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## A Queering

Jennifer Hind-Urquhart

Rachel Hind-Urquhart

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## A Queering

Jenn Hind-Urquhart and Rachel Hind-Urquhart<sup>1</sup>

In 1865, the world was introduced to a girl called Alice, who opined, “Dear, dear! How queer everything is to-day.”<sup>2</sup> Back in Alice’s day, the word *queer* lacked venom and overtones of brutality; were it not for homophobia, the word might today be quaint. Alas, the word is not totally free of taint, but it has, in the last decade or so, been wrested from the fists of oppressors to be reclaimed by the queer community, variously known as “the rainbow community,” “the gays and the theys,” or, more commonly, the 2SLGBTQ+ community. We are not the first community to have taken a word used in hatred against us and then used it ourselves. We have turned it into a kind of prayer shawl under which we gather and heal in community. At a certain point, we began to self-identify by the very term used to denigrate us. How queer.

Were Alice to visit the Western world today in all its postmodernity, she’d find that the word *queer* functions as an identifier for those who defy norms and push past society’s confinements in gender, sexuality, or both—and more. One might make a case that *normal* is more inflammatory an adjective today than *queer* is.

Over twenty years ago, Lisa Isherwood turned the word *queer* itself queer: she used it interchangeably as an adjective and a verb. She wrote, “Queering requires that all boundaries be challenged.” She and other queer feminist theologians of her time were beginning to recognize that *queer* was power and promise; Isherwood made *queering* a home and a hermeneutic for Christian theology, writing, “The queer Christian body is a transgressive signifier of radical equality . . . This body lives in the world but is not chained by its narrow definitions and hierarchical power systems. It is a body that acts stubbornly in the face of life as it is, and is a space in which creative rebellion is rooted in the everyday business of life. In the language of Christianity it is a redemptive space.”<sup>3</sup> Isherwood was writing at a time when homosexuality was still a radical signifier of otherhood, violence was perpetrated against us with alarming frequency, and same-sex marriage was still buried deep in the closet under two millennia worth of Christian-driven anti-queer doctrine. But, even then, she had the sense of how a queer hermeneutic might grow beyond the 2SLGBTQ+ community to act as a guiding principle that would allow all Christians, regardless of gender identity or sexual orientation, to emulate Christ—who often proclaimed a different kind of wonderland: the Kin-dom of God.<sup>4</sup>

Jesus, for Christians, was our pioneer queer and queering body. By virtue of Jesus’ *radical* message of inclusiveness and forgiveness, Jesus of Nazareth *challenged* the order of things. He fed his betrayer<sup>5</sup> and called his traitor “friend.”<sup>6</sup> He challenged the ancient Jewish temple

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<sup>1</sup> Rev. Jenn Hind-Urquhart is an Ordained Minister with the United Church of Canada, currently serving Emmanuel UC Waterloo, ON. Rachel Hind-Urquhart is currently completing the Master of Divinity program at Martin Luther University College.

<sup>2</sup> Lewis Carroll, *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* (New York: Books of Wonder, 1992), chap. 2.

<sup>3</sup> Lisa Isherwood, “Queering Christ: Outrageous Acts and Theological Rebellions,” *Literature and Theology* 15, no. 3 (2001): 252, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23925131>

<sup>4</sup> For a description of the term “Kin-dom,” see Stephen Cherry, “The Coming of God’s Kin-dom,” *Church Times* (February 26, 2021), <https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2021/26-february/faith/faith-features/the-coming-of-god-s-kin-dom>

<sup>5</sup> John 13:18.

<sup>6</sup> Matt. 26:30.

system by flipping tables,<sup>7</sup> turning cheeks,<sup>8</sup> and reversing the effects of death over Lazarus.<sup>9</sup> He said that what mattered to God was not what we put into our bodies but what came out in terms of effort, justice, and solidarity with the least of us.<sup>10</sup> It is impossible to consider Jesus without acknowledging how very *queer* he was: God, Creator of the Universe, living amongst us as a poor, itinerant outcast born in a barn to an unwed mother. Absolutely nothing about Jesus conformed to expectations—not a single thing about him was straight.

Jesus reveals a *creative rebellion* rooted in the everyday business of life,<sup>11</sup> and in his rebellions he prepared us for the ultimate, the queerest, the most revelatory rebellion of all: his crucifixion. Despite the deadly cost to himself, reversals and incongruity were and are pathways to tending to the pain and suffering of this world. It's a way of realizing God's Kin-dom.

In the same way that a clearing expands our view, so too does a *queering*. A queering is an expansive place in which all boundaries are reconfigured and become nebulous. This space is a kaleidoscope of topsy-turvy. Up is down and down is up, the first shall be last and the last shall be first, love your enemy and exalted are the ones on the margins.<sup>12</sup> Those belonging to oppressive groups in society discourage queered spaces because they offer life-giving opportunities. In queered spaces and in queered relationships, humans are free to engage one another unobstructed by the false narrative unnaturally applied to our tender souls by those who benefit from the status quo. In a queering, the beauty of our queer humanness is vitally alive and vibrating to the sound of the Queer Divine. In a world struggling under the status quo, being queer is salvific.<sup>13</sup>

Queered spaces, along with queer bodies, become redemptive, as Isherwood proclaimed at the dawn of our new millennium. They liberate our psyche from the yoke of oppressive ideologies which arbitrarily dictate privilege for some and not others. Jesus, who lives out surprising reversals “and places himself where no one wants to go and where we would least expect him[,] is a tremendous revelation of illumination and instruction.”<sup>14</sup> As Christians, we are called to be queer in the spirit of justice and redemption.

Where do we see a queer God today? Where do we find queering in our midst? We can see queering in the lives of transgender people who are challenging and reordering the “assigned gender at birth” formula of gender identity and expression. We can see queering in A Better Tent City where the precariously housed find solitude and lodging and a place of belonging. We can see queering in religious institutions banishing old doctrine that has been weaponized against homosexuals, Indigenous peoples, and the disabled in favour of inclusive doctrine that affirms all. Any time a person in a position of power offers their platform to amplify voices that have been silenced and forgotten, we see queering. The queering in our midst is the most direct example of an ideal framework in which one can engage the world. Christ might not be meaningful for everyone, but a queering can be.

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<sup>7</sup> John 2:13–15.

<sup>8</sup> Matt. 5:39.

<sup>9</sup> John 2:13–15.

<sup>10</sup> Matt. 15:1, 25:45.

<sup>11</sup> Isherwood, “Queering Christ,” 253.

<sup>12</sup> Matt. 20:16.

<sup>13</sup> Rachel Hind-Urquhart, “The Queer Life and Death of Jesus Christ: A Queer Path for Contemporary Times” (essay, Martin Luther University College, 2022).

<sup>14</sup> Hind-Urquhart, “The Queer Life and Death of Jesus.”