humanism...it is in the anthropocosmic spirit that we find communication between self and community, harmony between human species and nature, mutuality between humanity and Heaven."⁹⁷ While the West has diligently worked to reconcile the conflict between faith and reason, Confucianism is much more concerned with the unity between Heaven and human. It is an ontological ideal to realize this unity. As A.S. Cua points out,

⁹⁶ Hans Jonas, "The concept of God after Auschwitz," in Lubarsky and Griffin, *Jewish Philosophy and Process Thought* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 151-152.

⁹⁷ Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Berthrong, ed. *Confucianism and Ecology: The Interrelation of Heaven, Earth, and Humans* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), 17.

For a Confucian, particularly for a Neo-Confucian like Cheng Hao and Wang Yangming, commitment to *ren* may be so characterized, because the Confucian *ren*, by virtue of the indefinite and inexhaustible extension of affectionate concern for all things, envisages the attainment of an exalted state in which one “would form one body with all things without differentiation.” This Confucian vision is commonly called by Chinese scholars *tianren heyi*, the ideal of the unity and harmony of humanity and Heaven (*tian*).⁹⁸

The concept of *tianren heyi* in Confucianism strongly suggests that divine power is power in relation. As Dorothee Soelle argues, our relationship with God is not one of obedience but of unity; “we are not subject to the commands of some remote being that demands sacrifice and the relinquishing of the self,” and the relinquishing of reason, I would add, but we are asked to become one with God and with all life.⁹⁹ Whitehead’s philosophy actually has shown some similar to the idea of *tianren heyi*:

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.¹⁰⁰

Cua also enumerates the famous saying of Wang Yangming that for a person who is seriously committed to *ren*, he or she will regard all things as “one body.”¹⁰¹ He emphasizes, according to Wang Yangming, a person of *ren* “also forms ‘one body’ with plants, stones, tiles,

⁹⁸ A. S. Cua, “The Ethical and the Religious Dimensions of *Li*” in Tu, *Confucian Spirituality* Volume One, 263.

⁹⁹ Dorothee Soelle, *The Strength of the Weak: Toward a Christian Feminist Identity* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1984), 102.

¹⁰⁰ Alfred Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 348.

¹⁰¹ A. S. Cua, “The Ethical and the Religious Dimensions of *Li*” in Tu, *Confucian Spirituality* Volume One, 277.

mountains, and rivers. In this version of the Confucian vision of can taint, the unity and harmony of humanity and all things become an ethical idea that provides a cosmic perspective.”¹⁰²

The symbol of God as a king, who possesses absolute and unilateral power is a symbol system of hierarchical and oppressive kingdom. Feminist theologians like Rosemary Radford Ruether have been extremely critical of the image of God constructed by traditional theology. Ruether cautioned us that “[p]atriarchal theology uses the parent image for God to prolong spiritual infantilism as virtue and to make autonomy and assertion of free will a sin. Parenting in patriarchal society also becomes the way of enculturating us to the stereotypic male and female roles...” and that “parenting language for God reinforces patriarchal power rather than liberating us from it...”¹⁰³ Hartshorne has also advised us to move beyond the theological metaphor of parent-child relationships to the more intimate body and mind analogy to indicate the divine relationship with the world.¹⁰⁴

The classical theism is clearly dualistically defined, and the relationship between God and human beings is thus inevitably hierarchically patterned. Omnipotence is a theological mistake not only because it fails to solve the problem of theodicy, but it has also begotten the worldview of dichotomies: subject/object, mind/body, spirit/nature, good/evil, active/passive, male/female, heterosexual/homosexual, white/black, in which the former is given priority over the latter and considered to be superior. In short, simply put, this worldview has imposed

¹⁰² Ibid., 278.

¹⁰³ Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1983), 69-70.

¹⁰⁴ See Charles Hartshorne, *Omnipotence and Other Theological Mistakes* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1984).

artificial and hierarchical dualism on reality.

As Suzanne Pharr has pointed out, homophobia and sexism are highly interconnected; it is virtually impossible to view either one of the oppressions in isolation.¹⁰⁵ In order to dismantle homophobia or heterosexism, one needs to tackle sexism head on, as the former has its roots in the latter. Therefore, in order to argue in favor of queer people, it is inevitable to reject the patriarchal God, which is the oppressive divine image of classical theism.

To say that God is our comrade and God is a powerful God is to say that God is with us and for us. God lures, but God does not coerce. God's power does not take the form of overwhelming coercion. God's power is cooperating power, it increases capacity and competence, but does not overwhelm.¹⁰⁶ Whitehead has beautifully described this particular quality of God by saying that "God is the poet of the world with tender patience leading it by his vision of truth, beauty and goodness."¹⁰⁷ As our comrade, God is fighting evil and promoting goodness with us by offering us continual new possibilities in our moment-to-moment activities. We, however, are the ones to decide whether we embrace or reject the best options offered by God in every circumstance. In classical theism, God is the Absolute, the Subject, and we are the Object and the Other. But in *Tongzhi* Theology, God is related to God's creation. God and God's creation are interdependent. Our lives are highly intertwined; no one is an island. What affects one thing affects all things indirectly. We are subject to each other. We do not assume the status of the *other*. Our identity is not a state, but a process. The process of becoming is the process of

¹⁰⁵ Suzanne Pharr, *Homophobia: Weapon of Sexism* (Berkeley: Chardon Press, 1997).

