



**On the cover:** The pride flags shown are (left to right, top to bottom): progress, non-binary, transgender, disability, the original pride flag, bisexual. The progress pride flag shows the common pride flag colors (red, orange, yellow, green, blue, purple) in horizontal stripes with a triangle cut out for the transgender pride colors (light pink, light blue, and white) and BIPOC colors (brown and black). The original pride flag's eight horizontal stripes included pink and two shades of blue.

## Introduction to This Issue

### A Mess Makes Us Free

*“For you were called to freedom, siblings...” -Galatians 5:13*

There are few words that inspire such diverse interpretations as “freedom.” In the United States, where both editors live, it often is associated with patriotism, and too often, a form of patriotism that almost becomes idolatrous. Freedom for those living on the margins of society often is less theoretical; indeed, it is often in receiving access to tangible needs like medical care, housing, food, and safety from violence or hate crimes. This issue explores freedom in various ways from marginalized, queer, disabled, and trans perspectives.

Recently when attending an antiracism action planning event, co-editor River Cook Needham was encouraged to embrace the messiness that comes from doing antiracism. She writes,

...in that moment, I made a commitment to embrace messiness in my life through intentional honesty about who I am and what I need and desire. It seems counter-

By resisting the ways that theology encourages neat and clear lines, queer theology makes messes and lets them coexist with each other to create a richer theological net to hold more of those historically ignored and oppressed by the church.

intuitive that messes make us free. Often when I wake up next to a mess my urge is to make it not-a-mess, or to ignore it so that I can get other, more pressing work done. Yet, as I have embraced the practice of gentle persistence<sup>1</sup> and the creative tension of messes, I have found myself becoming more free and more liberated from social norms that have no real bearing on my life.

1. This term and practice is adopted from The Rev. Catharine Clarenbach, <https://thewayoftheriver.com/catharine-clarenbach/>

Queer theology is, in many ways, a way of learning to embrace messiness. By resisting the ways that theology encourages neat and clear lines, queer theology makes messes and lets them coexist with each other to create a richer theological net to hold more of those historically ignored and oppressed by the church.

In this issue, we take a moment to offer up queer theologies that resist categorization. Since 2009 when the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) adopted “Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust,” conversations about the welcome and celebration of gay and lesbian people have expanded to include conversations about bisexual, transgender, intersex, asexual, and other queer people. These conversations are ongoing, necessary, and timely. In 2021 alone, twenty-eight states have introduced laws aimed at harming trans people and trans communities. Violence against marginalized people, particularly against black and brown people, especially black and brown trans women continues at alarming rates. Now, perhaps more than ever before, there is need for the church to show leadership by taking a theological and ethical stance on behalf of marginalized communities. Inspired by this, queer theology has continued growing and developing, doing the messy work of creating new ways of doing theology in community. Our offering here points out the ways that queer theology continues to grow and to liberate people.

In this issue we will use the shorthand LGBT(Q)(IA+) to speak about people of diverse sexual orientations and gender identities. Said another way, we use LGBTQIA+ to speak about people who experience life outside of the cisgender heterosexual mainstream; that is, people who have a gender different than the one assigned at birth or who experience romantic or sexual attraction in ways that are not heterosexual. Queer, which often serves as a shorthand term for LGBTQIA+ also functions as a political identity which resists categorization. Rather than leaning into homonormative definitions of gay and lesbian, queer looks for ways to destabilize understandings of attraction, relationality, and gender and create something more complex and less able to be categorized. For example, queer theologian Marcella Althaus-Reid crafted a Christology of the Bi/Christ, opening conversation among queer theologians that Jesus might be bisexual rather than arguing if he was asexual, straight or gay.<sup>2</sup> Even as we try to draw firm lines between LGBTQIA+ and Queer, the reality is these terms are used in far less discrete and messier ways.

The first three articles in this issue offer queer perspectives on traditional theological or ethical questions. First, an article by J. Pace Warfield-May grounds the issue in Luther’s understanding of vocation and the ways that vocation and coming out as queer set us free to serve our neighbors, relying on Luther’s *Freedom of a Christian*. Next, an article by Kai Daniel Moore elucidates Martin Luther’s *theologia crucis* in light of the lived transition experiences of transgender people. Third, Brent Stanfield explores a virtue ethic of coming out from a trans-feminist perspective, creating a conversation between queer theology and transgender ethics as

discrete entities.

Next, Eddie Rosa Fuentes’ article offers a Queer Latinx perspective on the eschaton as both a time and a place using the moment of the Pulse nightclub shooting.

The final two articles focus on the ways that queer theology overlaps with other theological systems. Jessica A. Harren and River Cook Needham dialogue on coming out as queer and disabled or crip. Finally, River Cook Needham invites us into a more embodied liberation by bringing fat and transgender liberation into conversation with movements for racial justice. Together, these articles offer a broad overview of queer approaches to theology and liberation, and they embrace the ways that intersectionality can make the world both more messy and more liberating.

Throughout all of these articles, LGBTQIA+ people of faith embrace a queer politic and refuse to limit themselves to just one aspect of their being. From non-binary Lutheran theologians to fat and trans ethicists and process theologians, the authors hold a variety of lived experiences which overlap here in the messiness of queer and LGBTQIA+ theologies. Freedom is a central part of the abundant life that Christ promises to all believers. May the messes that we all make set us free.

*River Cook Needham*

*PhD Student at Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, Chicago, Illinois*

*J. Pace Warfield-May*

*PhD Candidate at The Graduate Theological Union, Berkeley, California*

*Co-editors of July Issue of Currents in Theology and Mission*

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2. Marcella Althaus-Reid, *The Queer God*, Kindle (London: Routledge, 2003), 173.

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