¹⁰⁶ Rachel Alder, *Engendering Judaism: An Inclusive Theology and Ethics* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1998), 94.

¹⁰⁷ Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 346.

affecting each other, which is also the process of transformation. Therefore, *Tongzhi* Theology, which has its roots in Confucianism is a theology promoting solidarity with God and with one another. We are all *tongzhi* (comrades) to one another and stand in solidarity.

As our comrade, God is our “great companion--the fellow sufferer who understands.”¹⁰⁸ God is not an external super-person or the unmoved mover. We are not ruled by oppressive imbalanced power. With God as our comrade, we no longer live in the patriarchal and imperial fears of otherness and loneliness. We are co-creators with God. As Philip Hefner put it, the human being “is created by God to be a co-creator in the creation that God has brought into being and for which God has purposes”¹⁰⁹ and “our ability to participate as an ordained co-creator is the result of the creative thrust of God.”¹¹⁰

God in *Tongzhi* Theology is a relational God. Divine power is power in relation. As “the experience of relation is fundamental and constitutive of human being,”¹¹¹ the divine power of God is found and exhibited in the bonds of our relationships with God. Carter Heyward, a feminist theologian, explicitly argues for a relational God. She writes, “The power of God...is the power of our relational bonding, a persistent power which makes ‘justice roll down like waters.’”¹¹²

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 351.

¹⁰⁹ Philip Hefner, *The Human Factor: Evolution, Culture, and Religion*, Theology and Sciences (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 35.

¹¹⁰ Philip Hefner, “The Evolution of the Created Co-Creator,” in *Cosmos as Creation: Theology and Science in Consonance*, ed. Ted Peters (Nashville: Abingdon, 1989), 418.

¹¹¹ Carter Heyward, *The Redemption of God: A Theology of Mutual Relation* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1982), 1.

The relational understanding of reality is another significant contribution of *Tongzhi* Theology besides its theology of God. In *Tongzhi* Theology, not only is God our comrade, we are comrades to our fellow human beings -- we are comrades to each other. We are affecting each other by everything we do and do not do. The interwoven and relational character of our world and our lives makes every relationship a dynamic process, which has the capability to shape and construct our lives. We are not isolated human beings, and thus, what we encounter and experience should not be considered and understood in individualistic terms. I am who I am because of who we are. Our individual experiences have their social courses. What we do not only affects our own lives, but also can affect the lives of others, either positively or negatively.

Tongzhi Theology, which has its roots in queer theory, is critical of identity politics. Identity politics tends to strengthen the divisions between individuals with the constructed identities created by human beings. *Tongzhi* Theology, however, emphasizes the common point of identities, especially the common experience of being marginalized and oppressed because of one's sexuality. Since LGBTI people are oppressed as a social group, our resistance to oppression cannot be individual but must be social. We have to act together and we should be comrades to each other. Thus, *Tongzhi* Theology is not only for LGBTI people, but also for straight people; it is a theology, which includes everyone in our society because our lives are highly intertwined. We are inescapably living and thriving, or withering, in an ecological web of life.

Tongzhi Theology emphasizes the organic holism of the world. It prioritizes interdependency and community rather than autonomy and individualism. It prefers process to

¹¹² Carter Heyward, *Our Passion for Justice: Images of Power, Sexuality, and Liberation* (New York: Pilgrim Press, 1984), 118.

substance, dynamic fluidity to inorganic rigidity, and creative constructionism to stereotyped essentialism. *Tongzhi* Theology believes that everything in the world is interconnected and interpenetrating, and that our social and natural worlds are nondualistic, nonreductive integrative and relational.

To summarize, *Tongzhi* Theology is shaped and crafted by the conversation between Chinese Confucianism, Whitehead's philosophy and queer theory. *Tongzhi* theology is not only for queer people of Asian descent, it is also a theology of queer Asians. The ideas of *Tian*, *Dao*, and *Taiji* (the Great Ultimate) are compatible with the metaphysical scheme of Whitehead. The experience of queer people is the trajectory of *Tongzhi* Theology. It is consistent with Whitehead's idea as he says that the primary datum for metaphysics "is nothing else than the experiencing subject."¹¹³ *Tongzhi* Theology, thus, is to affirm the essential subjectivity of queer people who have been denied significant participation in the process of constructing theology and communal life in Christianity. *Tongzhi* Theology emphasizes and affirms the values of change, community, relationship, solidarity, and freedom. *Tongzhi* Theology is political as it critically scrutinizes how power is constructed and executed in the world. It challenges the thinking of hierarchical dualism and reclaims the power of those who have been marginalized due to their sexuality. It upholds the principles of fairness and promotes social justice for everyone. *Tongzhi* Theology affirms that all human beings are free and creative, and that we can and should freely express ourselves creatively. The idea of *Tianrenheyi* emphasizes that we are in unity with God and that we are co-creators with God to transform the world into a better place to live so that every person can fully realize his or her potentials. We are all related,

¹¹³ Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 24.

interconnected, and interdependent. We call each other *tongzhi* because we are indeed comrades to each other!

We are *tongzhi* (comrades) uniting and fighting for a better future for everyone.

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